The Significance of a Distinction Between a Sexual Act and a Sexual Identity

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Sexual Act and Sexual Identity Within the Context of Male Homosexuality in Various Cultures
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- Assumption that sexual acts are an indication of sexual identity, and vice versa.
- There is a distinction that places different values/expectations on sexual acts vs. sexual identities.
- This distinction changes assumed relationship between sexual act/identity by allowing them at times to coexist as separate aspects of the same person.
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Identity

- An identity is a way of presenting yourself, a way of being perceived, and a way of grouping with others who share your identity.
- A person's sexual identity is fluid and can change depending on who is being identified, how they perceive themselves and how others see them.
- "Unlike the European-American system, the Mexican/Latin-American sexual system is based on a configuration of gender/sex/power that is articulated along the active/passive axis and organized through the scripted sexual role one plays. It highlights sexual aim...and gives only secondary importance to the person's gender or biological sex. (Almaguer 539).
- More focus on the body rather than the person as a whole.
Body and Sexual Identity

• Sometimes there is more attention paid to certain parts of the body, which makes sexual acts/identity separate.
• "This cultural construction confers an inordinate amount of meaning to the anal orifice and to anal penetration. This is in sharp contrast to the way homosexuality is viewed in the US, where the oral orifice structures the meaning of homosexuality in the popular imagination" (Almaguer, 539).
• Body tied to sexual identity rather than sexual act.
Sexual Act as Sexual Identity

• The person being penetrated is stigmatized for performing a feminine role.
• In equating the act of penetration with femininity, there is a connection between sexual act/identity.
• "Only a segment of the homosexually active youth, however, develop a preference for the anal receptive, pasivo sexual role, and thus come to define their individual sense of gender in a decidedly feminine direction" (Almaguer 542).

With these young people, their sexual identity is defined after, and because of, their sexual act.
• More emphasis placed on act of being a pasivo, this is what makes him feminine.
• Having a feminine identity does not make him gay.
• Enjoying penetration=negative because it is the feminine role.
Masculinity and Femininity

• Although both people are male, there is still masculinity and femininity present.
• The person performing the feminine role is seen as feminine, while the man who is penetrating retains his masculine identity. Penetration=masculine, receiving=feminine.
• In the US, two men who are sexually involved may be equally stigmatized.
• Stigma attached to their sexual identity as a whole, rather than individual acts.
Other Forms of Detachment

- A person's sexual identity may not be acknowledged while sexual acts continue.
- "Even frequent and recurrent homosexual behavior does not matter in Islamic societies as long as a man continues his family line and does not throw away property indulging in his vices" (Murray 16).
- Line between sexual behavior for pleasure vs. sexual behavior that is part of a lifestyle.
- The idea of gay identity is almost invisible.
Homosexuality in the U.S.

- Male to male sex automatically equated to a gay identity.
- Sexual identity and sexual behavior seen as connected.
  - "In the US, even one adult homosexual act or acknowledgment of homosexual desire may threaten a man's gender identity and throw open to question his sexual identity as well" (Almaguer 541).
- A man's sexual identity does not necessarily rest on his masculinity or femininity, it rests in his choice to engage in sex with another man.
- Effeminacy stigmatized but not because of certain sexual acts- effeminacy may be connected to his personal identity as a gay male
- Effeminacy a stereotype-associated with attraction to males, echoes heterosexual standards.
Social vs. Societal Identification

- An individual can have a personal way of identifying that is separate or different from the way society sees them.
- "Since these stigmatized, effeminate homosexuals have never thought of themselves as or claimed to be heterosexual, they reportedly experience less cognitive dissonance accepting a 'gay' identity and fewer problems in coming out" (qtd. in Almaguer 543).
- These men are already comfortable with identity, and are allowed to be by their society—they are already placed apart for being the "receiver".
Works Cited
