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Social Exclusion and the Stigmatization of Lesbians.

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Abstract

Within Human Rights as a whole there are included Sexual Rights. These refer, among other matters to sexual diversity, identity and freedom, and the principles of non-discrimination.

The fact that rights of this nature appear in such a context is proof enough that there is a need to protect individuals in certain situations where their human rights are violated. This is to avoid the exclusion that can be a consequence of belonging to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) group, and in particular, as discussed in this paper, to the category “lesbian”.

A society may have as its only form of division a binary separation (either a man or a woman) and standards indicating heterosexuality as the sole natural and normal behaviour. In this case, everything that fails to fit into this binary division and conform to heterosexuality will be labelled with terms such as “unnatural”, “abnormal”, “pathological”, “undesirable”, or the like. People are not aware that the fundamental aim is total and absolute social control in accordance with values that are created culturally and imposed generation after generation. It is also to punish anybody who tries to live outside the bounds that are set. It is from this attempt at control that stereotypes arise which can be used to assign false profiles and to stigmatize certain behaviours. These consequently lead to many varieties of exclusion.

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1. Introduction

Women’s lives implicitly involve a great deal of marginalization in most or all of the contexts in which living takes place. These include public and private spheres, work, social, academic and family life, health, leisure and free time. This marginality is shaped by the patriarchal and male chauvinist structures underlying society.

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It is these same structures that dictate the rules setting heterosexuality as the norm from which spring gender definitions and the two-fold division into men and women. It is on the basis of this division that roles and behaviours are attributed as suitable or to be expected. All of these, grounded on a binary divide, contrast what is termed “desirable and normal” with a whole list of behaviours, roles and ways of life that are pointed to as “abnormal”.

Apart from stigmatizing certain patterns as “abnormal”, such a society penalizes and punishes everything that escapes its control. This yields the two prime variables that throw light on the marginalization and social exclusion of lesbian women, as they are an outcome of these two characteristics: being women and being lesbian.

These two variables have as their result a double discrimination against such women in practically all spheres of life. This leads to a serious and proven risk of social exclusion and particular vulnerability when it comes to countering this risk.

Sexual rights fall within universal Human Rights, which have as their foundation the dignity, equality and freedom of all humans. Such rights should be promoted and defended by all societies and nations. It should be understood that they are, or should be, the full rights of all citizens. Any society that does not promote and guarantee them would thus be infringing rights and putting obstacles in the way of the full expression and realization of each individual. Here introduce the paper, and put a nomenclature if necessary, in a box with the same font size as the rest of the paper. The paragraphs continue from here and are only separated by headings, subheadings, images and formulae. The section headings are arranged by numbers, bold and 10 pt. Here follows further instructions for authors.

2. Social Exclusion

Social exclusion may be defined as the result of a dynamic process accumulating and combining various factors of disadvantage. These are linked to different aspects of individuals’ personal, social, cultural and political life.

Policies for social inclusion and cohesion take into account the fact that the social integration of an individual requires recognition and acceptance in a range of spheres. These include economic, work, social and community areas, but also those of citizenship and participation.

Sex is not just something natural, but rather is also a cultural and social phenomenon. Hence, it is susceptible to manipulation and control by the groups that are in power and by the predominant structures that are found in a given society.

Reducing sexuality merely to what is purely natural implies acceptance of the idea that it is static. In other words, it would be assumed not to vary from one culture or society to another and to have remained unchanging over the whole course of history, an assumption which is, of course, far from the truth. The terms which different societies have used to refer to sexual diversity are likewise not immutable, and even less so the positions that they have adopted towards this diversity.

If lesbianism is to be seen in all its complexity, it is practically unavoidable to take a historical and cultural perspective, with changing tones. This is because in this way alone it is possible to perceive and analyse lesbianism, marked as it is by a different development from male homosexuality and by its invisibility.

This invisibility comes directly from social exclusion, as it is made use of by those wishing to hide reality so as to seize the space of a group who will no longer be visible and thus will no longer either exist or have any rights. This space is the space that should belong to lesbians.

3. Heterosexuality as a Norm Used to Justify Control, Labelling and Punishment

Michel Foucault held that every model of power has its corresponding view of what is a healthy or an unhealthy body. It also has its own specific way of managing sexuality and reproduction.

The Western “labelling machine” has striven to create a complete hetero-centric binary structure, in which the only “natural” division is that between men and women. It has pointed the finger at everything falling outside this division as being “abnormal”, “unnatural” and “pathological”.

From this binary divide a whole series of roles and behaviours emerges, attributed to each gender group. These are seen as appropriate and correct according to the rules, as against all others, which fall outside what is normal or desirable.

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