



James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Sermon: The Institution of Homophobia

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Homophobia

Homo---phobia

Fear of homosexuality

Some hate the term because it implies victim-hood

Acrophobia, cynophobia, agoraphobia, xenophobia are all terms for individuals “suffering” from a fear of something, in other words -- illnesses.

Perhaps a Better Term to use is Heterosexism: placing heterosexuality as the paramount, or only acceptable, form of sexuality. More like Racist, Ageist, and bigot or terrorist – heterosexist.

It’s the acting out of privilege for the control of resources and power. There are several levels:

1. Personal
2. Interpersonal
3. Institutional
4. Cultural

Personal homophobia--prejudice based on a personal belief that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people are sinful, immoral, sick, and inferior to heterosexuals, or incomplete or damaged women and men. It is marked by feelings of fear, discomfort, dislike, hatred, disgust with same sex, or any sex other than heterosexuality. Because of our culture we are prone to “homophobia” or “heterosexism.”

Interpersonal homophobia--behaviour based on personal homophobia; hatred, dislike, disgust expressed by derogatory and/or violent acts, from telling jokes, using slurs to physical harassment, violence and other acts of discrimination.

Institutional homophobia--personal homophobia and interpersonal homophobia endorsed and coded into government, business, churches, or other institutions and organizations. Laws. Judgments, policies, and societal traditions which favor hetero-normative behaviour, or are more punitive towards sexuality other than heterosexual orientation.

Examples: (open inquiry)

Schools (Prom canceled), Housing agencies, adoptions, hospitals, inheritance, banking, jobs, insurance, foster child programs, child care....

Former federal public servant Paul Richard in Montreal, Canada files complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission against the Treasury Board of Canada for discrimination based on sexual orientation. Richard was an economist for the federal government for several departments and ministries from the early 1970's until 1985. He was "restructured out" after several moves of being shuffled around which he believes was because he was openly gay. He sites negative performance evaluations which are contrary to co-worker observation, reorganization intimidation, and other examples as evidence of discrimination. His dismissal led to Richard being diagnosed with clinical depression and hospitalization. He cites this as the reason for the late filing of his complaint. His initial complaint was denied because of the statute of limitations. The decision was later overturned in federal court citing the initial denial as "flawed." He provided 19 names as witnesses for his claim. The commission claimed that there was an undue prejudice to expect them to locate witnesses after so much time had passed, though in their original denial they had failed to even list any of them. The fear is that this case may open the door for numerous following complaints that will lead to back pay and restitution.

Far more close to home:

Dr. Dexter Amend, Coroner, of the Spokane, WA Coroner's office, was provided extra security by police because of death threats, after it was revealed that he had been acting out his personal perception of morality within his government job. What was he doing? Trying to prove a link between alcoholism, mental instability and homosexuality supporting his assertion that homosexuality is a sin.

When an 11-year-old died in a fire, Dr. Amend asked the boy's parent if their son had ever had a homosexual experience, or ever masturbated, merely to prove his previewed link between sexuality and early death. He did the same thing with the case of a dead 9-year-old girl found bludgeoned to death implying that her death was caused by a sexual assault from a homosexual. Amend said, "It's a crime that we don't expose the homosexual community, I'd like to see the homosexual lifestyle be condemned for what it is in terms of its raping innocent lives."

He regularly performed non-requested autopsies on suicides and violent crimes, particularly looking for evidence that the males in these instances had engaged in anal intercourse at some point in their lives. He also attributed certain deaths to suicide or excessive drinking without performing an autopsy; based merely on anecdotal evidence because he also believed the subjects to have been homosexual. His determinations at times led to the denial of insurance benefits. Some of his determinations were later challenged and overturned in court.

When this came to light, Amend still had three years left on his elected term, but because of how state law was worded, he could not be recalled. In fact the Washington State Medical Board held a six month investigation which led to proceedings to have his medical license revoked, but even then he could still serve out his term without a medical license!

Throughout our nation many schools have decided to ban all school clubs because some students wanted to form a Gay/Straight Alliance or other such support group and since it would be illegal to ban just one group, the school board banned all groups in order to maintain heterosexual dominance.

Saturday, March 13, 2010

[Lesbians banned from Mississippi Prom](#)

A school in Mississippi has cancelled its prom dance rather than allow a lesbian student attend with her girlfriend. Here's the full story from the [ACLU, 11 March 2010](#):

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against a Mississippi High School that has canceled prom rather than let a lesbian high school student attend the prom with her girlfriend and wear a tuxedo to the event. In papers filed with the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi, the ACLU asks the court to reinstate the prom for all students at the school and charges Itawamba County School District officials are violating Constance McMillen's First Amendment right to freedom of expression.

"All I wanted was the same chance to enjoy my prom night like any other student. But my school would rather hurt all the students than treat everyone fairly," said McMillen, an 18-year-old senior at Itawamba Agricultural High School in Fulton, Mississippi. "This isn't just about me and my rights anymore – now I'm fighting for the right of all the students at my school to have our prom."

The filing comes after Itawamba County School District issued a statement saying they were canceling prom, following a letter from the ACLU and the Mississippi Safe Schools Coalition demanding that they reverse their decision. McMillen said that before that happened, school officials had told her that she could not arrive at the prom with her girlfriend, also a student at IAHS, and that they might be thrown out if any other students complained about their presence at the April 2 event.

Cultural homophobia--Social standards and norms which dictate that being heterosexual is better or more normal than other sexual orientations and promote the idea that everyone "should" be heterosexual. Look at television and movie depictions of all BGLQT people as unhappy, or less than heterosexuals, or at the assumption that every child will grow up to fit a specific idea of gender and sexual orientation.

Then there are the Caricatures, or villain portrayals, of anyone who is not heterosexual---Paul Lind, Disney Villains, Silence of the Lambs, 24 hours, the uproar when J.K. Rowling said that Dumbledore was gay (greatest Wizard of all times gay and had a relationship with one of the most evil wizards of all time ending in a duel -- not exactly a completely positive image.

The reality is that defining these incidents in nice well-defined boxes does the issue an injustice. Just like traffic and cars, life's challenges happen more often at the intersections. Heterosexism--is an ism...it's not a phobia. **All "isms" are about control, power, and privilege.**

Homophobia is intrinsically linked with gender issues, gender justice, elitism, sexism, and more.

Who does homophobia hurt? EVERYONE!

When strict standards are imposed upon sexuality, then the spirit of sexuality which is relationships, attraction, enjoyment, familial support, and all other positive aspects of humanity are at risk. Who sets the standards? And Why? When heterosexism prevails all good and positive interaction between same sex people becomes suspect, which erodes authentic human interaction regardless of sexual preference or orientation. The fear produced within such a system stifles emotional flexibility, and can ultimately destroy heterosexual relationships.

The denial of equal rights for BGLQT individuals can lead to the limitations on the rights of everyone. Because sexual orientation and/or preference can be used for denial, it's easy to cross to race, mobility, age, etc.

Intersection: All ism's are symptoms of efforts to control power and resources in ways that give one particular group advantage over others. Morality, Religious conviction, and unscientific "science" as in the case of the coroner and others, are the smoke and mirrors of greed, fear, unbridled hatred, and unresolved personal issues used to maintain economic, social, and political power. It's the intersection of many different and sometimes apparently disparate issues.

Homophobia — Maybe it is a reasonable term. as I said earlier, phobias are considered illnesses. It's sad though when within our society our laws and institutions support and endorse such an illness. The first step towards healing is admitting there's a problem. The second is getting help. In the coming months we will have the opportunity to deepen our awareness of how society's illnesses have been woven into the fabric of our own being. That's the first step for us, seeing how we have been effecting by this illness. Then, our second step can be to help one another by more fully living out the values we promote as Unitarian Universalists. Let's not forget though, that heterosexism is an additional part of the equation. Social Justice for this issue means both dealing with the illness and the abuse.