



Philosophy and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues

Carol Quinn, Editor

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FROM THE EDITOR

Carol Quinn

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

After having served as the editor for this *Newsletter* since 2001, and for the *SLGP Newsletter* since 1999, I have decided to step down from these positions. I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting and working with folks in the LGBT philosophical community. I announce a call for nominations for newsletter editor of this *Newsletter*. Please send nominations to Mark Chekola (see call for newsletter editor below). Thank you all, and I wish you the best.

In this issue, I invite you to enjoy Richard Mohr's piece "Arousing Innocence," which he presented at the session entitled Society for Lesbian and Gay Philosophy session, "Gay and Lesbian Issues in Art and Aesthetics," at the Eastern APA in Washington, DC. You will also enjoy Bassam Romaya's review of Serena Nanda's *Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations*. Finally, I have included a diversity of voices from my undergraduate Philosophy of Sex course, in which we have been studying sexual identity. You will find their perspectives interesting and refreshing.

Contributions Invited

The editor encourages contributions to the *Newsletter*, especially essays that might fall through the cracks elsewhere for being untraditional in scope or content. Contributions may range from opinion pieces to book reviews to short articles. Commentary on issues important to professional life—teaching, research, and service—are especially welcome. Early contact with the editor is strongly encouraged. Please contact Carol Quinn at Department of Philosophy, 9201 University City Blvd., University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC 28223.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR NEW NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Carol Quinn will be stepping down as editor after three years of excellent work in putting together the *APA LGBT Newsletter*. We thank her very much!

We seek nominations for someone to serve as the new editor.

Mark Chekola, Chair, APA LGBT
Committeechekola@mnstate.edu

CALL FOR PAPERS—SPECIAL ISSUE ON GAY MARRIAGE

We plan to have a special issue of the *LGBT Newsletter* devoted to the topic of gay marriage. We welcome submissions of papers, opinion pieces, book reviews, news items, etc., related to that issue. If we received sufficient materials by June 15, the special issue will be our Fall, 2004 *Newsletter*. Otherwise it will be the following issue.

Send ideas and submissions to: Carol Quinn
cvquinn@email.uncc.edu

FROM THE CHAIR

Mark Chekola

Minnesota State University, Moorhead

The Committee has been in email contact, and we have had meetings of members of the Committee present at the APA divisional meetings in Philadelphia and San Francisco. In addition, we held receptions following the sessions in San Francisco in March 03 and in Cleveland in April 03.

Over the past academic year, the Committee sponsored a panel on the topic of Homosexuality and Religion at the APA meetings in Philadelphia, and co-sponsored with the Society for Lesbian and Gay Philosophy sessions at the San Francisco and Cleveland meetings. At San Francisco, the Committee co-sponsored a session honoring Richard Mohr as a Distinguished LGBT Philosopher, with a panel of people discussing his work and influence and Mohr responding. The panel in Cleveland was titled "Eco Homo; Queering Environmentalism."

Some of the concerns discussed by the Committee during this year have included the need for mentoring, not only of younger colleagues and graduate students, but also undergraduates; domestic partner benefits at colleges and universities that employ philosophers; and the paucity of essays on LGBT and other diversity issues accessible to undergraduates for use in anthologies and reading packets. I am working on a proposal to develop a project, in consultation with this Committee and the Committee on Inclusiveness, to encourage essays on diversity issues to be written with undergraduate students in mind. My hope is that these would be available for adoption in anthologies and for use in reading packets.

In the Spring 2003, we completed a project to survey twelve journals with regard to the number of papers on LGBT issues published in the twelve-year period (1990-2001). I am including the report at the end of this Committee report. The Committee will be discussing implications of the results of this survey, and we will be sharing it with the Committee on Inclusiveness.

Pamela Hall and Kelly Oliver have just finished their terms on the Committee, and we thank them. We welcome as new Committee members Julie Klein and Peg O'Connor.

We maintain an email list that I have used to send out announcements provided to me of positions in philosophy for which institutions are specifically welcoming applications from LGBT persons. It is my impression that some departments are sending announcements to APA diversity Committee Chairs as a way of specifically inviting minority applications. This may be useful to them for documentation for campus affirmative action officers.

Report: Survey of Journals and LGBT Scholarship

At the APA meetings in Chicago in April, 2002, the APA Committee on the Status of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons in the Profession decided to carry out a project to survey relevant journals with regard to papers relating to LGBT issues. There has been a sense that there is a lack of articles on LGBT issues in some appropriate journals, and we have decided to look into this by first carrying out a survey. We chose twelve journals we judged to be appropriate venues for articles on LGBT issues, and decided to survey those journals for the twelve years, 1990-2001. The survey was carried out by volunteers. The results of the survey are as follows:

<u>Journal</u>	<u>Number of LGBT-Related Articles Published 1990-2001</u>
<i>Ethics</i>	2 articles; 5 book reviews; 15 short book reviews
<i>Hastings Center Report</i>	5
<i>Hypatia</i>	32 articles, 2 book reviews
<i>International Journal of Applied Philosophy</i>	6
<i>Journal of Applied Philosophy</i>	2
<i>Journal of Social Philosophy</i>	9
<i>Journal of Value Inquiry</i>	0
<i>Law and Philosophy</i>	1
<i>Philosophical Forum</i>	1

<i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i>	0
<i>Public Affairs Quarterly</i>	2
<i>Social Theory and Practice</i>	1

Current Committee Membership
(with last year of term listed in parentheses):

Mark G. Chekola (2004)
Chair
Department of Philosophy
Minnesota State University, Moorhead
Moorhead, MN 56563
Email: chekola@mnstate.edu

Committee Members:

Pamela M. Hall (2003)
Department of Philosophy
Emory University
Atlanta, GA 30322
Email: philph@emory.edu

Jacob Hale (2005)
California State University, Northridge
Department of Philosophy
18111 Nordhoff Street – 8253
Northridge, CA 91330
Email: zeroboyjh@aol.com

Kelly Oliver (2003)
Women's Studies
Old Chemistry Building, #105
Stony Brook University
Stony Brook, NY 11794-3456
Email: koliver@ms.cc.sunysb.edu

Joseph Sartorelli (2004)
Department of Philosophy
Emory University
Atlanta, GA 30322
Email: philph@emory.edu

Kayley Vernallis (2004)
223 East Calaveras Street
Altadena, CA 91001
Email: kvernal@calsstatela.edu

Ralph N. Wedgwood (2004)
Department of Linguistics and Philosophy
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
77 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139-4307
Email: wedgwood@mit.edu

Ex Officio:

Editor of *Newsletter on LGBT Issues in Philosophy*

Carol Quinn

Department of Philosophy

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

9201 University City Blvd.

Charlotte, NC 28223

Email: cvquinn@email.uncc.edu

FEATURED ESSAY

Arousing Innocence

Richard D. Mohr

University of Illinois-Urbana

Presented, with slide illustrations, at the Society for Lesbian and Gay Philosophy session, “Gay and Lesbian Issues in Art and Aesthetics,” held at the Eastern Division Meetings of the American Philosophical Association (Washington, DC, December 29, 2003)

Nearly every week for more than a decade, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America has placed a full-page display ad in the business section of the *New York Times*. The often gorgeous designs of the ads are as subtle as their overt messages are blunt: Drugs Scramble Your Brain. Fire Employees Suspected of Drug Use—It’s for Their Own Good. Drug Use Cuts Corporate Profits. That sort of thing. In their iconography, however, the ads roam over a much wider social field and frequently convey insidious messages—messages no less powerful for their indirection.

An easy case: a disproportionately high percentage of these ads picture a professional woman as the drug user in need of social disciplining. Frequently these women are the only women to be seen anywhere in the *Times* business section. The ads freight these pages with the message that women do not belong in business—they belong somewhere else. The ad campaign uses America’s demonization of drugs as both an energy source and a vehicle for advancing an agenda of “traditional family values.”

It should not then come as much of a surprise that the ad campaign also includes iconography which links, indeed virtually identifies, demon drug use with being gay. Numerous times Drug-Free America has run an ad which features a nearly life-size portrait of a sylph-like boy. You have to look twice to tell that it is a boy, for he is coded all over with signs of femininity. His lips are slightly glossed, slightly pursed. His posture is coy. His head tilts forward over a unisex sweater, causing luscious and illuminated blond tresses to cascade over one eye. The other looks seductively at the camera—square at you. The arc formed by his neck and hair continues on to a plastic tube which he holds towards cocaine lined on a mirror, which in turn reflects his image. Indulgent and languorous, Narcissus invites you to drown within him.

The caption’s huge *sans serif* headline reads: “It used to be, at 13, little boys became interested in little girls.” What is the unstated antistrophe? One obvious possibility is, “But now little boys are becoming interested in drugs.” The copy, dripping with nostalgia and, like the caption, cast in the Norman Rockwell tense the imperfect continues: “Boys and girls used

to use straws to sip sodas at the drug store.” Our world is out of kilter, things are somewhat queer. At a minimum, drug use is billed as arresting heterosexual development. It deflects youth from the culturally proper object of erotic choice (coke replaces “woman”). And it disrupts the social rituals by which culture prods youth along nature’s path (snorting replaces courting). But this verbal flag of deviance is not entirely queer, for it fails to establish for the youth a positively-limned perverted identity. The ad’s iconography takes up this chore. It layers over the boy both of the tropes by which our civilization marks out perverted male sexuality: sexual inversion (being a woman trapped in a man’s body) and bad object choice (desiring a man rather than a woman).

The codes of femininity which engulf the boy iconographically suggest that a feminine essence is seeping through the shell, the pores, of his marginally male body. The boy really, deep down *is* a girl. So the caption’s cadences invite us to another possible antistrophic horror: “It used to be that little boys became interested in little girls, but now—with drugs little boys become little girls.” The ad would have us believe that more than corrupting the body, drugs corrupt, pervert, the soul.

But what of the lad’s enticing glance? This provides him with a bad object choice—you, the viewer. It is practically an axiom of contemporary art theory that the gaze of the viewer is presumptively a male gaze. But even without theory, we know that overwhelmingly the readership of the *Times* business pages is going to be male. The boy’s come-hither glance is for a man. He invites the man to become absorbed in his gaze. As a consequence, the boy’s association with drugs makes him doubly homosexual—as having both inverted gender and improper object choice.

The ad uses homosexuality and drugs to mutually demonize each other. But the ad achieves this identification only at a high and surprising price: The ad is so thickly laden with codes and subterfuges that, top-heavy, it inadvertently trips over its own intentions. Through the very glamour and lure that the ad uses to homosexualize its subject, it turns its viewer into a pedophile. The sumptuous layout gives the boy a sensuous, enticing star quality. Paradoxically the very medium of its anti-gay message makes the boy sexy to men.

Perhaps we have here an example of what Foucault hints at in the *History of Sexuality* when he repeatedly but vaguely refers to “perverse implantations,” those means by which culture instills or invokes sexual desires, rather than represses or punishes them. The ad gives its viewer ideas, ones that he might very well not have had otherwise. If not exactly nudging him toward action, the ideas at least open the mind to new possibilities for action, and they do so, even though they are put forth in a context of condemnation and suppression. The ad, even as it demonizes sexual perversion, implants the idea of the most condemned perversion of all into the mind of its beholder.

Pedophilic images are ones in which youthfulness sexualizes the image and, in turn, the image enhances the sexiness of youth. These images are surprisingly common in society—surprising given that society careers from hysteria to hysteria over the possible sexiness of children. Society seems to need these images. And the images are allowed to the extent that they are buffered, not read in the first instance as sexual representations, and do not develop beyond mere suggestive idea into a pedophilic discourse, a context of meaning for the pedophile. Indeed the social requirement that the pedophile’s existence be shadowy helps society make sure that sexy images of children will not be read as such. Society needs the pedophile: his existence allows everyone

else to view sexy children innocently. But his conceptualization by society must not be allowed to be rich enough to be interesting, to constitute a life. Sexy images of children abound, but NAMBLA remains a universal whipping boy.

The death threats and pundit carping that were targeted at director Todd Solondz for his 1998 movie *Happiness* were prompted not so much by its admitting that children have sexual drives, some directed to adults, as by its giving the pedophile a platform on which to give an account of himself. Admittedly the account is drenched in the same self-hatred one finds awash in speeches by that character, the Homosexual who is finally permitted to speak in the films of the 1960s (one thinks of William Wilder's *The Children's Hour*), but it is an account nonetheless. And the source of anxiety expressed by the Billy Sundays of Cyberland over pedophilic immigrants to the Internet is not so much that they will find children there as that they will find each other, and so achieve (as the December 23, 2001 *New York Times* put it in an article on Japanese pedophiles) "the 'validation' that comes with meeting other pedophiles online and sharing interests and experiences"—to wit, form a discursive community of the sort that gay youth have created on the Internet in response to forces in the non-cyber world—parents, friends, schools, churches—which will not let them speak there.

The pedophile must exist, but in an immature, if germinal, phantom, if fearsome, form. Society's panicked worry over kiddie pics then is not chiefly about their sexiness—either as something inherently dirty or as having aesthetic, erotic, and moral effects on people in general. Rather, social conventions simultaneously insist upon and convulse over the existence of a certain type of *mind*, one which—quite independently of what it sees and does—can be branded as perverted. This becomes even clearer if one sorts through the tangle of statutes, regulations, administrative interpretations, and judicial decisions that makes up current kiddie porn law.

What makes a picture of a kid into kiddie porn? For starters, the child's being naked, even partially naked, is not a necessary condition for kiddie porn. Since the *Knox* case of 1994, the child pictured may be completely clothed and the picture may still be considered indictable kiddie porn. Further, the child need not be performing any act that would be socially counted as sexual in order for the picture to still be treated legally as kiddie porn. Nor need the child even be posed provocatively, lewdly, or seductively. But then what's left? What distinguishes kiddie porn from Christmas snapshots? The mind of the beholder. The image is kiddie porn if it is possessed by someone who, quite independently of the image's content, can be considered perverted. And whether or not parents find themselves incarcerated for bear-rug and bathtub shots of their kids turns on what prosecutors and juries think was in the parent's mind in taking the photos—rather than on anything distinctive about the pictures themselves.

Toni Marie Angeli found this out when in 1996, she was arrested for photographs she had taken of her four-year-old son for a photography class, "Innocence in Nudity," at Harvard University. Charges were dropped when her mind was declared clean. The Massachusetts Department of Social Services and the local district attorney agreed that "the mother's photos were not done with lascivious or harmful intent." Not so lucky was Eilat Feuer, a student at the International Center for Photography in New York City. In 1994, he was coerced into pleading guilty to child abuse in order to secure a probationary sentence for photographs he had taken of his six-year-old daughter. His district attorney found his mind to be unclean. It is the mind, not the image, that is dispositive.

But, then, isolate this pedophilic mind from the rest of culture, label it perverted, derive the unacceptability of image and act from it, and, then, hey presto, sexy children are all right for viewing by everyone else. We see them virginal and alluring in mainstream clothing ads. Havana Joe Boots punningly invites the straight male yuppie readers of *Details* magazine to "Save Your Sole," even as you lose it (your soul, that is) in the bare butt of a naked, ambiguously sexed child, tush thrust camera-ward.

The Sunday *New York Times Magazine* is a regular source for pedophilic images. Here on February 21, 1999 appeared the glossiest version of an advertisement that ignited the second Calvin Klein underwear scandal—the designer's inauguration of a national display ad campaign in which two little boys frolic on a sofa, wearing underpants and nothing else. Smiley and radiant, with right hands clutched—half in shake, half in grapple—the boys and their crotches re-enact in unwitting mockery that grown man's psychic tussle between briefs and boxers. In the first Calvin Klein underwear scandal, of 1995, the designer had run an ad campaign featuring scantily clad fifteen-year-old boys decked out in heroin chic and posed "provocatively" (the press's adverb of choice) in settings of cheap paneling "suggestive" of amateur porn production. The F.B.I. threatened to investigate the 1995 ads as child porn on the ground that they were "lascivious," but ultimately the Justice Department punted. It realized that any attempt to apply its own need-not-show-genitals standard to a major corporation would likely prove just too embarrassing for Justice.

Even without the assistance of F.B.I. threats, a storm of criticism scotched the 1999 boys' underwear campaign—in just one day. The ad first ran, at full page, in the *New York Times Magazine* and some other urban papers on Wednesday February 17th and announced for the next day free in-store distributions of artist-signed posters of the boys and the unveiling of a billboard of them above Times Square. But the next day did not come for the campaign. On Thursday, the posters remained crated, the billboard furled. But by this time, the *Magazine* issue carrying the ad had been printed up, and so, come Sunday, it launched the already terminated campaign into an existence at once showy and spectral. The image sublated into icon.

Critics, though successful in squelching the campaign, had difficulty putting their finger on exactly what was objectionable about the ad. In an Associated Press wire-story on the flap, *Morality in Media* confidently claimed that it could discern in the crotch of the battler in briefs "the outline of the little boy's genitals." *Morality in Media* then inferred that, given Klein's use of a professional photographer, this flaunting of boy cock could not have been accidental: "At Calvin Klein nothing is innocent." Reassuring traces of requisitely perverted mind had been found—but only, so it seems, with the help of a Sherlock-Holmes-sized magnifying glass, a hungry eye, and some imagination. The lady protests too much—or at least for the wrong reasons.

The sexiness of the ad has nothing to do with genitals and perversion. It has everything to do with the glamour, framing, and cropping by which the ad links the radiance, intimacy, physicality, and joy of the boys, a linkage which is made all the more taut and tense by the ad's deft allusion to a trope of outlaw sexuality and of Thomas Eakins' and George Luks' wrestling paintings—fighting as a front for fucking.

Nonetheless, like *Morality in Media* with its cock-seeking mind, all America got to indulge in the ad. For the AP wire-story was accompanied by the ad itself. In the heartland of the homeland, millions of solid citizens who had never heard of the *New York Times* received from their paperboy what nearly everyone was willing to call kiddie porn.

The *Magazine's* weekly fashion section is a particularly rich site for pedophilic images. Take the March 2, 1997 spread titled, "Endless Summer," promoting children's swimwear. The shot shows five five-year-olds in swim suits—four girls symmetrically flanking a boy. The kids are at the beach, but the beach is also a discotheque—sand below, mirrored ball above. The boy and three of the girls face camera-ward and are captured with hips in mid-rotation and arms flinging their hands ball-ward in bacchanalian abandon. Tucked knees and spread legs complete each child as a contrapposto ecstasy. The fourth girl with arms akimbo wiggles her behind at the camera. When the endlessness of summer draws clothing that would be ordinary at the beach into the sexual hothouse of the disco, that clothing—like a stiletto-heeled shoe hanging pendulous off a polished toe—becomes a sign of pheromone-drenched nakedness, which in child form the fashion spread serves up for adult delectation.

On the back page of the *Magazine's* October 9, 1995 issue devoted entirely to children's issues and on billboards of the time up and down the Metro-North commuter lines, a Tommy Hilfiger ad displayed a naked-tummied, adultly dressed boy of about six dangling insouciantly from a branch. His tongue slurps the air. His boxer shorts scoot up above his belt loops just as underwear does in adult jean ads which everyone acknowledges as sexy in the main because of this joint peek-a-boo revelation of torso and boxers. A cliché of cultural studies holds that wearing briefs says, "I have a penis," while wearing boxers says, "I am the penis." Nevertheless, stamp the ad, with its child phallus, "not kiddie porn," for it incidentally serves as a promotion for the *Times'* child-oriented charity, the Fresh Air Fund.

Why does the American national psyche need the pedophilia of everyday life? What drive does it stoke, even as the nation condemns any mention or thought of it? Following the lead of some other social critics, such as Kenneth Plummer and James Kincaid, and before them Philippe Ariès and the late Walter Kendrick argued in a brave piece for the Sunday *New York Times Magazine's* all-kids issue that our contemporary understanding of childhood as a period of innocence and purity solidified only in the Victorian era, and that before then, going back to the Middle Ages, children were viewed simply as little adults. Childhood took all its cues from adulthood. It did not constitute an independent, free-standing style of living or mode of existence. Until 1900, the age of consent in half of the United States was ten.

Apparently having gone about as far as he felt he dared in the *Times*, Kendrick concluded by pointedly reducing the anxiety that these revelations no doubt stir in the average reader: "Today's hysteria over child pornography springs mainly from adults' fear of themselves, the guilty knowledge that you don't have to be a pedophile to get an occasional frisson from looking at children." But guilty self-knowledge does not hysterical witch hunts make; one simply lies low. True: today's hysteria springs mainly from adults' fear of themselves, but this fear issues from their half-recognition that to admit explicitly, as pornography does, that children are sexy would mean that virtually everyone is a pedophile. In light of the current cultural view that sexual interest in children flows only from, is contingent solely on, the mind of the pedophile, for anyone to admit that he or she has any frisson at all from looking at children is necessarily to be branded as deviant. Were society to allow itself to articulate that it does have sexual interests in children little adults are not sexy, but innocence and purity are society would have met the enemy and seen that he is us.

In another article on the young, the *New York Times Magazine* itself came surprisingly close to admitting that Americans want to have kids in more ways than one. A feature article on America's 1996 female Olympic gymnasts is all atwitter with the national adoration of these medal winners (October 20, 1996). They are touring the country's arena circuit like rock stars. Some will even continue to tour with gymnasts from the 2000 Olympics. But it's not their medals that Americans are flocking to see. The article compares the female gymnasts to women in "modeling and pornography," and contrasts them with their male counterparts, who lack "mystery" and just seem like "friendly jocks." In the female athletes, we are told, America "glorifies a hyper-niche body type." And what type is that? Well, it falls in a "specific lacuna between girl and woman." And what are the specifics of this lacuna, and what is the source of the "mystery" that gives these females a porn star quality? Well, petite bodies are part of it, but the main explanation—and here the *Times* cites the authority of the *New England Journal of Medicine*—is that in these females' bodies "years of intense training suppress estrogen production, delaying puberty and causing 18- and 19-year-olds to look and sound like 12-year-olds." In other words, these petite females are "street legal" prepubescent girls. America could have sex with these girls. America could take sexual delight in viewing these girls, and it would be all right, even science says so. One could even pay for such prepubescent eye candy. And America does by the stadium full night after night.

America's hysteria over kiddie porn, then, is not simply the result of the country's epicyclical prudishness about matters sexual. Rather it is the result of our general worries about purity, innocence, and identity who we are. Childhood—the social concept—cannot do the moral work society has created it to do. In an era whose distinguishing marks are depression and the depression, genocide and the prospect of omnicide, life can look pretty damn nasty, brutish, and short. And so to serve both as ethical prop and security blanket, we have created a moral museum of innocence and purity—our Eden—and we have labeled it childhood. But then the paradox of everyday pedophilia is this: once we have made over childhood into purity and innocence, we naturally enough want to have it, but to have it would make it what we no longer want.

A longer version of this essay will appear in Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, editors, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

BOOK REVIEW

Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations

Serena Nanda (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 2000). 13 black and white illustrations. 127 pp.

Reviewed by Bassam Romaya

Temple University

What does gender diversity look like outside the Euro-American model? To what extent has colonization and globalization subverted pre-existing gender variance in other cultures? Is there a universal system of gender diversity commonly held by the *West* and the *Rest*? The cultural anthropologist, Serena Nanda, takes us on a crosscultural and transhistorical journey through several continents and archipelagos in an attempt to answer these puzzling questions. Nanda's *Gender Diversity* delivers an eye-opening ethnographic account of gender diversity across seven world civilizations; highlighting vital connections between globalization (both cultural and corporate), postcolonialism, international politics and their affects on contemporary gender variance ("variance" and "diversity" are used interchangeably by Nanda) in non-Euro-American cultures. After our first stop through Native American Indian societies, we travel to India, Brazil, Polynesia (including Melanesia, Samoa, Tahiti, and Tonga), Thailand, the Philippines, and finally back to European-American continents.

A key thesis of *Gender Diversity* is that ethnographic evidence does not support the conviction that a systematic fourfold sex/gender binary of male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, are shared universal concepts stemming across the non-Euro-American model of sex/gender diversity. Nanda asserts that "[the anthropological evidence] argues against any one-way, cause-and-effect relationship between homosexuality and sex/gender diversity" (101). In other words, while social and cultural disapproval of homogenized (same gender or gender norm and not same sex or anatomy) same-sex relations runs rampant in most non-Euro-American civilizations (as was the case in Euro-American societies prior to the mid-twentieth century), the connection between gender norm and sexual role remains intact, as the clinical separation of sexual identity from crossgendered behaviors has not yet occurred in many places. In addition, many cultures' contemporary sex/gender practice is dynamic, ambiguous, and more inconsistent than previously thought. As Nanda notes, this shift is a byproduct of various circumstances. First, early explorers/colonists/settlers often reacted with hostility upon encountering gender variance in North American Indian, Indian, and Polynesian societies, and thereby punished and repressed its occurrence. Second, medical and psychiatric advances of the twentieth century, as well as Euro-American social, cultural, and political influence across many cultures, has greatly altered and reshaped traditional sex/gender systems. This is most visible in places like Thailand (where a postmodern "queer" identity politic has quickly destabilized the pre-existing sex/gender framework). And in the Philippines, gender variants serve as diplomatic liaisons between the traditional culture and "Western" import, where "bantut" transvestite and crossgendered beauty pageants commonly idealize and disseminate Euro-American themes and foreign symbols of prestige to the common culture (83-85). In addition, a mélange of regional social attitudes (as well as attitudes impacted by class, educational status, or religious influence) and varying degrees of culturally-sanctioned institutionalization or visibility,

make sex/gender systems more difficult to ascertain across societies. For some, gender variance is deeply associated with religious, cosmological, spiritual, or mythical significance (not to mention its relevance to class, social, and hierarchical distinctions), as is the case in India, Thailand, and Native American Indian societies. While in other places, such as Polynesia (as well as Euro-American continents), gender variance posits a purely secular social position.

Gender Diversity contains seven full-length chapters and a preliminary chapter. In her introduction, Nanda takes the time to define the idiolect (not to mention her inclusion of a glossary and gender filmography at the end of the book), elucidating the social and clinical meaning of "sex," "gender," "sexuality," "gendered homosexuality," "sex/gender identity," "transsexual," "transgendered," and a host of many other classificatory terms. She continues this focus in subsequent chapters, paying close attention to possible defamatory uses that may arise. Nanda's language is clear, accessible, and engaging. What's more, she rejects common *orientalist* discursive bifurcations that often romanticize and misrepresent the people/culture under consideration; accordingly, she resists the polarity of "East" and "West," instead adopting the term "Euro-American" to address the so-called West.

In chapter one, Nanda analyzes the multiple gender possibilities in Native American Indian populations, including *berdache*, *nadleeh*, *alyha* and *hwame*. "Berdache" was a term coined by European explorers upon encountering Native American Indian male gender variants. The berdache may be understood as *sui generis*, a gender of its own kind; that is, neither man by virtue of his garb and female occupation, nor women, by virtue of his inability to bear children (19). Although the term is no longer used, it normally referred to individuals who (to varying degrees) participated in the culturally normative gender roles of the opposite sex. Later on, "two-spirit" became a more acceptable term, but nonetheless still subject of much debate (12-13). Of course, there are other gender variants in Native American Indian societies: the *nadleeh*, a Navajo male gender variant, the *Mohave alyha*, which was more akin to the transvestite, and the *hwame*, a Mohave female gender variant, both of which were marked by Mohave initiation ceremonies. The connection between spiritual power and gender variance was/is highly significant in most Native American Indian societies.

The second chapter surveys gender variance in India (most of which is drawn from Nanda's subsequent work, *The Hijras of India*). Here we are introduced to the male gender variant, *hijra*, and the female gender variant, *sadhin*. The hijra is more kin to the eunuch, and like the two-spirit, becomes recognized as a hybrid androgynous category (neither man nor woman). To become a hijra, the gender variant male must undergo a ceremonial castration ritual, cross genders, assume a female name, and ultimately attain membership in the hijra community. Gender variance in India shares deep roots with conventional Hindu beliefs in hermaphroditic deities. Thus, hijras have a unique, sacred role in Indian culture, as they are believed to be empowered by Bahuchara Mata, the Hindu Mother Goddess associated with transgenderism. The Mother Goddess imbues hijras with sacred powers which enables them to be hired at marriage ceremonies, both as entertainment and for the purpose of blessing a newlywed couple with fertility. While hijras are meant to uphold ascetic religious roles, this is not the case in practice as many earn a living as prostitutes (32-37). Alternatively, the asexual female gender variant, *sadhin*, serves a different social role. *Sadhins* dress as men, renounce marriage, and embrace celibacy (oddly enough, they also must be virgins), but unlike the hijras, they undergo no transformation ceremony, retain their female names, and have

no sacred/specific ritual or performance roles in Indian society. Much like Spanish/British/European influence, which repressed Native American Indian gender variants, current Indian laws (originally promulgated by the British) forbid emasculation rituals (39).

We then travel to Brazil where we meet the *travesti*, *pasivo*, *viado*, and *bicha*, where a strict heterogendered (rather than homosexual or homogendered) cultural system is deeply entrenched. In chapter three, we are introduced to a common heterogendered behavioral code largely predicated on the distinction between those who penetrate, or *atividade*, and those who are penetrated, or *passividade* (44). Like many Latin American cultures (and one may add Arabic cultures here as well), the social emphasis is not situated in terms of a conventional Euro-American model of homosexual/heterosexual binary, because sexual role, and not sexual orientation or anatomy, is what establishes Brazilian gender markers.¹ Those who penetrate are not “sexually” marked or categorized in the way a Euro-American homosexual is; rather, the *atividade* does not sacrifice losing his heteronormative masculine social identity. Only the *passividade* is stigmatized by his effeminate sexual role because “penetration symbolically expresses the hierarchical power relations at the heart of the patriarchal gender systems” (44-45). Unlike the Indian *hijra* and akin to two-spirit, the *travesti/viado/bicha*, keeps his male genitals and reports to have no desire of removing it because “sex-change operations do not produce women, but only castrated homosexuals” (47). In many cultures, gender variants (e.g. *hijra*, *kathoe*, *travesti*) are never thought of as having transformed into the opposite sex; unlike the Euro-American transsexual, gender variants (of any kind) are not considered to have changed sexes, regardless of castration (*hijras*) or how convincingly female-like they may otherwise appear. While *travesti*/et al. do crossdress and embody other crossgendered behaviors like the *hijras*, they are not considered a third in-between gender as the *hijra*. Rather, they are commonly reduced to a socially inferior status as failed men (and often as prostitutes, failed women, classified “with women,” but not thought of “as women”). Like contemporary Indian views on *hijras*, Brazilian social attitudes on gender variance are inconsistent and complex, ranging from fear and disgust, to intrigue and tolerance. Moreover, spiritual power also seems relevant to Brazilian gender nonconformists, as *pasivos* (and also female gender variant priestesses) are often associated with Afro-Brazilian religions (i.e., *Candomblé* or *Macumba*), where the Brazilian *carnaval* becomes a hotbed for *pasivos* and their admirers (50-56). Without a doubt, the Brazilian sex/gender system is a complicated model deeply affected by regional, social, cultural, educational, and religious systems.

Next we meet the *mahu* of Tahiti, *fa’afafine* of Samoa, *fakaleiti* in Tonga, and *pinapinaaine* of Tuva and Gilbertese Islands. In chapter four, Nanda begins to call her subjects “gender liminal,” in tandem with the fluid and inconsistent crossgendered behaviors found from island to island. A striking feature of the Polynesian gender liminal is his porous status; that is, although the role is known to be chosen or recognized in early childhood, the Polynesian *mahu* (et. al.), unlike the *hijra*, *travesti*, *pasivo*, and others, may lose his gender liminal status and regain his gendered male social identity by discontinuing crossgendered behavior in appearance and occupation. Similar to the Brazilian model, same-sex sexual behavior is not a marker of sexual identity or stigmatization, but sexual role (which for the *mahu* only requires fellating a non-*mahu*) as well as gender liminal status is what characterizes Polynesian gender nonconformity. Like the two-spirit and *hijra*, the *mahu* achieves his social status by assimilating crossgendered behaviors, occupations, and, at times,

ceremonial initiation. Unlike other cultures’ association of gender variance with spiritual/magical/religious power, the Polynesian gender liminal is entirely secular in kind.

In Thailand, we find the *Kathoe* and the *bayot*, *bantut*, and *bakla* (regionally varied terms) in the Philippines. In chapter five, we are introduced to a more directly influenced Euro-American model of gender variance as a type of transgendered homosexuality. Yet unlike the Euro-American model, same-sex sexual behavior is not akin to gender nonconformity in either Thailand or the Philippines (73). Unlike the secularized *mahu*, the *kathoey*s acknowledge spiritual connections to Theravada Buddhism (which held that *kathoey*s are natural byproducts of “Karmic fate,” rather than sinful and abominable, as believed to be by early explorers). Like Brazil, Polynesia, and India, Thai social disapproval of homogendered (as opposed to homosexual) sexual behavior is ubiquitous. Yet still, more contemporary Euro-American sex/gender systems have largely destabilized pre-existing ones. Finally, in the Philippines we find a more fluid and ambiguous social attitude on gender variance, one deeply marked by the influence of past foreign domination (e.g., Arabic, Spanish, and American), where a heterogendered (but not necessarily heterosexual) sex/gender system is loosely in place.

In the final two chapters, Nanda reiterates her findings and draws the study to a close. In chapter six, we travel back to Euro-American continents to retrace the history of sex and gender diversity in the “West.” Nanda begins with Plato and Aristotle and glibly moves up to identity politics of the transgendered and intersexed movements of the 1990s.² While the penultimate chapter introduces a much-needed discussion of female gender variance in the Euro-American tradition, any mention of the impact of Freudian Inversion Theory on the psychiatric and biomedical profession of the twentieth century is entirely absent (not to mention the exclusion of Stonewall Inn/gay liberation movements of the 1960s and feminist revolutions of the 1970s). We move from the Ancient Greeks, to *mollys* and *sapphists* of eighteenth century Europe, to the contemporaneously familiar transgendered identity politics of the late-twentieth century.³ Conciseness accompanies its limitations.

In her closing chapter, Nanda offers a summary of the similarities and differences in her anthropological study of gender diversity across cultures. A running thesis in this chapter (and for Nanda’s study overall) is that Euro-American gender variants reinforce the gender binaries in their patriarchal societies; Nanda maintains that Euro-American examples such as transsexuals and “drag queens,” actually exploit the gender binaries, because they “appear to reinforce the heterogender, patriarchal sex/gender ideologies in their respective societies, no matter how much they may resist negative stereotypes in adapting to society” (106). Such an assertion departs from well-known Euro-American academic writing on gender, particularly ones that frame gender in terms of a performative, subversive, imitative, and socially constructed institution.⁴ As far as enforcing the gender binaries, Nanda does not fault the transsexual or gender anarchist, she points the finger at the medical profession and other social institutions that have negligently forced transgendered and intersexed individuals to mold into the *heteronormative* social binaries of man and woman.

While the work primarily focuses on male gender variants, Nanda nonetheless makes a genuine effort to include many well-documented examples of female gender variants in many contexts (e.g., *hwame* among the Mohave, *sadhin* in India, transvestite/crossgendered female saints of the Middle Ages and early modern Europe, the sworn virgins of the Balkans, etc.). In addition, the work could benefit from the inclusion of

gender variance in other parts of the globe (such as the transgendered xanith in Oman and female husbands of Africa, which Nanda only briefly mentions). In her defense, the author does recognize these and similar shortcomings of the study, and ultimately concedes that space limitation demands the omission of many other intriguing possibilities, including the focus on additional cultures and a wider discussion of female gender variants (2, 7-8).

There is no doubt that Nanda's *Gender Diversity* serves a wholesome feast to the hungry gender enthusiast. Yet, like many well-known works on gender, it is not clear whether we can derive an overarching prescriptive conclusion from which to work with; perhaps Nanda's book is not concerned with such a task since "the anthropological perspective cautions us against making any easy generalizations about 'human nature'" (1). Although one walks away from the work having gained a wealth of information, it is not clear how we ought to proceed based on Nanda's analysis of crosscultural gender diversity. For instance, it is not clear how the study could impact the promulgation of public policy, contemporary international exchanges on sex/gender relations, the relationship between race, culture, gender and sexuality, or the transformation of Euro-American gender ideologies. Of course, Nanda's project is not interested in grounding a prescriptive philosophical conclusion. As far as I can see, the greater defect in the study remains with the emphasis on cultural gender relativism, which in itself is problematic. This second major thesis surfaces throughout the book and was already hinted at in her inaugurating chapter as she wrote, "The focus on cultural difference also emphasizes that there is no correct or superior way to organize sex/gender categories or treat sex/gender nonconformity" (9). I suppose for Nanda, gender is best left an open question. In the book's final chapter, the strive toward cultural gender relativism becomes clearer as Nanda recapitulates her findings on heterogendered and homogendered relations. Nanda concludes that due to varying cultural gender differences, "the soundest conclusion at this time is that the association between sexuality and sex/gender diversity cannot be assumed, but rather must be examined within specific cultural/historical contexts" (102). Both theses are not unrelated; for if cultural gender relativism is true, and merely shifts between heterogendered and homogendered social or cultural patterns, Nanda leaves herself with no premises from which she can devise a conclusive position on gender variance—consequently, leaving it an open question. Of course, these observations do not reveal unique defects in *Gender Diversity*, rather they could easily be directed at many other well-established, precursory gender treatises, as they too have left gender as they found it.⁵

Nanda's *Gender Diversity* is an indispensably valuable guidebook for anyone interested in human sexuality, gender studies, gay and lesbian studies/queer theory, feminist theory, and many other peripheral fields in the humanities and social sciences. Nanda's work is easy to adore for its accessibility and clarity, intellectual and practical insight, and for its contribution to the study of gender. Nanda offers a refreshing new direction in a cluttered arena of gender trouble and gender rubble.

Endnotes

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2. Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).
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4. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Bodies That Matter:*

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ON SEXUAL IDENTITY: VOICES FROM PHILOSOPHY OF SEX CLASS

Carol Quinn

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Over the past month in my philosophy of sex class, my students and I have been reading essays on sexual identity. Several of my students wrote responses to these essays and class discussions. I found a few of them particularly wonderful. I hope you do too.

A Brief Account of Gender

Howard Lintz

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

From birth, we are assigned colors. Hospital nurses adorn us with pink or blue blankets, bonnets, and bracelets. The majority of our developmental years are patterned after this pink-and-blue model of sex. Though they seem gentle enough to go unnoticed, these pastel markers account for our introduction to gender classification.

Boys are designated the clumsy, foul-mouthed, dirty ones. They get angry and break things. They are blue. These are the people who will grow up to become men. This is what it means to *be* a boy. Girls are proper, decorated, and sensitive. They wear dresses and take dance lessons. They are pink. These girls will become women. This is what it means to *be* a girl. For most of us, there is little conscious thought involved, if any; it's how things work.

I was recently asked to consider a transgendered couple: Alex is a lesbian. Specifically, she is a lesbian who is a biological female. Cameron¹ is a biological male and a transgendered lesbian. Cameron chooses not to receive sex-reassignment surgery. The two consider themselves a lesbian couple. The specific question: "Does it matter what they call themselves?"

In an effort to make sense of this information, I found source upon source stating the same things: A) Sex is separate from gender, and B) Transgenderism is when one's sex does not match one's gender (the meaning of which will be clarified in this essay). Fantastic. The former was an unelaborated mantra in my *Introduction to Sociology* class, and the latter is nothing more than a simple definition. Even personal accounts stopped at something to the effect of, "I was born a male, but I am a woman." This does not tell me what I want to know. I want to know how or why one's gender might differ from one's sex. I want to know what it means to be transgendered, past the definition. This is my attempt to better understand that meaning.

The first step is simple: We must *immediately* dismiss the all-too-common metaphor of "a Y's soul in a Z's body." This explanation is objectively incorrect. To make this claim is to posit that there is some ethereal deity with billions upon billions of Make-Your-Own-Human kits, consisting of male bodies, female bodies, male essences, and female essences, and that, in its hurried attempt to meet quotas, it occasionally makes the mistake of inserting an essence into the wrong body. In short, we shall reject eternal souls and divine beings as poor representations of reality. We must restrict our choices to the realm of real possibilities.

If there is no great designer and, therefore, no planned design, perhaps we can go a step further and correct our terminology. If there is no plan, it is impossible to fail in the execution of that plan. So it is with sex (as determined by one's anatomy: male or female) and gender (as determined by something else: man or woman): No creator has made an effort to match a body type with a gender, which means there can be neither right nor wrong body-gender pairings.² Referring to transgendered individuals as having been born the "wrong" physical sex is a misuse of the word "wrong." This is similar to the phrase, "bad weather," in that there is nothing inherently bad about the weather. Instead, the weather happens not to please us or accord with the previous night's forecast. Transgendered people are not psyches in the *wrong bodies*.

This suggests two more likely possibilities. One is that, when we use the word "wrong," to describe a transgendered person's sexual identity (which I use to mean the amalgam of one's own self-concept of sex, gender, and other related notions) we mean to say that it is somehow displeasing. The other possibility is that said identity somehow differs from some set of expectations. We cannot compare something as complex as one's sexual identity to something as simple as odor. This means that this application of the word "wrong" cannot be reduced to some sort of purely instinctive response, such as a reaction to a foul odor. That leaves us with the second possibility: variation from expectations.

If so, what are these expectations, and what is the source? We can use four criteria to get a better idea of human sexual identity.

First, as has already been established, "sex" refers to one's anatomical features, in terms of reproductive organs (functional or not). Categorizing a person by sex is quite easy: Again, one is either male or female.

The second criterion, "sexual preference," refers to the general group of people to whom an individual is sexually attracted, with respect to the individual's own identity—specifically, "heterosexual" and "homosexual."

The third factor, appearance, indicates the sex an individual's looks match or are intended to match. This is perhaps trickier than sexual preference. Physically speaking, the obvious points of reference are musculature, size, and facial features. This also encompasses clothing design (cut and color) and hairstyle.

The fourth aspect is conduct and refers to the group with which an individual's behavior and emotions correspond. This facet of identity is far more complicated and far more *essential* than the others. While there are more explanations of behavior and emotion than I care to cite, most revolve around biology (genetics), socialization, or various meetings of the two. Amongst those, differing theories could carry different implications in other aspects of gender study, but none should work against this analysis.

Whatever the source, most people have some observable patterns of behavior and emotion. They have fairly steady attitudes about various things, which we will not go into. All of these behaviors, emotions, attitudes, likes, and dislikes amount to one thing: They form what we refer to as personality. They are the ways we approach and react to the world. Certain themes run through the different aspects of personality, linking certain emotions and actions. The words we ascribe to these connections become the vocabulary of personal traits. We have fairly rigid standards, opposing extraversion, determination, lucidity, competence, and emotional detachment to introversion, passivity, frivolity, childishness, and affection.

It is only now that we hit upon something which *might* tell us about gender. We find that there are certain tendencies involving sexes, sexual preference, appearances, and personalities. Most individuals within a biological grouping happen to be predominantly attracted to members of the other. Within a given culture at a given time, despite some variations, certain ranges of clothing and hairstyles are more typical of each sex. Certain characteristics are more commonly found in females than in males, while others are more common in males than in females.

Through these trends, we develop strong associations. We begin transforming statistical norms into social norms, shifting definitions in the process. The gay male becomes not merely a statistical deviation, but a *social deviant*. The female in hiking boots and pink-clad male transform from unusual to *strange*. A nurturing male becomes a sissy; an assertive female, a bitch. All of these people become weird—*queer*. They cease to be unexpected and become *unacceptable*. Through the link of sex, we also assume connections between sexual orientation, exteriors, and personal traits. The homosexual, pink-clad male, and nurturing male become one and the same, as do the lesbian, boot-wearing female, and bitch.

This is the source of gender: a shift from stating “this phenomenon tends to coincide with that phenomenon” to “this phenomenon is the source of that phenomenon.” Specifically, using the words “masculine” and “feminine” to describe that which is assigned as characteristic to males and females (the nouns and adjective share roots: *masculus* and *feminus*, respectively). is the mechanism through which we create gender, an idea which would not otherwise exist.

Despite the prevalence of such norms, they are created in the face of quite a few exceptions. That is because, for whatever reason, we make a conscious effort to classify things. In this quest for definition, both as a society and as individuals, we modify our observations; we *round* them to the nearest marker, which happens to be sex. We then take those artificial matchings and exaggerate them; we polarize them to eliminate any possibility of overlapping.

What about those exceptions? Every one of our rules is broken. In fact, the very criteria we use to create our system of gender are much more complicated than originally laid out. The difficulty with biological sex is that we must also account for *at least* one more group: intersexed individuals (those born with or who still possess the genitalia of both sexes). Bisexuality prevents our dualistic notion of sexual preference. In the United States, most hairstyles and clothing haven’t been entirely gender-specific in half of a century. If we consider either with respect to different cultures, it becomes even more pointless, and still more across history.

Personalities, along with the memories that help shape them, form the cores of our identities. If the other three criteria have wider ranges than originally thought, the idea of relating sex to personality is absurd. Not only can we find entire sets of personal traits (the “masculine” set, for instance) across sex lines; we see that specific qualities often thought to belong to opposite genders (e.g. determination and introversion or competence and affection) are readily found in paired together in single individuals. The assignment of sex-specific gender does a disservice to all by discouraging and inhibiting individual characteristics—the things that make each of us who we are.

This aspect of reality is not only the source, but the essence, of the experience of transgenderism. Transgenderism is rooted in the belief that one’s desires, feelings, or behaviors differ not only from what is expected, but from what is *supposed to be*. It is the belief that there is something

fundamentally wrong with the pairing of one’s inner self and one’s body.

Transgendered’s are no more their believed genders than a hypnotized person becomes a chicken or than a method actor becomes a fictional character. This is not, however, because they misinterpret their feelings, but because they (like most people) misunderstand the word “gender.” While the feelings are real, they are based entirely upon a false perception: that there is such a thing as gender in the first place. In reality, gender does not exist. It is a human attempt to create ethereal, Platonic Forms from properties that cannot be sufficiently abstracted, because they are neither universal to nor inseparable from their material counterparts.

Unless referring to one’s biological sex, the terms “man” and “woman” become virtually meaningless. Thus, if Cameron prefers to be thought of and addressed as a woman, that’s fine, but Alex and Cameron are not in a *lesbian* relationship; since gender does not exist, that term must be restricted to one between biological females.

The saying, “Sex is between your legs; gender is between your ears” is more true than people realize. Gender is between one’s ears—not one’s own gender, but the idea itself. If we *must* find a way to describe it, it cannot be a simple, clear-cut division. In fact, gender cannot be thought of in terms of a typical continuum, with essential *Woman* at one end and essential *Man* at the other; at its most precise, that continuum must be drawn jaggedly, with the understanding that some individuals will still defy classification by ordinary standards—as it should be.

I say, “as it should be” because of the answer to my original question, which was not addressed in the bulk of this essay. I was not asked whether or not Alex and Cameron are women or lesbians, but whether or not it matters. The answer? No, it doesn’t.

Endnotes

1. Both names have been changed.
2. The same does *not* apply in the case of morality. This account of gender is an attempt to describe reality, whereas morality deals with the attempt to improve reality—to reach an ideal. The exact nature of this ideal, whatever it may be, can be attributed at least in part to human preference. In other words, morality does, in fact, have a creator and a purpose, so the absence of a deity or deities does not negate the possibility of moral behavior.

It’s All Our Asses!: Two Symptoms of the Heteronormative

Jason Matherly

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

. . . taking an enemy on the battle field is like a hawk taking a bird. Even though it enters into the midst of a thousand of them, it gives no attention to any bird other than the one than it has first marked.

—Yamamoto Tsunetomo, Hagakure

There is an interesting sentiment going around: thanks to television shows such as *Will & Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, homosexuals are becoming more accepted in mainstream society. Similar ideas also seem to be circulating around the recent rulings in Massachusetts regarding gay marriage. But, issues of stereotypes aside, are such shows as

these really representative of homosexuals per se? More likely, it seems, they are, at best, integrating a particular brand of queer culture. On the other hand, gay marriage is very much a matter of homosexuality, and the notion of acceptability is certainly at issue. Still, this tie that binds these two realms of socio-political circumstance is confused. First, there is a marked difference between homosexuality and queer culture. Secondly, with regards to acceptability (or, if one prefers, “tolerance”) itself, is this really the most desirable avenue for either of these two factions of the gay world?

It would be superfluous to review Foucault’s history of homosexuality, but, as a gentle reminder, let us recall that at one time (prior to about 1870, specifically) there was no such category as “homosexual.” The reasons for this classification should, by now, be relatively well-known, and from this it can be understood that, because “modern power relies . . . on social norms to regulate behavior,” from the very beginning homosexuals had little recourse but to desire acceptance from (since the division has been made) “heteronormative” society. While it was not plotted, it was a dirty trick nonetheless. “Queer,” on the other hand, grew out of a response to socio-political circumstances rather than out of the socio-political mechanism itself. In a very pertinent sense, the “queer” community was never forced into the desire of acceptability: it was a movement, and it was revolutionary.

Today, programs such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* which appear to, in a sense, champion homosexuality, in fact only serve to integrate a watered-down (i.e., corporate-fashion-oriented, non-revolutionary) version of “queer.” As Jean Baudrillard puts it, “In terms of fashion and appearance, we no longer pursue beauty or seductiveness, but the ‘look.’” Of course, as has been pointed out, none of this has anything whatever to do with homosexuality. But, moreover, it hardly has anything to do with “queer.” Today it is not, “We are all queer,” but, “We are all transsexuals.” Essentially, “queer” is no longer a force to be reckoned with on a socio-political level, but a commodity to be capitalized on. What is “queer” today but an object to create a cheap desire? Queer: l’objet petit a. In other words, surplus-enjoyment. If media-driven “queer” does anything to deheteronormatize society, it necessarily does so at the expense of any possible genuine revolutionary queer force, and, in its confusion with homosexuality, also at the expense same-sex(ual) relations. If more solid evidence of this is required, one need look no further than the utterly superficial, bourgeois trend of the so-called “metrosexual.”

But what of gay marriage? The acceptance of gay marriage is, socio-politically, a major success on the homosexual front (regardless of one’s views on the institution of marriage), since marriage traditionally represents not only a spiritual unity but also an acceptable sexual unity (with regards to religion, at any rate, which homosexuals are certainly a part of, of course). Looking away from the queer movement for a moment, let us consider what this achieves in terms of heteronormative society: it means that homosexuals have gained a “right” long coveted religiously, socially, and politically. It holds meaning with regards to, among other things, taxes, medical situations, and religious beliefs. However, we must take into account the origins of marriage—that it came into being through, and continues to be, a principally religious ceremony. Already it has been argued, most admirably by Slavoj Žižek, that Christianity’s subversive roots must be recovered for revolutionary purposes. Going further, perhaps, it seems that religion in general, in its fundamental connection with poetry, should arguably be “recovered” for its revolutionary (i.e., contra post-modern socio-political ideology) potential. In other words, regardless of the immediate benefits of sanctioned gay marriage, as necessary as they may be situationally speaking,

gay marriage should not be seen as a great triumph over heteronormative society. Rather, it should be taken as a momentary ease within the culture at large. Make no mistake: it is still tolerance and nothing but tolerance, and as comforting as it may be, it is of the utmost importance not to fall into the trap of heteronormative society.

For as long as marriage (to say the least) remains what it is, hetero-racist-capitalist-ideological-normative society still prevails. In short, homosexuals must not take the transparent achievements of so-called media oriented “queer” culture to be theirs. Meanwhile, queer culture, like religion in general, must recover itself, so to speak, and once again become a revolutionary force. It must not misunderstand itself as a movement on behalf of homosexuals to be “accepted” by heteronormative society, but as a movement to topple that society at its very foundation. (This same argument may be made of the Black Power Movement, of the Feminist Movement (which, it seems, with its “Third Wave” is somewhat on that track to some extent), and even of certain anarchist and anti-globalization movements). At the same time, homosexuals must still break away from the desire to “belong” to heteronormative society. Whether we base it on the ceremony of marriage or not, it must find in itself an alignment with revolutionary thought, otherwise it will fall into the void of spectacle upon which queer culture is on the verge. The two must reacquire themselves. Furthermore, they must acquaint themselves also with other movements (such as those mentioned above) which strive on some level to combat the terror of dominant culture. Ultimately, regardless of which revolutionary front we are on, if it is indeed revolutionary, we must come to see ourselves as one front. We must not strive for mere acceptance, nor can mere acceptance be our end. Instead we must remain focused on our target and we must not stray. It is the prevailing culture that we must all see as treacherous, and it is the prevailing culture which we must, in the end, direct our dissent towards.

Fragile Fictions—Sexuality, Religion, and Political Essentialisms

Jack E. Marsh Jr.

University of North Carolina-Charlotte

...philosophical anthropology finds itself confronted with a *prephilosophical* comprehension, based on pathos and myth, of the theme of the disproportion of man [*sic.*] understood as being in a milieu, fragile and fallible.¹

—Paul Ricoeur

In this essay, I explore the use of sexual essentialisms in the current debates over gay marriage. I suggest that a narrative view of self-identity *requires* a politics that protects difference while ensuring equality in every quarter of public life. I will argue that the current hostility of much of the political rhetoric on the subject is rooted in the coercive essentialisms employed by various sides.

Who am I? This question has been a source of pain and confusion for me. I was raised in religious fundamentalism. The journey from “religious right” to a certain political liberalism has been a tenuous process, a process that required a fundamental rethinking of my identity and the view of reality bequeathed to me by family and friends, by people I love. While, for the most part, I’ve made peace with my past and forged a creative yet critical synthesis of certain of those values

with certain values of my generation, the *politics* of homosexuality is still a source of tension for me.

Not long after I arrived at my university, I was homesick and hurting. My girlfriend decided to break up with me a few weeks after I made the ten hour drive to Charlotte. Far from home and nursing my wounds, it was one of my roommates, John, who offered a sympathetic ear.² My own prejudices were revealed when he told me he was gay. I was shocked because he didn't fit my aesthetic stereotype of gay men. I wondered why he had told me. After he opened up about his own spirituality, the conflict he felt between those commitments and his lifestyle, and the way he had been mistreated by "religious" people, I saw the risk he took in confiding in me. In a way I felt honored that he trusted me. I sensed the fear he felt about being rejected for practicing a gay lifestyle.

Throughout the next year, John and I went from being roommates to being friends. We took turns being each others therapists, giving and receiving advice and empathy about everything from our workload to relationships. I met and spent time with many of his friends and partner(s) too. Throughout the year, my own internal debate intensified. John and his friends weren't "evil" or "perverse" as I'd been led to believe at one time. If anything, I found a more genuine openness, tolerance, and acceptance in my new friendships than with many of my "religious" friends.

Who am I? Who is John? Instantiations of the species *Homo sapien*? Perhaps. Yet this feels like a mere atomic congregant and requires a knowing cogito. Perhaps this is all we are. Yet what of the space, perhaps an *abyss*, between a self-certain cogito and the themes of pathos and myth? If I think of John as a particular instantiation of a universal, it feels wrong, like I somehow dictate his essence. From our conversations and confessions I feel like it's not a stretch to say with Heidegger (and Ricoeur) that we are *thrown* into "a milieu, fragile and fallible."³ *Thrown* into a world not of our making, into complex meaning structures not of our design, into a milieu where our identity "reflects" nothing like Cartesian indubitability. If we have anything that comes close to a "self," to a concrete identity, it seems to be something that is fragile, something that is susceptible to violation and despair; something that *exceeds* every deduction or apophantic mediation, something of which I'm not certain, an identity of fallibility and fragility.

For Heidegger our *thrownness* isn't the whole story. Always in light of finitude we can take hold of various possibilities, yet possibilities that are in some way conditioned by *thrownness*, by our concrete historical circumstances.⁴ For some philosophers, the means by which we grasp (or create or construct) these possibilities are through narrative.⁵ We appropriate old stories and try to create new ones. The fact that we are *thrown* means our fictions are never created out of nothing. We employ science, religion, aesthetics, etc. in creating our stories. We attempt to make sense of our experience through a hermeneutics of fiction, of storytelling.

By this I don't mean to denigrate our *identities* by claiming they're fictitious. Our stories become the flesh of identity; they become the locus around and through which we make sense of our experience and the world. Narratives are never authored *exclusively* by a "self." They are given in socialization. It is *de-and-re-constructed* in every encounter with *difference*, with alterity. My friendship with John demonstrates how different experiences produce different stories and that this difference can often be painful and confusing in attempting to understand who we are and who we're not. These differences can call into question the narratives that give us a sense of self, and can raise ethical questions in how we deal with such difference. Our friendship renewed certain tensions we both

grappled with through a conflict of religious and sexual narratives. I am a sexual being, I am a spiritual being. This is given in *thrownness*, and both serve as horizon for telling the story of who I am and what I want to be.

The story I've suggested above is a bit different than the one(s) told by the Western intellectual tradition. Parmenidian Being, the Cartesian cogito, all the way up to Sartrean transcendence, has been the quest for certainty or autonomy or both; a quest for the "essence" of the human, a quest that must explain itself in light of the gulags, Auschwitz, and Hiroshima.

The current religious objection to homosexual practice assumes an essentialism. God gives us an eternal soul and establishes sexual norms via inspired religious texts so it would violate God's law to allow gay marriage or to support gay rights.⁶ Less religious cultural conservatives appeal to a naturalistic essence or simply "tradition for tradition's sake."⁷ Whether the human is construed as a soul-thing or matter-thing, such positions claim to exhaust the content of identity under a religious, scientific, historical, or philosophical system, such that it claims normative authority for restricting certain sexual practice. In light of recent history, should we not take a hard look at how various *essentialisms* are used to justify violence, hate, and oppression?

However the essentialism question cuts both ways. If the sexual *essentialisms* of religious and cultural conservatism have historically been used to justify violence, then counter norms based on essentialism won't ameliorate the problem. It is precisely essentialism that is the issue. The current cultural myth that one does not choose to be gay assumes an essence no less violent *when used to justify social policy*.⁸ I call this a myth because of the claim to positivity. What would it take to justify this claim? I find it interesting that researchers on both sides haven't settled the question. For example pro-gay sociologist David Greenberg in his monumental work *The Construction of Homosexuality* writes:

Scholars are not likely to come to agreement anytime soon about the causes of sexual orientation, or its nature . . . For every lesbian separatist arguing that lesbianism is a political choice that carries feminism to its logical conclusion, there is someone else saying, "I was born that way." . . . Cognitive and normative pluralism will persist for the indefinite future.⁹

Why must the pluralism persist? What would it take to "objectively" prove that homosexual practice *is* or *is not* a choice or to "prove" that homosexual practice is morally wrong? Unless our research methodologies can be shown to be the metaphysical Rosetta Stone, unless we can reach a "rational" foundation that grants theory completion and coherence, unless we can insure the accuracy of representations, such "evidences" and "proofs" are out of reach. Doesn't such a meta-discourse claim a privileged perspective that allows it to "correct" other perspectives and *do so with violence if necessary*?

"Gay essentialism" might be a legitimate response to the *essentialisms* of the right. This is precisely why employing a meta-discourse is violent and preferential. Let us suppose that it was "scientifically proven" that homosexuality was a pathology. Would the gay community accept such "proof?" Nor I. Now let us suppose that it was "scientifically proven" that homosexual practice was completely genetically determined. Would an orthodox Jew, a practicing Muslim, or a conservative Christian accept such proof (Not to mention a certain Buddhism and Hinduism, etc.)?¹⁰ What of the many who have *claimed* to "overcome" their homosexuality, or gays

and lesbians who want help and treatment to *change*?¹¹ Are they inauthentic individuals who “deny who they are?” Wouldn’t such a claim replicate the same violence perpetrated on the gay community by religious and cultural conservatives? Would this not assume a sexual essentialism?

Blind appeal to tradition or “sacred scripture” is not a justification, nor even a coherent suggestion, to ground a just polity in a pluralistic democracy. The ban on gay marriage is a violation; it is discriminatory; it bars equal access to the various legal and financial benefits that heterosexual married couples enjoy.

However, legislatively coercing pastors, priests, and rabbis to perform a gay marriage, or mandating that sexual practice cannot be a criterion of exclusion for *private* religious communities, seems to be equally violatory. If I were to walk into synagogue on Sabbath and proclaim, “there is no God but the God, and Muhammad is his prophet . . .” I would be excluded. If I were a pastor of an Evangelical church and practiced heterosexual sex outside of marriage, I would be excluded. If I were elected to Congress as a member of the Green Party, yet voted for arctic oil drilling and reduced clean air standards, I would be excluded.

The point is that a real liberalism protects the speech, expression and fictions even of groups and individuals in which it has thematic differences, and perhaps especially these. If we only tolerate social practices and speech that agree with our ideology, how are we different from fundamentalists?

As for the conflict between the fundamentalist “fiction” of my upbringing and contemporary sexual identity narratives, I’m still uncertain. I’m ever conscious of my own fragility and fallibility in the face of such conflicts. One thing I am sure of however, that is, I want to err on the side of equality. Especially in support and activism for gay rights, even if my own fictions are far from settled.

Endnotes

1. Paul Ricoeur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed., Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 21.
2. I’ve changed his name to protect his privacy.
3. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Translated by Macquarrie and Robinson (New York: NY Harper & Row, 1962), 174.
4. *Ibid.*, 183-184.
5. Daniel C. Dennett, “The Self as the Center of Narrative Gravity,” in F. Kessel, P. Cole, and D. Johnson, eds., *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (New Jersey: Erlbaum, 1992); and Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Identity,” in D. Wood, ed., *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1991), 188-199.
6. David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 420.
7. *Ibid.*, 478-479.
8. William H. Masters, Virginia E. Brown, and Robert Kolodny, *Human Sexuality* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 319; and Kim Painter, “A Biological Theory for Sexual Preference,” *USA Today*, 1 January 1989, 4D.
9. David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 480, 481.
10. *Ibid.*, 100.
11. Robert Kronmeyer, *Overcoming Homosexuality* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980) 141-167; and William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *Homosexuality in Perspective* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 333, 368.

Luis

Samuel Piñero

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

I am Black, African-American, Colored, high-yellow, Negro. I am Puerto Rican, Latino, Hispanic. My identity is the most important topic in my life. Because of my ambiguous racial appearance, people describe me by attributes under my control: musician, magician, dreadlocked guy, sempai,¹ boss, friend. I took my brother’s right to self-identify from him. No longer having the title, “my brother,” he was now, “my gay brother”—a title I use to differentiate between him and my other brother. The process seems unfair—his identity taken from him because of his lifestyle. I attribute my philosophy and insight on gay issues to discovering my brother’s homosexuality, confronting my own identity issues, and contemplating the nature of my own sexual behavior.

I realized my brother was gay ten years before he told me. The revelation was devastating in a way. There was a sense of depravity and of dirty sexual secrets being uncovered. The verification came from my sister, and we both felt a sense of disbelief. Our brother did not “act gay” in our eyes. If asked about his preferences, he would flatly deny them. How is it my brother “became” gay?

I was originally of the opinion that my brother chose his life. I didn’t understand how it was possible he could be attracted to a man. I still have doubts as to why women even like us. To me, there is nothing appealing about men. I only spend time with myself because I have to. Men are often hairy, messy, and dirty,² all attributes which are unappealing to me. My brother risks being ostracized by his family and discriminated against. Additionally, his gayness subordinates his identity as a Puerto Rican. My brother would be concerned not primarily with race-related rights, but with the rights of homosexuals. Additionally his work with any Puerto Rican issues is overshadowed by his gay identity. Realizing there is no way I could make choices that affect me this way enlightens my brother’s plight. I could never choose to risk my family, my race, and my life to do something I want to do. To risk these things, it must be something I have to do.

A choice to be with men makes no sense to me, especially since I cannot identify with the desire aspect of a homosexual relationship. I like girls—so much that if my reality changes to one where liking girls is considered morally wrong by much of society, I would definitely continue to pursue them. Additionally, if it were illegal or immoral to participate in certain activities with these girls, I would partake in secret. My perception of my brother was somehow different from my understanding of myself. Over time, I developed an appreciation of the “why” of his situation. The epiphany? My brother is just like me. The difference is he likes men, one man in particular. He loves him. How can anyone deny them their happiness?

So much of our happiness seems to hinge on our identity, and our freedom to express our identity without judgment and regret. I am happy to say that my brother told me about his preferences after I had many years to get an understanding of the reality of the situation. He expressed surprise that I knew, but I reassured him that I knew all along, and that it made no difference in our relationship or how I feel about him. I would have loved him from the first day, but I now can articulate our similarities rather than our differences. I am also proud of my father, a conservative minister, whose only comment to my brother about his homosexuality was “I love you.” Maybe he

was coming to terms with the reality of the situation over all these years as well. My brother's admission of his lifestyle made a difference in our relationship, but in a positive way. He is comfortable spending time with the family and I am closer with him than I had been when he had his "dirty little secret," which was no secret at all. Now my friend who likes to smell girl's shoes—that guy still freaks me out a little. But that is another story.

Endnotes

1. A term in karate meaning senior student.
2. At least the men I know are, including myself. It can be argued that these are gender roles played by men.