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GENDER & SEXUAL IDENTITY

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NO WOODLOT BLOOMED IN SPRING WITHOUT SONG

Or, a Brief Discussion of Gender and Sexuality

So you're pornographic if you're lesbian.

So you're a slut if you're bisexual.

So you're predatory if you're transgender.

So you're indecisive if you're queer.

So you're a prude if you're asexual.

So you're confused if you're pansexual.

So... that's a lie.

You aren't a slut if you fancy multiple genders. You're not a prude because you don't feel sexual --or even romantic!-- attraction to other people. You're not pornographic if you like women. You're not confused if you're pansexual just because you can be attracted to anyone, regardless of gender, gender identity, or sexuality. You're not indecisive if you're queer, it just means that's the label that fits you. You're not predatory if you're transgender, you're just accepting who you are as the person you are most comfortable being.

To talk about the LGBTQIA+ movement, one must first start at the beginning. Well, the beginning of the modern LGBTQIA+ movement. This movement really kicks off with a biracial lesbian: Stormé DeLarverie. She was the woman who started Stonewall.

The story behind Stonewall goes like this: A woman was handcuffed after being accosted at a bar. All the descriptions of this focus on the harshness of the police. Then, the woman gets taken through the crowd. She escapes multiple times. She gets hit on the head with a baton by an officer, and she fights back. She says “my handcuffs are too tight” to the crowd. She’s bleeding from a head wound. She says “why don’t you guys do something?” to the crowd. She gets put in the back of the police wagon, and the crowd finally does something. Not just anything, though. Punches are thrown.

Sure, nobody knows who threw the first punch, or even for sure that Ms DeLarverie was the one in the handcuffs, but many people accredit her with being the individual who kicked off Stonewall.

However, her role in the “Gay Liberation” movement is quite clear. She remained an influential figure in the LGBTQIA+ community, both as an activist and a performer and bouncer at many bars. Her obituary in the New York Times is an outstanding representation of who she was. Her identity was based on her intersectionality. She was a lesbian woman -a butch, lesbian woman- who was biracial. Every single part of her played a major role in defining the woman she was. She was described as “a gay superhero” in her obituary, and it’s no wonder why. She remained a major figure in the LGBTQIA+ movement until her mid eighties, and she was honoured by being one of fifty “pioneers, trailblazers, and heroes” on the National LGBTQ Wall of Honor at Stonewall. She kicked ass.

She wasn’t alone. There were so many other people at Stonewall, many of whom were black, queer women, and black, trans women. Stonewall pushed the movement to the forefront of the public eye, bringing with it a variety of LGBTQIA+ centred newspapers and different activist groups. This included the strengthening of the Gay Liberation Front, which allied themselves with black power groups and anti-war demonstrators.

These groups practised tactics like “zapping” politicians and celebrities, which put them on the spot, and called attention to the needed support of the LGBTQIA+ community. This didn’t end in the sixties, either, it continued through the AIDS epidemic.

When discussing the AIDS epidemic, there are many issues to be brought up. The first is the obvious one: why in the world did a disease that can affect anyone become such a polarised issue. That’s an easy question: the eighties, when the AIDS epidemic became a major issue, were dominated by conservative politicians around the world. These leaders included Reagan, in the United States, and Thatcher, in the United Kingdom. Both pushed for more conservative policies, both economic and socially. This was detrimental to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Another issue is the lack of a cure. Although current treatments do exist for HIV/AIDS, there is no definite cure for it. Doctors are still looking for a way to remove the disease completely. When the disease first became prominent, no one knew what to do. Many doctors could not even tell what the epidemic was caused by. Some thought it was cancer, and some thought it was a virus, and it wasn’t until 1983 that the disease was even determined to be a virus. Even with that information, doctors did not know how to treat the illness.

However, the ultimate issue with the AIDS epidemic is the stigmatism of it. It was seen as a disease exclusive to gay men, even though many, many other people contracted it. It was even called “gay-related immune deficiency” by 1982. Due to the stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS, many gay men were left scorned in hospitals and doctors offices. During this time period, lesbians and queer women came in to “soothe, heal, and care for the gay men around them who were living with HIV.” These women worked tirelessly from the beginning of the epidemic, coming from all walks of life and all backgrounds to treat a subset of their community who were often denied proper treatment and care from medical practitioners.

This leads us to another common misconception about the LGBTQIA+ community. You’ve probably heard the statement that it’s just the younger generation with a larger proportion of LGBTQIA+ individuals. And it might be that younger generations are more accepting, and younger generations are more likely to have positive treatment when they come out, but a different perspective is that it’s not that there are more individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ now.

Instead, a possible theory is that a lot of the LGBTQIA+ individuals of previous generations are dead. Those who contracted HIV/AIDS in the early eighties faced death at greater rates than non-LGBTQIA+ individuals. Even more were murdered by peers.

The haunting legacy of the AIDS epidemic can still be seen today. Restrictions on gay men giving blood are still around in a variety of countries, and it has only been recently that the the Food and Drug Administration has accepted blood from men in sexual relationships with men. But there are still restrictions. They can't give blood if they've had sex within three months. Even if it's with a long term partner. Even if it's with a spouse. They still have to meet every single other criteria. Cisgender, heterosexual men don't have to refrain from giving blood if they've had a one night stand the night before.

But I digress.

Another major issue that affects all of the LGBTQIA+ community is sexual harassment and sexual assault. According to the Human Rights Coalition, individuals who identify as being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual assault.

This is due to a myriad of reasons, including higher rates of poverty, the stigmatisation of the LGBTQIA+ community, and marginalisation. Lesbian and bisexual women are three times as likely to report being sexually harassed than heterosexual women. Transgender individuals are even more likely to experience sexual violence, with around 64% of transgender individuals reporting so.

A majority of these individuals tend to be young people of colour. “Among people of colour, [Native American] (65%), Multiracial (59%), Middle Eastern (58%), and Black (53%) respondents of the 2015 US Transgender Survey were most likely to have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime” according to the Human Rights Coalition. Younger individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community are more likely to experience sexual assault or sexual harassment as well. In a variety of cases, the assault occurs before the individual is eighteen.

These individuals are victimised by rape culture. They are told that “they are responsible for their sexual assaults.” One of the negative stereotypes mentioned earlier was the sexualisation of the LGBTQIA+ community, and that plays a major role in the victim blaming of these individuals. One of the most searched categories on pornhub in 2019 was “lesbian” porn, only passed by terms singling out East Asian women. When considering the most popular porn searches of 2019, a majority of the categories were focused on different races. Some of the most popular included “Japanese,” “Arab,” and “Turkish.” In this, we see the sexualisation of both women of colour and LGBTQIA+ women, in addition to sexualisation of children --often young girls. The trend was similar in 2021, though it also included an increase in porn watched by cisgender, heterosexual men, watching porn that exploited transgender individuals as well.

Though this does not solely explain the issues surrounding the hyper-sexualisation of the LGBTQIA+ community, it plays a large role in the vulnerability of the population.

The sexualisation of the community is not new. This is a terrifying, horrible fact. Comments posed to sapphic women about threesomes and taking them as a challenge have been around for decades. The sexualisation and sexual harassment faced by trans people of all genders has existed for far too long. It's time to take a stand against this. It's time to stand up for the LGBTQIA+ community as a whole.

So you're lesbian if you're lesbian.

So you're bisexual if you're bisexual.

So you're transgender if you're transgender.

So you're queer if you're queer.

So you're asexual if you're asexual.

So you're pansexual if you're pansexual.

You are yourself, and you are the person who decides what labels you attach to yourself, whatever those labels might be. You choose whatever fits best for you, be that what you label your sexuality or your gender as.

Title pulled from this quote by Sappho:

"If you forget me, think
of our gifts to Aphrodite
and all the loveliness that we shared

"all the violet tiaras,
braided rosebuds, dill and
crocus twined around your young neck

"myrrh poured on your head
and on soft mats girls with
all that they most wished for beside them

"while no voices chanted
choruses without ours,
no woodlot bloomed in spring without song..."
— Sappho

Sources:

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[Sexual Assault in the LGBTQ Community – National Center for Lesbian Rights](#)

[Differences in Lesbian, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Women's Experiences of Sexual Assault and Rape in a National US Sample](#)

[The Trevor Project](#)

[Black women, the forgotten survivors of sexual assault](#)