

Movie review on multicultural perspectives

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Assault on Gay America

Frontline's investigative documentary *Assault on Gay America* presents a startling view concerning the treatment of homosexuals or people perceived to be homosexual in America and the attitudes in society contributing to this treatment. The episode centers around a man named Bill Jack Gaither, murdered in 1999 by acquaintances near his hometown of Sylacauga in Alabama because of his sexual orientation. The documentary includes interviews with people from his hometown who knew him, his convicted killers, family, religious leaders, Forensic Psychologists and students who discuss perceptions of gender roles and homosexuality.

Although I am well aware that prejudices exist in America in many forms, this video provided a reminder that the results of prejudice are not just people having bad attitudes doing a little bullying at the expense of others, but can have tragic and unnecessary results. It made me sad to see that a man who lived his life as a good person, helping others, working hard, and caring for his family could meet such a violent end. The interviews affected me greatly with their frank talk about gender roles and resulting expectations. It startled me to see how the idea of respect can quickly disintegrate into violent actions of hatred.

Some of the major issues brought up in the film include what society expects of homosexuals, what kind of behavior is appropriate for males and females, how homosexuality is a modern invention, religious issues concerning gays, and why some people react violently to perceived sexual orientation. For example, Marion Hammond discusses what she considers to be appropriate

sexual behavior in her bar in Sylacauga, the town where Billy Jack lived and died. According to her, open displays of affection are inappropriate for couples in her bar no matter if the couple is gay or straight. Forensic Psychologist Karen Franklin speaks about her interviews with people convicted of assaulting homosexuals trying to understand the reason why they reacted violently. According to her, people who react violently feel “entitled” to punish those who do not fit into a standard gender role. Sociologist Michael Kimmel who studies masculinity issues says, “What makes a man a man is that he is relentlessly repudiating the feminine” and he defines homophobia as “the fear that people will get the wrong idea about you.”

The students interviewed had very concrete ideas about what being a man is, like “strong, fearless, tough” and didn’t hesitate to describe the opposite as “girly man,” “faggot,” or “sissy.” When words like that come so easily to the students, it is not surprising that Billy Jack’s killers felt entitled to get rid of someone who was outside their boundaries of manhood.

What impacted me the most were the words spoken by Billy Jack’s murderers. The killers appeared to be remorseless about the crime they committed. One of the killers, Steve Mullins, said, “I woke up at 5:30 the morning of February 19th, and I was going to do whatever I had to do to kill Billy Jack. To me, it didn’t seem like it was any different than waking up and saying, ‘I’m going to the grocery store this afternoon.’” Mullins appears to feel righteous about the murder he committed when he says, “God forgives for everything. If you ask, you shall receive. And I asked for forgiveness, and

that's what I got. I repented. He's in hell because he's a homosexual and it tells you in the New Testament that that's wrong.”

The religious aspect behind Mullins’s rationale in killing a man is frightening. Fundamentalist Christians like the Rev. Jerry Fallwell proclaim, “ I believe with all my heart the Bible is the infallible word of God. And I therefore believe that whatever it says is so.” Although he does not condone violence against homosexuals, Fallwell believes homosexuality is a sin. Daniel Helminiak, an author and former Catholic priest, believes that the Bible has been corrupted through various translations and that literal interpretations of the Bible are misinterpretations. He also feels that people ignore the history of the times when the Bible was written, in which status played a primary role in sexuality. He says, “ The Romans, they had a hierarchy, and whoever was at the very top could have sex with all the women. They could have sex with men who were of another class, but not somebody of their same class, and certainly with the slaves and anybody who wasn't a citizen.”

As a manager, I hope that my treatment of people of all genders, races, orientations, ages, and so forth will be sensitive and fair. It is easy for me to decide for myself that I will be fair, but this movie reminds me that not everyone else holds the same views as I do. I think Marion Hammond was very reasonable in expecting all patrons of her bar to adhere to a particular standard of behavior, no matter their sexual orientation. A similar rule can be promoted by management in the workplace; after all, in a working environment, there are specific jobs to be done. Dress codes and behavioral expectations are based on job requirements, not personal opinions. I also

hope that employees who feel they are not being treated fair because of sexual orientation or other issues will feel comfortable to discuss with me as a manager how the workplace can be made a safe and comfortable place for everyone.

References

Malis, Claudia Pryor (Writer), & Malis, Claudia Pryor (Director). (2000). Assault on Gay America [Television series episode]. In C. Pryor (Producer), Frontline. Boston, MA: WGBH.