

Dualisms & Homophobia

Oppression & Justice (Fall 2013)

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“Dueling Dualisms”

FAUSTO-STERLING

SEX/GENDER

- Historically, activist/scholarly focus on gender, not the biological category of sex
 - “left open the possibility that male/female differences in cognitive function and behavior could *result* from sex differences” (4)
 - → either ignore scientific findings or obsess over them
- “Our bodies are too complex to provide clear-cut answers about sexual difference” (4)
 - Sex/gender distinction not simply biology/culture distinction
 - **Intersex** as counterexample to sex dualism

SCIENCE & SEX

- Classic question in philosophy of science:
 - Does observation or theory come first?
 - If “pure” observation is impossible, then scientific studies and findings will be tainted/slanted according to prior theoretical commitments (inc. dualisms, norms)
- “what we call ‘facts’ about the living world are not universal truths [...] they ‘are rooted in specific histories, practices, languages and peoples’” (7)
 - Meaning and interpretation of non-heterosexual behavior has changed drastically over the years, differ according to cultural/historical context

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

- ◉ Distinction commonly made between **what is real** and **what is socially constructed**
 - Worth noting: Something can be socially constructed and still real for all intents and purposes (e.g., money)
- ◉ ...of sexuality?
 - **Constructionism:** desires the product of social/cultural/historical norms, or at least have different meanings depending on context
 - **Essentialism:** desires inborn, “wired into our bodies” (15)
- ◉ Fausto-Sterling: “our bodily experiences are brought into being by our development in particular cultures and historical periods [...] [we] construct our bodies, incorporating experience into our very flesh” (20)
 - “Although some hope that a belief in the nature side of things will lead to greater tolerance, past history suggests that the opposite is also possible” (26)



DISCUSSION

- ⦿ Do you think it is morally permissible for parents of an intersex newborn to authorize surgery to “normalize” the sex of the child?
- ⦿ Given Fausto-Sterling’s case against “pure” science or observation, what responsibilities do scientists and non-scientists have when provided with new studies on biological sex?



“How Homophobia Hurts Everyone”

BLUMENFELD

HETEROSEXISM & HOMOPHOBIA

- Although conceptually distinct, these can become blurred in everyday interactions, practices, and policies.
 - LGBTQI are “among the most despised groups in the United States today” (268)
- **Given how accepted these biases are in many social circles, what are some difficulties in taking due care in moral deliberation and subjecting one’s motives and actions to self-scrutiny so as not to be a bystander to oppression?**

LEVELS OF HOMOPHOBIA

◎ Personal

- Attitudes of pity, disgust, superiority/inferiority

◎ Interpersonal

- Relationships of discrimination, harassment, insults, intimidation, violence

◎ Institutional

- Systematic discrimination or lack of support for LGBTQI and their allies

LEVELS OF HOMOPHOBIA

◎ Cultural

- Explicit or implicit legitimization of oppression through stereotypes, mockery, exclusion, invisibility, marginalization, powerlessness
- ◎ What is the moral value in being able to define yourself as lesbian, queer, etc? What is the moral harm of others (e.g., medical authorities) providing the categories or labels?
 - How should privileged persons or authorities handle their responsibility to respect the self-definition of LGBTQI individuals?

HARMS OF HOMOPHOBIA FOR HETEROSEXUALS

- ◎ Some harms:
 - Stunts possibilities for intimacy
 - Locked into damaging and limiting gender norms
 - Desensitizing, dehumanizing
 - Can be treated as part of oppressed group
 - Damaging familial expectations
 - Marriage, procreation, sex pressures
 - Destructive to common goals
- ◎ Paying attention to these harms can **cultivate empathy** and contribute to **alliance building**

DISCUSSION

◎ Analyze the following interventions:

- A church group that hands out pocket Bibles to high schoolers who they identify as being LGBTQI.
- A psychiatrist who gives all LGBTQI patients additional therapy and anti-depressants, regardless of why they come to therapy.
- “Gay conversion therapy” –masturbatory reconditioning, aversion therapy, hypnosis, “gender lessons”, electroconvulsive therapy, psychoanalysis
- **What is morally problematic about each of these interventions? What assumptions underlie them? Could the social acceptance of the LGBTQI individual be used as a justification for any of these?**

Questions?
Comments?