

Homophobic Attitudes in Men

ENGL 2201

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Homophobia is prevalent in society due to many underlying reasons. Homophobic attitudes constantly lead to discriminatory acts that greatly affect the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) population. Condorelli (2015) states, “Studies on homophobia found the origin of discriminatory attitudes regarding homosexuals in conceptual equations presenting homosexuality either as a genetic error, or as a psychological “disturbance” or at other times as a ‘mistake’ in the socialization process” (p.1761). Many people within society have differing views on how homosexuality is defined. When homosexuality is viewed as a mistake or lifestyle, rather than a result of gender conflict and society, homophobia is likely to arise. Within the psychology field it is essential to understand the causes of such a controversial topic that brings so many negative attitudes and discrimination. Stein (1996) argues, “The fear of being perceived as homosexual compels men to enforce standards of appropriate masculine behavior that reinforces competition between men, distances men from each other, and maintains derogatory views of women” (p.39). Most men who are heterosexual are influenced by gender norms and heterosexism which arises from society. To ensure that they are not perceived as part of the LGBT community, they try their best to flaunt their masculinity, and stay away from what and who are perceived as gay. Thomas, Mience, Masson, and Bernoussi (2014) state, “[H]omophobic attitudes endure, even if the way they are expressed has changed. They have become more discrete and more sophisticated, with harassment and persecution replacing physical attacks, which still exist, but are increasingly rare” (p.156). Even though disapproval of homosexuality was vocalized more in the 90’s it is still common and still continues to affect the LGBT community. Homophobia is not expressed as much as before, due to rights given to homosexual individuals and the legalization of same-sex marriage. Homophobic attitudes arise due to

external and internal factors, that lead to emotional struggles and many cases of discrimination toward homosexual individuals.

Heterosexism

One reason for homophobic attitudes comes from the idea that the union between a male and female is normal, and anything else is viewed as unacceptable. Tin and Redburn (2008) state, "Homophobia's origin is, without a doubt, to be found in heterosexism... This regime tends to construct heterosexuality as the only legitimate sexual experience possible, or even thinkable, which explains why so many people go through life without ever having considered the homosexual reality" (p.12-13). Many people find it necessary to be socially accepted; therefore, they go along with what they believe is acceptable and normal. Being heterosexual is ideal in civilized societies. Because of this, people lack the urge to try to get an understanding of homosexual individuals. According to Lock and Kleis (1998), the development of homophobia is used as a defense mechanism to keep internal anxieties under control (p. 427). Homophobia is used as an excuse to distance one from what they see as abnormal, such as homosexuality. Americans are taught that marriage is supposed to be between a man and women, that leads them to use a defense mechanism, homophobia, to stray away from what they wish to not understand. Lewis and White (2009) point out, "The majority of defenses, which contributed to the prediction of membership of the high homophobia group, were immature defenses... [T]hose who utilize immature defenses may well allow such thoughts to lead onto active avoidance of those perceived to be homosexual or to violent enactment of homophobia" (p. 440). This statement coincides with Lock and Kleis findings about defense mechanisms influencing homophobia. Homophobic men find that it is easy to just avoid gay people, instead of

confronting the underlying reasons their homophobia. Not only are heterosexual men influenced to be homophobic by the idea of heterosexism, but they are also influenced by society.

Society

The environment plays a very important factor in influencing how people perceive homosexuals and how they interact with them. Ward (2005) states, "Hill found that religiosity and homophobia were predicted by social class status, defined in educational terms" (p.499). People of a lower class and a lower educational level are more prone to becoming homophobic due to the lack of knowledge about the homosexual community. People of a higher education are more open-minded and understand that being gay is not a choice, but something deeper. Verweij, Sheka, Zietsch, Eaves, Bailey, et al. (2008) argues, "[S]hared environmental influences, such as norms and values taught by parents, are aspects in forming positive or negative attitudes toward homosexuals, and possibly also toward other out-groups" (p. 263). Parents teach their children morals; therefore, they instill their convictions into their offspring. Parents who possess homophobic attitudes raise homophobic children. Society alongside parents influence children on norms by displaying what is acceptable and unacceptable. Children who grow up in different environments have different views on homosexuals. Homophobia can be a product of society, but it can be influenced by internal struggles, such as gender conflict.

Gender conflicts

Homophobia can arise due to gender conflicts in childhood that have been repressed. Lock and Kleis (1998) stated the following:

Research in gender development attempts to account for gender non-conformity and homosexuality in boys...The first nidus for problems, and probably the most severe kinds of problems, would be in the area of core-gender identity. It may be that, as Stroller

suggests, this accounts for transsexualism, but when this is not the outcome, significant deficits in one's core-gender identity could lead to severe anxieties about gender identity (p. 428).

This statement points out that struggles within a boy's gender identity can lead him to experience constant anxiety about his gender identity throughout his life. This reveals the use of homophobia as a defense mechanism, reaction formation, that causes men to feel uneasy around homosexuals due to their unresolved gender conflicts. According to O'Neil (2013), "GRC,[gender role conflict], has been found in men of different ages, races, ethnicities, nationalities, and sexual orientations... GRC exists across the life span with boys and adult men but in different ways" (p. 492). This quote reveals that gender role conflict is still seen as a cause for developing homophobic attitudes. "In a ... study of exclusively heterosexual men that compared homophobic to nonhomophobic males, it was found that when exposed to sexually explicit erotic stimuli consisting of male homosexual men, only homophobic men exhibited increase in penile circumference. The researchers concluded that these homophobic males are unaware of or deny their homosexual arousal. These opposing outcomes suggest that defensive homophobia may be based on either anxiety or on unconscious arousal" (Lock & Kleis, 1998). Homophobic men are in denial of their homosexual curiosity, that derives from early childhood where gender was being established from the parents. Marks, Bun, and McHale (2009) includes, "Parents directly communicate their beliefs about gender by providing instruction, guidance, and training to their children" (p.222). In America, it is a cultural necessity to instill gender specific qualities that coincides with a child's biological sex regardless if the child agrees or not. These qualities that the parent tries to instill in the child causes them to think that what they feel is

wrong and should therefore be repressed. Gender conflict can lead to homophobia which in turn can lead to discrimination and emotional abuse toward homosexual individuals.

Consequences

Homophobia is a destructive attitude towards homosexuals that results in many forms of abuse that can greatly endanger the well-being of a homosexual individual. Condorelli (2015) includes, “[H]omophobia is essentially an emotional or affective negative reaction toward homosexuals which manifests itself in “responses of fear, anger, disgust, discomfort, and aversion that individuals experience in dealing with gay people” (p. 1763). These negative reactions toward gay people can cause these individuals to feel excluded from the society and these reactions can also lead them to internalize these negative reaction that can result in them viewing themselves as a mistake in society. Almedia, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, and Arzael (2009) state, “Accumulating evidence indicates that adolescents who have same-sex sexual attractions....or who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are more likely than heterosexual adolescents to exhibit symptoms of emotional distress, including depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts” (p. 1001). People who identify as part of the LGBT population experience a great deal of emotional turmoil due to the condescending views of homophobic individuals. Individuals with homophobic attitudes verbally, physically, and emotionally abuse homosexuals due to their sexual orientation. These homophobic attitudes could be diminished through education, learning to accept, and trying to identify the root of the homophobic attitudes. With homophobia still common in society, the LGBT community will continue to be abused and discriminated against.

Conclusion

Homophobia is an issue in society and will continue to affect the LGBT population if individuals with homophobia continue to think that their homophobic attitudes are not destructive. Homophobia arises due to environmental factors and psychological factors. Parents play a huge part in influencing the views associated with gay people. They teach their children what they perceive as right; therefore, children's attitudes about homosexuality comes partially from the parents. The idea of gender norms impacts men perceptions of what it is to be a man, how a man should act, and what a man should look and act like. These gender norms cause children with gender conflict problems to repress their transsexual feelings. Men can also become homophobic due to the common belief of heterosexism. These homophobic attitudes are prevalent in society and will continue to negatively impact the homosexual community if these attitudes are continuously accepted and are not addressed. If awareness is brought to the homophobic issue and individuals with homophobic attitudes participate in therapy, the number of homophobic men will greatly diminish.

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