

The debate between essentialism and social construction

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The debate between essentialism and social construction is a very complicated one. Since both essentialists and social constructionists have different perspectives on matters, in order to be able to decide whether or not there was a presence of homosexual persons over time and place certain aspects have to be taken into consideration. Such as, was it biologically inherited, was it brought about with a preference on acts and desires or overtime influenced by religion, culture, beliefs, social norms, and acceptance has a definite answer is a tough decision to make.

Essentialists are stereotypical; they choose to have a set definition of a homosexual, whereas a social constructionist would have variations in their idea of what makes a homosexual. A social constructionist would disagree with whether the presence of homosexual persons over time and place have a set thought as to homosexuality was biologically inherited because they would feel that, that would be limiting the thought of other aspects influencing homosexuality. Social constructionists would feel that there is not just one set category or definition that makes you a homosexual.

For example, an essentialist would say that a homosexual is someone who has black hair; therefore everyone who has black hair to an essentialist would be a homosexual. Whereas, a social constructionist would say black hair, brown, yellow, purple it doesn't matter it is in fact what that person felt that made him a homosexual. So taking an essentialist point of view stating that there was homosexual persons throughout time and place would discriminate other homosexuals who had different sexual desires, preferences, and acts that transcended through time due to other influencing matters.

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Matters such as culture, social norms and acceptance, beliefs, and backgrounds are good examples. Whereas Gordon and Abott state, " Social Constructionism usually has to do with categorizing. " This statement could be viewed as someone stating that religion is a deciding factor to whether someone is homosexual and someone else saying that background is a deciding factor to deciding homosexuality. There are two ideas or theory's stated here that both do influence homosexuality.

A social constructionist would be able to figure out what it means to be influenced by religion and what is meant to be influenced by background, and be versatile between the two the groups allowing homosexual individuals themselves to decide which factor influenced them even if it was both religion and background.. While an essentialist would simply state those definitions and state which category he/she would fall into there would be not switching into groups. (Gordon and Abott).

In the article the Hijras of India by Serena Nanda, the Hijras of India are viewed as a separate group just like gay, lesbian and bisexual people in any other cultures, countries, religions, etc, just because their differences are not viewed as a social norm. They are also treated differently in every aspect because of different influences such as births and weddings. Hijras are a religious group of men who dress and act like women either because they are men who are bisexual and gay, or because when they were young boys they were castrated because of religious beliefs.

The Hijras that were castrated when they were young boys are neither men nor women and cannot reproduce so they are viewed as powerful, able to

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curse those who disrespect them, yet outsiders in their contribution to this India society. Considering gay, lesbian and bisexual lives are not accepted in this culture, would it be reasonable to say that these men who started this religious belief where gay or bisexual men are looking for a way to express there emotions in this non accepting society?

This would be a social constructionist view because over time actions and desires have changed in this society because acceptance, beliefs, culture, etc have become more accepting and understanding of the true meaning behind this religious belief. Some other things that came up were are these acts still being performed to younger boys and is this against their religion to deny a human being the right to be male and reproduce (source: Nanda)? In Class on Tuesday September 23, 2003 we had a class discussion on biological differences or mishaps that happen to babies that make it confusing to decide what sex that baby really is.

In this class discussion we looked at different examples of baby girls who had their chromosomes in tact but their ovaries were inside of them and had larger clitorises. Should they have been men? We also looked at many other different situations pertaining to that subject. This could also relate back to the Hijras because they could not help what was done to them and this was only done because of social norms and social acceptance. This being an essentialist point of view there was a need for order and meaning.

A social constructionist would just simply say that they could fall into many categories and find out what it means to be an XYYY baby or an XX baby with no vagina hole. " Thus, social constructionists spend much time "

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deconstructing" things: demonstrating that a group of categories have no truth and showing how they are socially accomplished (Gordon and Abbott)" Instead of the doctors, parents or the Hijra men who decided what sex a child should be a social constructionist would not follow the social norm in a need to have order and find an answer they would except the difference and make it a category with meaning.

Ancient Greece provides another example of how there has always been a presence of homosexuality with an influence from culture. There was presence of homosexuality then and still is today but it has been influenced throughout time by culture, acceptance, social norms etc... , because over time religion, cultures, etc have become more important and more needed for order to place people by the essentialists (Vance).

Social constructionist views are more acceptable to differences and variations from the social norms of order and judging. They have shown that there has been a presence of a homosexual person over time and place but not just one type of homosexual person variations of unique homosexual persons. Social constructionism proves that there is not just one way to be but many ways and many categories we can all fit in not judging upon sexual orientation.