



Discourse On Homophobia

Homophobia must be recognized for what it is: a kind of dysfunction that manifests as a self-righteous posturing.

One is forced to subscribe to a distorted view of identity and lifestyle in order to rationalize a homophobic mindset. Most anti-gay stances are predicated on the faulty assumption that homosexuality is a “choice of lifestyle”. This reverses the causal nature of gay lifestyle vis a vis volitional lifestyle. The inversion takes place, presumably, because one mistakes an inherent trait for the decision to subscribe to a certain belief system or mode of living. In some cases, identity arises from lifestyle; in other cases, lifestyle arises from identity. It is important to recognize the difference.

When one opts to adopt an identity, the identity derives from the choices one makes regarding “lifestyle”: interests / values, as well as practices / rituals / routines. In other words, the behavior and beliefs are prior to the defining of the identity. “This is who I am because this is what I think, what I like, what I want, what I do.” The reason for thinking, liking, wanting and doing what one thinks, likes, wants and does is, then, retroactively attributed to that identity. This is a rationalization, not a causal explanation. Examples of this are political ideology and religiosity.

On the other hand, when one possesses an attribute that is inherent to who one is, the lifestyle emerges from that identity. That is: the identity is prior to what one thinks, likes, wants and does. Examples of this are ethnicity and sexuality.

It is important to distinguish between the two phenomena if we are to accurately diagnose homophobia.

When identity as an X is inherent (because the features that define X are congenital), lifestyle as an X derives from that identity. In this sense, lifestyle is an organic / automatic corollary of who one inherently is—and is thus not selected as one option among many possible options.

By contrast, when identity is chosen, identity derives from lifestyle. Here, lifestyle is a choice, and one’s identity emerges from the beliefs / behavior involved in that choice. The habits of acting and thinking that those choices entail YIELD the identity, not vice versa.

Homosexuality, then, is not a “lifestyle choice” as are, for example, Hassidism, Puritanism (conservatism / fundamentalism), and free-thought. That these three sorts of lifestyles ARE choices illustrates why a gay lifestyle is not. Let’s look at these three examples of lifestyle choices—where there are different factors at play:

1) Hassidism is a completely PASSIVE choice—a kind of “forced choice”—and thus a pseudo-choice. The lifestyle is imposed upon a person who is “born into” constraining circumstances that are completely out of his control. Here, one is compelled to “go along” with the order to which one finds oneself beholden. This is due to the fact that one is thrown into a situation by sheer accident of birth, and essentially brainwashed by entrenched, institutionalized mechanisms. (In other words, indoctrination within an insular, controlled environment plays a role in COERCING the pseudo-choice.)

Here, the barriers to exit are HUGE, and so the submission to the lifestyle is largely a matter of pragmatic capitulation. It requires a tremendous amount of self-discipline to overcome this unfortunate predicament—to CHOOSE to break free from the lifestyle. Though it is possible, most will not have the wherewithal to do so.

2) Puritanism (or any other fundamentalist religionism) is also passive, but mainly due to ingrained habit from incessant, systematic conditioning. Such a lifestyle is slightly more of a conscientious choice than is a COMPLETELY passive choice (e.g. Hassidism). Such a “choice” is often a matter of wantonly submitting to social pressures. The barriers to exit for such lifestyles is not insignificant, but far less than, say, Hassidism. Submission to such lifestyles, then, is largely a matter of mindless capitulation.

3) Free-thought is a proactive / conscientious choice made after a modicum of critical reflection. Here is a lifestyle that is generally arrived at after a process of rational deliberation—and is thus a FULL lifestyle choice. Here, the only barrier to exit is one’s own will to engage in critical reflection—the desire to be autonomous. With such a lifestyle choice, there is zero capitulation involved (as autonomy is, by definition, absence of submission).

Thus, things like Hassidism and Puritanism are heteronomy-based lifestyle choices while something like free-thought is an autonomy-based lifestyle choice. These are to be contrasted with lifestyles that are NOT choices, such as life as a member of a certain race.



For someone who is gay, his/her lifestyle isn't PRESCRIBED TO him/her by others, nor is it chosen—as if from a marketplace of options. It is a natural outgrowth of WHO HE/SHE INHERENTLY IS. Thus, to describe the lifestyle entailed by homosexuality as a “lifestyle choice” is inaccurate. Moreover, the barriers to exit in this identity group are close to absolute. (I can't deny who I inherently am any more than a person of a given race can deny his race.)

There is no capitulation / submission involved in embracing one's identity as a gay or straight person...any more than a white / black / Latin / Indian / Asian / Arab person is capitulating / submitting in recognizing that he is white / black / Latin / Indian / Asian / Arab. We would never say a left-handed person is “submitting” to his left-handed-ness by opting to use his left hand to write.

Homophobia is predicated on the assumption that being gay is a lifestyle CHOICE. For it implies that a person has made a decision TO BE gay.

In many ways, homophobia is an analogue of racism. In both cases, one is treating as a choice something that is not a choice. In either case, one is discriminating against a group of people based on a factor that is patently irrelevant to ascertaining a person's probity / merit. This is an attribute that is not only an inherent part of who a person is, but that has no bearing whatsoever on how good a person is. Race? Left- / right-handedness? Sexuality? Such factors have dubious relevance to any honest assessment of how worthy people are of our respect. Homophobia, then, is morally defective for many of the same reasons racism is...or handed-ism would be.

After all, moral-ness is predicated on free-will: the notion that people have freely chosen to act / think in a certain way. It is the CHOICE that is moral or immoral. Where there is no choice, moral judgment can't take place.

Bigotry is a symptom of false pride—a condition precipitated by ignorance and fear. To be homophobic, then, is to betray an underlying insecurity...as well as to demonstrate a severe state of cognitive disorientation. To utter the statement “Being gay is morally wrong” is to give voice to an inane claim. By doing so, one is declaring that one doesn't have a grasp of the concept with which one purports to be dealing.

To insist that sexuality has anything whatsoever to do with one's capacity for X is to make a patently irrelevant factor a point of contention. Who is unworthy of being an X? Anyone ignorant enough to think a gay man or woman is categorically unworthy of being an X. (Here, X can be “parent”, “public servant”, “statesman”, “good person”, etc.)



Let's look at other misconceptions on which homophobia is based. The contention is sometimes made that it is "unhealthy" for a child to see two men being affectionate with one-another. The theory is that witnessing such a phenomenon will somehow "confuse" the youth...or perhaps even persuade him to partake in the activity himself.

This is a peculiar claim to make. It is not merely false IN FACT, but it is a rather bizarre impression to have. In many ways, it parallels the contention that there is something "wrong" with inter-racial dating.

Are we to suggest that one white man seeing a white man dating a black woman would somehow influence the former's taste in the color of a woman's skin? Such a claim is absurd with regard to race for the same reasons it is absurd with regard to gender. Sexual attraction simply doesn't work that way. If it did, then gay men who regularly see men dating women would eventually become straight.

Some men are attracted to very skinny women. I am not. Are we to suggest that witnessing other men date very skinny woman will somehow alter my taste for curvy women? As a youth, I knew gay men—yet, miraculously—I now find myself to be a straight adult. Is this surprising?

It seems that seeing same-sex couples, like seeing inter-racial couples, would instill in youth a noble message: That love and affection can transcend gender and race. A child witnessing such a sight may illustrate that people of different races or of the same gender can have emotional bonds in the same way that a pair of straight, white people can.

Is this not an admirable lesson to learn?

Should we not look forward to the day that a child sees an inter-racial couple or a same-sex couple, and is prompted to inquire about it? Should we not celebrate the fact that, only then, could it occur to the child that human connection transcends such factors? If only everyone could have such an epiphany.

I don't like to eat liver. I don't like to watch golf. I am right-handed, not left-handed. I didn't make the decision to have such proclivities; they're simply part of how I'm wired. Does another person eating liver prevent me from eating a Cobb salad? Does my friend watching golf infringe on my ability to watch a baseball game? Does my neighbor writing with his left hand somehow burden the use of my right hand? Why, then, would a straight person find homosexuality problematic?



Homosexuality, we're expected to believe, is somehow deleterious to society. Such irrational claims are useful fictions when one seeks to deny certain civil rights to gay men. All actions require rationalizations. To deny an entire segment of the population key civil rights based simply on whom they inherently are is an agenda that requires a doozy of a rationalization.

"Your not SUPPOSED TO be left-handed!" Interesting proposition. "YOUR left-handedness threatens MY identity as a right-hander." Interesting claim. What sort of mental disposition would compel someone to make such statements? It would seem that the same logic applies to homophobia.

We won't live in a genuine democracy until gay men are afforded every civil right afforded to straight men.