

The politicization of sexuality

Everyone should have known that sooner or later America would experience a backlash from the homosexual community and that that backlash would spawn a wave of new political groups that would put their indelible stamp on the sexual lifestyle and gender debate.

It shouldn't be necessary to begin every discussion of alternative sexual lifestyles without first making a disclaimer, but, unfortunately, it is these days. If one doesn't, the person making statements outside of his or her own sexual preferences group will be immediately targeted as a being a homophobe or worse. That's why I make this disclaimer and 'out' myself. I am a White, heterosexual male born in the 1940s. I have no argument with those who don't share my identity and continue to do my best to understand everyone's point of view. That's the way I was brought up. I harbor no ill will to those who've chosen to adopt an alternative to my sexual preference. They, like the rest of us, have the full protection of our laws to pursue their life choices.

That said, there is no justification for the minority of alternative sexual choice practitioners to dictate to the majority of sexual choice practitioners the ground rules for discussing sexual attitudes that affect society and politics in the United States of America. That goes for the majority as well. We must come together in the spirit of fairness to debate the issue, free from discrimination from either side.

Let's get one thing out of the way so that we can go further with this discussion...It seems to me that the biggest stumbling block to discussing our sexual roles is one simple argument.

The traditionalists believe that heterosexuality is the norm and that everything else deviates from that norm. They will use the Bible and thousands of years of history to bolster their case. Those taking the opposite view believe that everything man does *is natural* and therefore homosexuality is natural and everyone should be allowed to practice it without fear of recrimination or discrimination. The problem is that there is no middle ground where another viewpoint can coexist. So, the result is that we end up with two camps; a pro-homosexual one and an anti-homosexual one.

If you accept that position then you can see that it is nearly impossible to 'solve' this disagreement, amicably, to everyone's satisfaction. By the way, when I say 'solve' I mean that the end game must be to achieve universal acceptance of one another...heterosexuals of homosexuals and the reverse. Notice I am not using euphemisms here. (The word 'gay' will always mean 'happy' in my vocabulary and never stand for 'homosexual.') That statement in itself will be taken by some as evidence of a homophobic attitude simply because I refuse to use "their" euphemistic term for their sexual preference. If that's the price I must pay for using correct speech it is a price I'm willing to pay.

That's a good segue to the debate over the words we are allowed to use. Words don't change over time, but the assignment of who can use them and the context in which they may be used does. In the racial arena, we Caucasoids (Whites) are not allowed to use the 'N' word today. It has been banished from our lexicon of permissible White speech. It's alright for Blacks to use it, but not us. There are literally a dozen other words for persons of the Negroid race that Whites may not use, and I understand completely why they are forbidden. They can be viewed as disparaging and unkind in the least and downright hateful at their worst. These days, each racial or ethnic group wants to decide which words may be used to describe themselves, and I have no problem with that. I just reserve my right to object to them.

My problem is that I find it hard to keep up with the changes and hard to know which word isn't going to start a bonfire of outrage. As for us Whites, there aren't too many words that disparage our race, and not many of us who are members of that race hear them in our daily lives. We heard them more often during the turbulent times of the sixties and seventies when race riots and Black Power protests were at their height. Instead, those who hate Whites today use demeaning adjectives in front of our noun to make their case.

Personally, I object to anyone demeaning anybody, but I guess as long as there are people there will be those who use phrases like "old White man" or "ignorant White man" or "homophobic, old ignorant White man." I'm sure most of us agree that it's more than a little unfair and certainly unnecessary to point out a person's race when race isn't germane to the issue at hand. For example, it used to be customary for reports of crimes published in the newspapers to include a person's race. The reasons for doing so could have been a racist newspaper editor's insistence or it could have just been something the papers did to satisfy their readers' curiosity. Or it could have been pertinent because there were few people of that person's race in the neighborhood in question. Who knows? Either way, the bottom line is that one shouldn't jump up and cry, 'racism' every time a person's race is mentioned. Instead, we should ask questions as to the reason why it was mentioned at all. That's only fair.

It's nearly impossible to hide the color of one's skin and that has always made racial minorities easy prey for those wishing to do them harm. Sexual preferences and alternative sexual lifestyles are another matter, entirely. In decades past, when homosexuality was not just a sin but a crime, homosexuals went to great lengths to closet away their differences from mainstream America. Boys who were delicate; fair of skin and slight of build were often suspected of being feminine, but not necessarily homosexual. Indeed, it was preferable to be a little effeminate than to be a young man who liked other young men. America's prevailing sexual mores didn't afford any protection for homosexuals to come out of hiding for quite awhile, but, eventually, they did as with prominent men like Harvey Milk, James Baldwin and Truman Capote, though Hollywood always did its best to circle the wagons around its stars like Tab Hunter, Rock Hudson and Raymond Burr, to name just three. The reason? Not tolerance, mind you...protecting box office receipts.

Some professions were considered to acceptable for 'real men' like the building trades while others like fashion designers, interior decorators, dancers, florists and those who dabbled in the arts were thought to be 'female' jobs or 'crossover' jobs. The exceptions were the sciences, medicine and teaching where men and women could work side-by-side and nobody would blink an eye. In my day, men and women didn't go around hugging each other or kissing in public. It was considered bad manners and to some of my older friends and family members it was viewed as downright shocking or even immoral. These reactions to those overt displays weren't considered prudish. The outward expression of lust or love was just considered unnecessarily provocative and revealed a bad upbringing. Expressions of intimacy were supposed to be reserved for the privacy of the home. When I think about it, perhaps that's why homosexuals decided to use their new-found openness to shock the rest of us. There is nothing more unsettling to a bona fide heterosexual man than to see two of his own gender fondling or 'sucking face' as my daughters used to say when they were younger.

I cannot speak for heterosexual females of my generation, but I would guess that they, too, are also a bit uncomfortable at seeing two women publicly embracing each other in the same way as two men. Wait. Before you ship me off to the old folks' home or condemn me to the homophobic guillotine, let me say that I truly understand and empathize with people who have had to repress their sexuality over a long period of time. Were I one of them, I, too, would probably be upset that any caring and loving action of mine could be construed as out-of-place, and would object to anyone telling me to stand down.

Americans have never liked being forced to change their minds, and the one big mistake the homosexual community has made is DEMANDING that Americans regard them as part of the mainstream majority. While their movement has made great strides towards achieving true sexual equality they may be pushing too hard by allying themselves with activists who see all of us who want to protect our own sexual preference as the 'enemy.' That we are not, but many of us don't see the need to wear our sexuality on our sleeves. Instead, we would prefer a 'don't ask, don't tell' approach about one's own chosen sexual lifestyle. In other words, keep it to yourself. Don't flaunt it.

This approach does not deny anybody their rights. What it does do is something societies have always done and that is to find a socially acceptable way of interacting with one another that doesn't put people off, though I'm willing to concede that this approach would be viewed as a retreat to more restrained times. Perhaps that is what the homosexual community fears. That forcing them to self-censor their open expression of their sexuality would be tantamount to kowtowing to the demands of the heterosexual majority and would lead to a reversal of the gains they've made. Personally, I think that fear is misplaced and unfounded.

We should not roll back the progress that has been made to decriminalize and de-stigmatize those in our sexual minority. I believe we have made great progress and shown ourselves willing to accept them and their choices, but we want to accept them on mutually-agreed terms, not those dictated by them. The current LGBTQ, etc. groups have discovered their power and are lobbying to make their influence felt with lawmakers and local municipalities. They have managed to convince many city councils and mayors that 'Gayness is good' and worth promoting in the spirit of inclusion and diversity. So-called 'Gay Pride' days and 'Gay Pride' parades are being held all over the United States, but there are still many who do not share the homosexual community's enthusiasm or are on their side.

Evangelical Christians, for example, are hesitant about accepting homosexuality as *normal* and frequently cite passages in the Bible that bolster their positions, but they are changing, albeit slowly. Some churches are even allowing homosexual marriages to take place, thereby expanding the sacrament's reach to accommodate them.

Many Protestant-leaning churches are on board with this and a growing number of them are ordaining openly homosexual ministers, too. We all are aware of the pedophilia scandal within the Catholic church. Unfortunately, many who view that scandal of priests abusing young boys believe it to be the result of homosexual priests. That is an unfortunate linkage, and it has hurt the homosexual cause and most homosexuals who wouldn't dream of preying upon underage boys. The two are separate issues, entirely, and homosexuality shouldn't be used to explain away pedophilia or the reverse.

I believe that most Americans have accepted homosexuality. While they may not be freely embracing homosexuals or wishing the lifestyle on their children, they are exhibiting more than just a modicum of tolerance. Unfortunately, the movement for homosexual rights has traveled into the legal arena and in doing so has created new enemies. We have witnessed protracted, ugly legal fights over cake-baking, wedding planning and other issues that are now creating friction among those groups that were willing to 'live and let live' and the hard-core activists in the homosexual movement. We are also seeing the emergence of a militant side of the community as they stage protests and boycotts against businesses like Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby over their owners' traditional views on marriage. This has frozen the debate in place, and because homosexuality is not mentioned in our Constitution, it is destined to become a political battle as well as a societal one.

People say that discussions of race relations is the 'third rail' in American politics, but I would say that gender and sexual preference rights have moved firmly into that slot. The reason is simple. Any time a well-meaning non-judgmental person with no history of gender or sexual bias attempts to discuss this issue openly and honestly, he or she is immediately labeled as 'anti-gay,' effectively shutting down the discussion. When that happens, both groups stiffen their spines and move to their respective corners of the ring because there is no middle ground to be found and certainly no referee to take them there.

Which groups populate the alternative lifestyle universe? And what are they doing?

Being the curious fellow I am, I did an Internet search on three words, 'homosexual support groups.' Google gave me 14 million results. 'Gay support groups' gave me 129 million results.

Searching for 'Gay organizations' gave me 84 organizations. I logged on to a few and read a bit, but I confess that I couldn't identify with their rhetoric, nor was I comfortable with it. Much was said about how inconsiderate and intellectually or spiritually constipated we heterosexuals are. What I found myself wanting was a direct message to those of us who are on the 'other side' a sincere invitation, if you will, to join the discussion.

Wanting to be fair, I searched the Internet for, 'heterosexual support groups' and Mr. Google gave me 13.7 million hits. Moving to the euphemism I then searched for 'straight support groups' and Google found 215 million results (though many of those hits had nothing to do with sexuality). There is no doubt that some non-profit organizations that are finding it hard to get donations have allied themselves with the homosexual community and are emphasizing their support for them. Whether this is out of a deep-seated desire to show their solidarity or out of purely financial motives on their part I cannot say. What I can say from a political point of view is that homosexuals have traditionally found shelter in the Democratic Party and have viewed Republicans as the enemies of their goals and objectives. Nothing could be further from the truth. Today, there are millions of Republicans who do not oppose homosexuals.

This anti-homosexual perception has got to change if Republicans want to be seen to be on the right side of history and on the compassionate side of American political thought, especially if they wish to continue occupying the majority of seats in the Senate, win back a majority in the House and hang on to the White House. That said, it is a tragedy that such an important issue like America's acceptance of diverse lifestyles, should become a political football. Let us hope that we can find a way to work together to dispel our fears and bury our prejudices once and for all. One thing is for certain. It is better to inform than to inflame and always better to praise than to shame.

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