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# Compulsory (Hetero) Sexuality Within Homosexual Desire And The Despoilment Of Inner-Self

‘Stereotypes that devoured Our Society’

Authored By-Srishti Gupta

## I. Introduction

“Gender is neither with what we’re born, nor something we have, but is something that we *perform*”<sup>1</sup>. A small boy, who proudly reveres his father, performing everything he can to bear a resemblance – to be a ‘man’, the boy is personifying his adult male role-model. Likewise small girls, they endeavour their mothers by putting on makeup, her dresses-shoes etc. Expressly, gendered performances are accessible to everyone, but with them run constraints on who can conduct which personae or to perform what individuality with impunity. This is where gender and sex stands together, hence the society strives to match the ways of an individual’s comportments with its biologically based sex. Not surprisingly, heterosexual coupling and privileging any resulting children, while disapproving the homosexual desires are firmly intertwined with society’s gender perseverance, where gendered-identity is delineated with ‘labels’ designated to respective genders (e.g., male, female, genderqueer, bi, femme).

Gender-role orientation, a related conception, evinces the degree through which psychological and behavioural attributes corresponds with societally regulated norms for masculinity and femininity. These behavioural patterns are acknowledged as ‘sex-roles’<sup>2</sup> more recently as ‘gender-roles’. Sex and Gender are both pertinent to sexual orientation as an individual’s characteristics are directed towards their sexual-identities, which may accentuate upon physical (sex) and communal (gender) based self-perceptions. Additionally, this way individuals can be oriented towards biological sex-traits, socially-influenced gender identity, or both, irrespective of one being male, female, or ‘other’<sup>3</sup>.

A highly evident activity of pairing up girls-boys as couples commands the situation altogether. Heterosexuality is a construction around which the social associations organises itself, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble Identity*-(module-I, Routledge-1990)

<sup>2</sup> Spence, Helmreich, ‘Negative and positive components of psychological masculinity-and-femininity-(1979)

<sup>3</sup> Janice Habarth, ‘Thinking “Straight”- (2008)

‘heterosexual market’<sup>4</sup> forms the core to it. Rigidly, neither everyone desires to engage themselves in heterosexual market, nor every participant is hetero. This market enables social-order to assume heterosexuality as condescending, while marginalizing the deviants (homosexuals). Further the market instigates dichotomous thinking “opposite attracts” which unfolds the conscious element of desire<sup>5</sup>.

The phrase “compulsory-heterosexuality<sup>6</sup>” initially-accentuates an assumption of a male dominant society, normalising the sexual-relationship-between a man-woman. The phrase infers heterosexuality as something which is neither inborn nor a choice per se, but an enforcement of customary, natural and socially-admissible choices.

## **II. Stereotyping And Self-Stereotyping Homosexuals**

Gender stereotyping is delineated as overgeneralization of attributes and peculiarities of definite groups as established upon their gender (usually male-female). But, now as our society progresses towards broader construct of “gender”, individuals clinging with binary idea to it encounters everyday perplexities around those with gender-atypicality, who do not fit within strict gender dichotomy. For instance, assertive women are cited as “whores”, while men who don’t emerge masculine are referred as “sissies” or assumed to be gays, which is conceded as an offensive stereotype among LGBTQ community. Each day gender non-conforming people endure the brunt of economic and societal marginalization owing to prejudices based upon their gender-specifications<sup>7</sup>. Components contributing in stereotypic behaviour against lesbian/gays/bisexuals includes – sexist attitudes, their minority-status, belief about environmental causes of homosexuality, gender role expectations etc.<sup>8</sup> Some are opinionated that being homosexual is an extreme gender-role violation (here, stereotype derives from sexism) while others believe that sexual orientation is an individualistic based preconception (here, homophobia). Others view sexual orientation and gender-role to be intertwined.

The interaction of gender-role with sexual orientation embodies two rudimentary assumptions which are both based upon cultural belief and are repeatedly unrecognized. These assumptions are “cultural gender belief system”<sup>9</sup> and “inversion theory of sexual-orientation”, which constitutes an essentialist rather than socially fabricated prospect of gender where traditional gender-role conformity i.e., heterosexuality as the “norm” is advocated. The ‘gender-belief-system’ proposes a set of opinions and belief circling

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<sup>4</sup> Barrie Thorne, ‘Gender Play’, (1993)

<sup>5</sup> Eckert, ‘Language and Gender’

<sup>6</sup> Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’-(1980)

<sup>7</sup> Gender Equality Law Centre, ‘Gender Stereotyping’ <<https://www.genderequalitylaw.org/gender-stereotyping>>

<sup>8</sup> Herek, ‘Psychology of Sexual-Preference’-(2003); Schneider, ‘The Psychology of Stereotyping’ (2004)

<sup>9</sup> Deaux, ‘Analyzing gender’ (1987)

females/males and their personated traits of masculinity and femininity, and suggests that gender-roles, either distinctively or identically tied to biological sex<sup>10</sup>. This system expects a person with some traits of a specific gender-role shall hold desirability of opposite sex (i.e. sexual attraction), otherwise, people non-conforming to traditional role expectations (“sissies”, “tomboys”) are assumed to be gays-lesbians-homosexuals. While, people in ‘inversion-theory’<sup>11</sup> stereotype homosexuals as “inverted” because being incapable to meet the expectation of opposite sex attraction.<sup>12</sup>

Mainstream stereotypes focusing homosexuals repeatedly reveals them as violative of gender-norms in multiple domains – interests, occupations, roles, mannerisms and appearance. Facial properties accepts feminine male faces and masculine female faces as gay/lesbians. Further, Gay men are stereotyped as emotional, weak, submissive, while Lesbians are stereotyped as sex-atypical. Some perceive the elevated masculinity among lesbians are contrasting to the heterosexual-women.

Social sex-role stereotypes and conventionalisation of homosexuals usually appear to be confounded, such that gays are ascribed certain roles, reactions and traits which are generally attributed to heterosexual-women, while lesbians are likewise seen as conforming to stereotypical heterosexual-male behaviours.

Consequently, Identity development among homosexuals enables sociocultural stereotypes to unknowingly play a significant role in the process, as it predicts the developed gay identity to have faced the stereotypical and sex-atypical attitudes of society before they even come-out as LGBTQs. Thus, making the identity development process strenuous for ‘non-identified’ gays/lesbians etc., the non-identified ones not only gets exposed to these biased perceptions and prejudices of LGBTQs in society, but would be at high risk to acquire them as a notions of ‘homos’ being an out-group in the culture. Their earliest understanding of “what it means to be homosexual” may thus be constructed purely on sociocultural-stereotypes rather being based on appropriate role models. Most gay people for instance resist living in homosexual families, owing to stigmas and fear of sentient backlash which may discourage newly-identified ones from networking or sustaining<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> id

<sup>11</sup> The phrase Sexual inversion is used by sexologists to homosexuality. Sexual inversion was accepted to be an inborn misfortune of gender attributes. Those referred to be ‘inverted males’ were compared to traditional females and vice versa.

<sup>12</sup> Amy Rees & Carol Doyle, ‘Sexual Orientation, Gender Role Expression, and Stereotyping’

<sup>13</sup> John Bickford, ‘Stereotype conformity in gay people and homosexual identity’ (1999)

Research on 'likings' for gay men expresses greater fondness for masculine gay men rather for feminine gays, because more or less they fulfil the societal expectations of emerging like a 'man', similarly a feminine lesbian for preferential resembling a 'woman'. These differential likings may demoralize homosexuals who're beginning to express their identity overtly and fearing the stereotypic fashion towards being liked and accepted. Such patterns, revolving confirmed stereotypicality are not ethical and aversive for new-identifiers. This may culminate into an atrocious failure of their advancement and development of identity, and ill-defined self-concepts and negative experiences may develop internalised distress, homophobia, and self-hatred.

### **III. Social Construction Of Identities**

Social constructionism can be comprehended as a rambling structure defining sexual actors and sexual activities at societal and individual levels. And thus, it put forth a manifesto that, human realities and prejudices that follows it are socially 'constructed' through assessing one's language and potential, and that it can be revamped through means of questioning the assumed realities and 'deconstructing' them, or scrutinizing the ways in which these were created<sup>14</sup>.

'Gender-stereotyping equality' principles owns expressive insinuations. Here, Butler asserts that gender utterly comprises through individual's actions, bearing definite social meanings. Society often assigns its interpretations to, and restrict parameters of gendered-actions and performances<sup>15</sup>. And hence, genuine and essentialised gender-identities appears occluded form the social constructions of gender. Example-the way we try to see someone in a drag, the (female) drag is someone who's performing and is constructed on top of a pure underlying (male) body. Therefore, Butler's perspective of everyone being a constant gender performer in society, rightly fits. Gender, can hence be understood by its performance, socially constructed, though cannot be avoided or escaped.

Butler persuaded the society to fabricate "gender trouble" by suspending the binary vision of sex, gender, and sexuality. Crucially because, gender is neither an essential quality nor an inherent identity, rather it's performative, awfully, the entirety of which still is based and regulated by societal norms. In other words, instead 'being' men or women, individuals 'act' as men or women, moreover, fear of dismissive consequences in their failure to do so, thereupon facilitates gender categorization.

The prevalent view of biological sex is binary, seemed to be natural and contemplated to be the cultural understanding for sex and sexual desire. Society believes binary orientation as simple and that sex should

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<sup>14</sup> Juliet Richters, 'The social construction of sexual practice' (2001)

<sup>15</sup> Supra 1

be a spectrum and not a dichotomy, by labelling individuals who perform otherwise as abnormal and “conditioned”. Example – research<sup>16</sup> shows babies born with intersex characteristics are forced under surgeries to achieve “normal” sex characteristics (male-female) and to maintain binary construction.

The pessimistic conservatism and binary performance does not exist unintentionally, rather got proliferated due to patriarchy and its power structures of compulsory heterosexuality, where women sustains by fulfilling the means of reproduction to men. These power structures are repressing distinct gender performances, and creating heteronormative gender execution<sup>17</sup>.

Later in 1980s, within the pop culture, an interesting idea of people holding a sixth sense to detect ‘who’s gay’, called “gaydar”<sup>18</sup> became notable. Gaydar forms an alternative label for stereotyping myths of homo-orientation i.e., fashionable men are gay. Along with, another account expresses that people also generally deems facial structure and resulting perceptions as an indicator to one’s sexual orientation.

This is where the society and its millennials are leading themselves to; to fear, hatred-and-prejudice against homosexuals. Further, let’s look upon how homophobia consumed the culture.

#### **IV. Heterosexism, Homophobia And Heteronormativity**

Homosexuality is not problematic, the real issue is homophobia<sup>19</sup> and the miscellaneous approaches across which people are maltreated, concerning, the basis of affectional preference and thy sexual-orientation. Eventually, Same-sex eroticism did received social-acceptance in many cultures as a conventional conditioning in humans, but in our society, it’s still immoral and stigmatic, whereby people are wanting to believe it either non-existent or impracticable. Compulsory-heterosexuality is proliferating inequalities in the lives of sexual-minorities, Gay-men and lesbians repeatedly are loosing custody battles over children, owing to homophobia.

Homophobia and normative masculinity are interconnected-conceptions, one way several men “prove” their masculinity to other men by demonstrating their heterosexuality, together with homophobia. Men are likely to divulge homophobic behaviour when they fear their masculinity is threatened<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch (2017), ‘*Medically Unnecessary Surgeries on Intersex Children*’

<sup>17</sup> Thekla Morgenroth, ‘Gender Trouble in Sociology Psychology’-(2018)

<sup>18</sup> William Cox, Patricia G. ‘Inferences about Sexual Orientation’ (2016)

<sup>19</sup> ‘Homophobia’ highlights various negative attitudes towards homosexuals, usually expressed at individual, cultural and institutional levels.

<sup>20</sup> Tony Silva, ‘Straight identity and same-sex desire’ (2018)

Therefore, one can presume the sustenance of homophobia to get along with patriarchy. The patriarchy displays itself as a “hypermasculine capital”<sup>21</sup> which portrays an approach to masculinity not only as aggressive but also rigidly heterosexual. Hence, compulsory heterosexuality becomes socially-dominant and an oppressive form of sexuality for homosexuals effecting self-suffocation. The SC’s verdict of decriminalizing section 377<sup>22</sup> proved a blessing on Indian society as it unchained the manifestations of patriarchy, earlier the acute unequal rights between a gay-man and a straight-man, indicates the sexual relationship among a woman and man to be legitimate, but with superiority of man being hypermasculine in this relationship.

**The privileging of heterosexuality emanates societal pressure among individuals to conform and to execute heterosexual roles, leading them to envisage their individuality and their social interactions in certain ways. Social institutions of marriage and everyday activities, reproduces assumptions regarding heterosexuality as a norm and extends prestige to those who ‘fit’ within the ordained mould of hetero-orientation. However, “normative heterosexuality regulates the ones who fit-in, while marginalizing and sanctioning the unacceptable ones. Kitzinger<sup>23</sup> discusses heterosexuality as “the myriad ways which manifests it as a natural, uncomplicated, taken for granted phenomenon.” While, heteronormativity fabricates assumptions regarding heterosexuality as acceptable norm, and appraises all other categories of sexual orientations as bizarre. Heteronormativity precipitates variations in mental health and well-being outcomes for certain groups, specifically, recent studies divulges that sexual minorities are more adaptable to pessimistic health outcomes, than the general population. Oftentimes, these outcomes are accepted as “minority stress” induced by heteronormative social pressures, prejudices and biases.**

## **V. ‘Nothing-To-Cure’**

People recklessly are fancying to “see straight” and are lacking to acknowledge that these discrete genders within contemporary culture forms a part to what ‘humanizes’ individuals. Infact, these identities are believed to be depraved and are frequently punished. This punishment comprises marginalization, oppression, and stigmatization by the ‘virtuous’ (heteros) either by challenging the binary system

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<sup>21</sup> Hypermasculinity is a psychological term which believes the exaggeration of male stereotypical traits, like aggression, physical strength, emotionally strong, and tough sexuality.

<sup>22</sup> S.377, Indian Penal Code

<sup>23</sup> Kitzinger, ‘Heteronormativity in action’ (2005), [pp-477-498]

(e.g., intersex/genderqueer/bisexuals) or by obstructing the presumed connection between sex and sexuality (e.g. gay and lesbian individuals).

A 21-year-old-student spotted dead after allegedly being compelled to involuntarily undergo ‘conversion therapy’ by parents, after coming-out as bisexual<sup>24</sup>. Such incidents are not unusual, indeed these are flashed as headlines every now and then. Homos, especially when young, are coerced to ‘un-become’ who they are by parents. Although, hon’ble SC decriminalised consensual homosexual sex under section-377 and the Indian psychiatric society promulgated homosexuality as not a mental disorder, yet s.377 has serious consequences for India’s LGBTQ community. The law abandoned millennials to open harassment, battering and blackmails. Some even got forced into loveless marriages, or couples run-away, or commit joint-suicide.

These jarring realities further haunts us over ridiculous outrages, as once, Baba Ramdev famously “claimed” to “cure” homosexuality via yoga. Doctors and Psychiatrists still are “trying to cure” genetics of queerness. Shock therapies, genital surgeries, antipsychotic medications are common in our society. besides Babas, cosmic-healers assert to covert children heterosexual. Just because constitution brought a change in its laws doesn’t means mentalities will too<sup>25</sup>.

Exerting rape as a corrective tool to sexual-orientation under an impression of bringing them back to ‘societal norms’ is prevalent. This might sound inhumane but 15 instances of ‘corrective-rapes’ are registered<sup>26</sup> many goes unrecorded as perpetrators in usually are family-members, resulting refraining of victims, suffering trauma to speak of their brothers/cousins turning rapists<sup>27</sup>.

It’s an ardent need for the society to heed upon homosexuality, bisexuality or any sexuality, that it’s not a teenage “phase” or any “aesthetic” and neither it can be “cured”. Its natural, alongside various other species who’re observing sexuality orientational differences.

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<sup>24</sup> Taran Deol, ‘Indian parents forcing queer children into ‘conversion therapy’ (2020) <<https://theprint.in/opinion/pov/shock-and-outrage-wont-stop-indian-parents-forcing-queer-children-into-conversion-therapy/425439/>>

<sup>25</sup> id

<sup>26</sup> With the Crise Intervention Team of LGBT Collective

<sup>27</sup> Rupam Jain, ‘Parents use ‘corrective rapes’ to ‘straighten gays’ (2015) <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/parenting/parents-use-corrective-rape-to-straighten-gays/articleshow/47489949.cms>>