

# The charmed circle essay



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Gayle Rubin's article "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" describes the idea of the "charmed circle". Referring to sexuality Rubin begins to illustrate her idea of the "charmed circle" by challenging sexual essentialism (the idea that sex is a natural force) by saying that it is or can be socially created and that it is not transhistorical or eternally unchanging.

This idea of the "charmed circle" creates certain ideas of femininity through advertising and movies, and puts great pressure and impact on the lives of people who do not fall into the "circle". In this paper I will discuss how the media reinforces Rubin's idea of the "charmed circle" through magazines such as Vogue or Glamour and through movies like Sleeping Beauty. In her article Rubin describes that there is considered to be 'good' sex and 'bad' sex. 'Good' sex is accepted if it is heterosexual, married, reproductive, in a relationship, and non-commercial.

It even goes as far to describe how you can or can't do it, according to the "circle" 'good' sex must also be vanilla, bodies only, in pairs, same generation, in private, and without pornography. Whatever lies outside of these characteristics is considered to be 'bad' sex and is seen as a result of some kind of mental disorder. Some things that lie outside the "charmed circle" are homosexuality (although it is slowly becoming more acceptable if in a long term relationship), alone or in groups, non-married, and sadomasochistic.

Hierarchies are also created within the "charmed circle" describing the most acceptable sex as married, heterosexual, procreative, and for love. The ideas

of femininity, especially those in Western society, that support the “ charmed circle” are those of heterosexuality, women being passive or submissive, virtuosity, and being chaste. Through the media in Western society these ideas of femininity and the “ charmed circle” are very closely linked.

As you can see in the following pictures from Vogue and Glamour magazine, and the movie Sleeping Beauty all of these women are white and assumed to be heterosexual and portrayed as pure, chaste, virtuous, and passive. In movies like Sleeping Beauty we are taught that women need to be saved making them vulnerable and completely helpless. The “ charmed circle” is also reinforced through the binary opposition assumed between white women and women of colour.

In the next photo this woman of colour is not portrayed as the other women by not being seen as silent, or passive. Women of colour are seen as being outside the ideas of the “ charmed circle” and femininity so they are often portrayed as sexually predatory and animalistic. In order for the “ charmed circle” to be properly supported women can’t be seen as sexually aggressive or predatory. These ideas of femininity and the “ charmed circle” have damaging and sometimes even life threatening consequences for those that fall outside of these ideals.

These ideals can cause a severe lack of self-esteem as a result of being constantly ostracized, and often subjected to violence. In Rubin’s article she points out that sodomy is still considered against the law in some states and people can be sentenced for up to 20 years. The Diagnostic and Statistical

Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) describes many of the acts that lie outside of the “ charmed circle” such as transsexuality and exhibitionism as mental disorders and only recently removed homosexuality from the list.

Through ideas such as this the “ charmed circle” puts restrictions on those that lie outside of the “ circle” on their ability to express their sexuality, their access to friends and family whether it be restrictions on adoption for homosexual families or friends not accepting their differences in sexuality, and it subjects these people to emotional abuse, harassment and can even put restrictions on their careers.

Popular culture has even created ideas that those with different sexual orientations can be dangerous to our security and safety, which only creates a rationalization for mistreating those with different sexual preferences.

There is a great deal of heterosexual privilege in the “ charmed circle” and race discrimination. Women of colour are not a part of the “ charmed circle” because they are seen as promiscuous and unchaste, impure, strong and sexually predatory resulting in abuse towards these women emotionally and physically.

Heterosexual privilege is also seen through the “ circle” because acts that are not seen as acceptable in the ‘ bad’ sex category can still be seen as acceptable if it is heterosexual, it can be seen as destructive or mercenary but would still be considered to be acceptable. Through the media we can see the close links between the “ charmed circle” and the ideas of femininity that are seen as acceptable. Many advertisements almost seem to justify this very damaging and very hidden type of discrimination.

These ideas are constantly being challenged by society but even homosexuality is still largely discriminated against and violent acts against this or even emotional abuse is causing severe damage on these people. I think it is time that we begin respecting one another's differences and realize the damaging effects of 'good' and 'bad' sex ideas. We need to continue challenging the media and these axioms in order to break these hierarchies and privileged circles.