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Western Societal Philosophies and its Relation to Queer Liminality

By: Michael R Fabich June 6th, 2023

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Abstract:

This research seeks to critically examine the societal constructs prevalent within Western society, focusing on their implications for LGBTQ+ individuals. By delving into the complex dynamics of gender, sexuality, and family, this research aims to shed light on the underlying factors that perpetuate separation, stigmatization, and marginalization. A comprehensive analysis of these constructs is crucial to understanding the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as to pave the way for meaningful societal progress towards inclusivity, acceptance, and equal rights. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policymakers, educators, and advocates seeking to create more inclusive and equitable societies. By unraveling the intricate layers of societal constructs, we can challenge prevailing norms, dismantle harmful stereotypes, and work towards fostering a more compassionate and accepting environment for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ rights, societal change, and the creation of a more inclusive future for Western society.

Keywords: Anthropology; Gender and Sexuality; Queer Liminality; Queer Family; LGBTQ+ rights; LGBT freedom; Western society today; Western societal philosophies



Michael R Fabich
Mfabich@ANTHRO.science



Introduction:

The concept of Western society evokes a multitude of perceptions and connotations, encompassing a complex interplay of dynamic perspectives that shape our understanding of various topics and viewpoints within diverse communities. These perspectives often rely on well-defined definitions to portray the intricacies and diversities inherent in societal structures. However, it is notable that certain aspects of individual groups within Western society are subjected to more rudimentary, polarized constructs. These rudimentary Western views have continuously created separation on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, religion, and cultural practices. None is more inherent today than the ones concerning gender versus biological sex and notions of the ideal family. In this context, Western societal views on homosexuality contribute to the fragmentation of the larger social fabric, while limited perspectives on gender and gender roles, often sexualized, further exacerbate this divide. Consequently, LGBTQ+ individuals find themselves caught in a perpetual state of liminality due to society's conflicting and opposing views, leading to far-reaching consequences for their well-being and sense of belonging.

Methodology:

The research methodology employed involves a multidisciplinary approach drawing upon relevant literature, theoretical frameworks, personal experience, and other evidence. By combining Anthropology, real-world Queer ethnographic research, and other cultural perspectives, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in shaping societal constructs within Western society and how it relates to the Queer community.

Queer Liminality in Western Society:

A society's negative perception of homosexuality engenders a distinct division between LGBTQ+ individuals and the broader social fabric, compelling them to reside outside the confines of mainstream society. In the article "Liminality," by Michael Joseph (2021), Joseph delves into the concepts of liminal spaces, defining one aspect of liminality as "the quality of being socially segregated" (Joseph, 2021, p.116). Similarly, the study conducted by Ridge, Plummer, and Peisley (2006), titled "Remaking the masculine self and coping in the liminal world of the gay 'scene'," examines the ramifications of external homophobia and violence on the estrangement of queer individuals from society. Notably, their research illuminates that the "Immersion [of gay men] in... gay space[s] also involved varying degrees of dissociation from other social networks" like jobs, straight friends and family, and participation in the society" (Ridge, 2006, p506). The contributing factor for this need to be immersed in gay spaces involves the extreme hatred of Queer individuals from outside of that space. The immersion in the West and central Hollywood queer nightlife during the initial years of the 21st century elicits an intriguing insight into the need for separation and safe places. Wherein self-expression was confined to venues populated by individuals who shared a collective understanding of the challenges involved in being Queer when the notion and word QUEER was stigmatized rather than celebrated as an aspect of personal identity. A majority of Queer individuals were compelled to distance themselves from their families while seeking employment within the queer scene, as they encountered discrimination in professions that demanded conformity to heteronormative standards, reinforcing the imperative for queer individuals to adopt a more "heterosexual"



demeanor. Consequently, these queer individuals established intimate enclaves that deliberately isolated themselves from these prevailing heteronormative communities that had firmly entrenched themselves within the surrounding localities. This forced detachment from the conventional realm of Western society subjected LGBTQ+ individuals into a perpetual state of liminality, whereby they find themselves detached from the customary functioning of society as a means of survival.

The Western construct of equating biological sex with gender has persistently led to the sexualization of individuals within the LGBTQ+ community, particularly those who identify as nonbinary or engage in drag performance. This limited definition of gender, gender roles, and sexual identity leads to what Michael Joseph calls liminality of “Outsiderhood... [one of the] two types of liminality explored in recent narratives” (Joseph, 2021, p.118). Throughout history, Western societies have grappled with comprehending the disassociation of biology from gender ideals and constructs. Fulton and Anderson (1992) examine Indigenous American cultures in their article on the "Amerindian 'Man-Woman'," highlighting Westerners' failure to recognize that gender and gender roles are unrelated to an individual's biological sex or their engagement in same-sex relationships. Indigenous American cultures acknowledge the presence of Two-Spirit individuals, who assume gender roles outside the Western male-female binary, often serving as spiritual leaders. “Western interpretation dichotomizes the gender role for each sex, which results from erroneous assumptions about, first, the connection between biology and gender, and, second, the nature of gender roles” (Fulton & Anderson, 1992, p.607). This construction of a male-female

gender binary in society perpetuates false notions about appropriate behavior, dress, and sexuality, leading to the automatic yet baseless sexualization of those who exist outside these norms, such as nonbinary individuals and drag performers. Fulton and Anderson state “not every [two spirits] performed same-sex sexual relations exclusively nor would [Indigenous Americans] who had sexual relationships with another like sexed person be necessarily perceived as a [Two-Spirit] by the community” (Fulton & Anderson, 1992, p.608). Western society burdens individuals who deviate from its gender binaries by sexually objectifying them based on appearance, behavior, or identity. Due to the misrepresentation of gender and gender identity as a sexual act, the LGBTQ+ community is subjected to both sexualization and accusations of being overly sexual. Consequently, this dynamic not only perpetuates liminality within the queer community but also exposes many to feeling sexually violated by the very individuals who label queer people as sexual deviants.

The manifestation of liminality within the LGBTQ+ community is prominently exemplified by the divergent societal perspectives on same-sex adoption, which create a rift between proponents and opponents of this practice. In her article "Family," Wesseling (2021) elucidates the inherent liminality of adoption, noting that "Western adoptive parents usually aspire toward the norm of the nuclear family" (Wesseling, 2021, p.74). The negative viewpoint held by certain segments of society regarding same-sex adoption is evident in Haines' article titled "Same-Sex Adoption Should Not Be Tolerated for the Sake of Encouraging Adoption" (2013). Haines characterizes a "bad lifestyle" as involving drug dealing and domestic



violence, even though he acknowledges that same-sex couples are less likely to engage in such behavior. However, he unfairly includes the "gay lifestyle" within this categorization, stating that "the problem... is that they're [same-sex couples] still a subset of the 'bad lifestyle' sort. And bad lifestyle... certainly translates to 'unfit for child rearing'" (Haines, 2013). In contrast, an opposing perspective is presented in the article "Homosexuals Should Be Allowed to Adopt" by Hunt and Krehely (2013). They cite multiple studies indicating that "children raised by a gay or lesbian parent are just as likely to grow up well-adjusted adults as children raised by heterosexual parents" (Hunt & Krehely, 2013). In a society where contradictory viewpoints on same-sex adoption persist, both same-sex couples and the children involved are constantly situated within a liminal space defined by societal norms surrounding the concept of family, often accompanied by fears of child removal or separation from their parents. The opposition to same-sex adoption stems from the perception of a traditional nuclear family as the ideal form of family structure. This viewpoint, deeply ingrained in Western societies, sets up a standard against which other family formations, including those of same-sex couples, are judged. The liminality arises from the tension between these opposing perspectives. On one hand, Wesseling (2021) highlights how adoptive parents typically strive to conform to the nuclear family model, emphasizing the role of biological connections and traditional gender roles in child rearing. On the other hand, Haines (2013) presents a negative view of same-sex adoption by associating it with a presumed "bad lifestyle," even though research contradicts such stereotypes (Hunt & Krehely, 2013). These conflicting viewpoints position same-sex couples and their children in an ambiguous space where

societal acceptance and legal protections remain uncertain. The impact of this liminality is profound. Same-sex couples who wish to adopt face the persistent challenge of societal discrimination and legal barriers. They are forced to navigate a complex landscape of varying attitudes and prejudices, often experiencing feelings of exclusion and marginalization. The children of same-sex couples are also affected, as they may encounter stigmatization or discrimination based on their family structure, which can have detrimental effects on their well-being and sense of belonging.

Conclusion:

Societal perceptions of homosexuality engender a state of division within the broader community, owing to its narrow understanding of gender and gender roles intertwined with a sexualized framework. The resulting opposing viewpoints prevalent in society subject LGBTQ+ individuals to an ongoing state of liminality. This separation perpetuates a diminished societal role for Queer individuals, curtailing their potential contributions to the collective. Moreover, society's failure to disentangle gender from biological sex engenders sexualized notions of individuals. The divergent stances on same-sex adoption within the LGBTQ+ community exemplify the liminality experienced not only by the parents but also by the child, who, having believed they had found their long-awaited family, now finds themselves in a precarious position. Western society is often touted as one that embraces diverse perspectives, fostering inclusivity and progress for all its members. However, this idealistic portrayal remains elusive for the LGBTQ+ community, as they continue to struggle for their rights, contend with limited freedoms, and maintain hope for a brighter future



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