

**GAY BASHED: ANALYZING UNPROVOKED ACTS OF HOMOPHOBIC VIOLENCE
DIRECTED AT GAY ASIAN AMERICAN MALES**

David Ortuno

California State University San Marcos

ABSTRACT

My research examines unprovoked acts of homophobic violence directed at gay Asian American males. The purpose of this examination is to link unprovoked acts of homophobic violence directed at gay Asian American males to binary gendered norms, values, and beliefs that are culturally entrenched in hegemonic language (Butler, 1990). This action enabled me to argue that objective words are not only uttered but also communicatively performed; attaching their positive and negative connotations to living people, liberating and justifying some while also stigmatizing and marginalizing others. For instance, the definition of “white” is clean, pure, and good, while “black” is defined as dirty, bad, and scary - now attach living people, sexes, and genders to these objective definitions that are in turn communicatively performed in action.

KEYWORDS: LBGTQ, PRIDE, Gay pride, Gay bashed, gender trouble, social mechanisms, transmutation mechanisms, binary sexes, binary genders, inequality, stratification, hate crime, discrimination, intersectionality, Matthew Shephard, physical assault, social violence, anti-LBGTQ terrorists, and intellectual closure.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this inquiry is to analyze unprovoked acts of homophobic violence directed at gay Asian American males. My rhetorical artifact is a 2017 New York Post article, which details the unprovoked, brutal gay bashing of a gay Asian American male. To better contextualize my artifact, I conducted a cross-sectional analysis of other media artifacts relating to the hegemonic “intersectional mechanisms” (Appelrouth & Edles, 2012; Gross, 2009) of sex, gender, and unprovoked public acts of violence directed against non-binary sexes and genders (Butler, 1990). Other media artifacts consisted of peer reviewed articles, books, and popular press editorials. Altogether, these artifacts enabled me to successfully link the social mechanisms (Gross, 2009) of agency, action, and intercultural communication to unprovoked, malicious acts of violence directed at gay Asian American males. To theoretically advance this discovery, I mixed the hypothetical frameworks of gender trouble (Butler, 1990) with social mechanisms (Gross, 2009) and transmutation mechanisms (Schneider, 1962). Hypothetical frameworks are thoroughly delineated in the theory section of this investigation.

The purpose of this examination is to link unprovoked acts of homophobic violence directed at gay Asian American males to binary gendered norms, values, and beliefs that are culturally entrenched in

hegemonic language (Butler, 1990). This action also enabled me to argue in favor of the following four contentions: (1) how unprovoked acts of homophobic violence is an indirect and intermediate product of hegemonic language; (2) how hegemonic language is an indirect and intermediate product of a hegemonic culture; (3) how hegemonic language functions as a hegemonic platform; and (4) how hegemonic platforms further enable hegemonic actors, such as anti-gay sympathizers, anti-gay activists, and anti-gay terrorists to berate, physically assault, and in some cases, murder members of the lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) communities.

SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

Ott & Okai (2009) associated hegemonic cultures, language and visual aids with stigmatization and marginalization of the homosexual body; arguing that:

the Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. the homosexual body has traditionally been stigmatized or marked as abnormal in a wide variety of ways; it has variously been coded as dirty and unclean, eliminate and queer, and threatening and predatory to suit the needs of those in power (Ott & Okai, 2009, p. 495).

Historically, hegemonic cultures have employed language and visual aids to both stigmatize and marginalize non-binary sexes and genders. Hegemonic governments employ language and symbols to create verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, which non-coercively persuades and influences its citizens to assimilate into a heterosexual, and not a non-heterosexual identity.

Other scholars noted how and why domination, oppression, and discrimination exists within and between hegemonic cultures and co-cultures (Ono & Pham, 2009). For example, in America, heterosexual Asian American males are traditionally stereotyped in mainstream media and entertainment as being both desexualized and highly educated or “the model minority” (Ono & Pham, 2009, p. 82); while in pornography, gay Asian American males are socially regulated as the “bottom” or “receiver” of homosexual acts (Ono & Pham, 2009, pp. 75-77). This is to imply that gay Asian American males make up the base and not the top or middle of gay porn. Ono & Pham (2009) proposed that both Asians and Asian Americans have always been stigmatized and marginalized in American culture, evident in ethnocentric entertainment and media roles that indirectly and intermediately dehumanize, belittle, and negatively stereotype both Asian and Asian Americans, under the premise of admiring and respecting them (Schneider, 1962).

In American culture, diversity relating to sex and gender identity is a polarizing topic. Some propose that diversity relating to sexual identity produces benefits, while others may suggest that diversity creates burdens for both non-binary sexes and genders. The burden of cultural and non-binary sexual identity is summed up by Florido (2014); noting that both Asian and non-Asian cultures:

“...need to accept that Asian cultural values may complicate the views of sexuality presented by gay Asian American males and how these views affect one’s sexual identity development (Florida, 2014, p. 2).”

THEORY

To better understand how and why binary gendered norms and values function against members of the LGBTQ community, I mixed the hypothetical frame works of gender trouble (Butler, 1990) with social mechanisms (Gross, 2009) and transmutation mechanisms (Schneider, 1962). Hypothetical frameworks enabled me to successfully link both “transmutation mechanisms” (Schneider, 1962) and “social mechanisms” (Gross, 2009) to malicious acts of violence directed at gay Asian American males (Butler, 1990).

Butler (1990) theorized that the binary structure of hegemonic language relating to sex and gender, categorically designates actors who do not participate in X (female) + Y (male) heterosexual reproduction, as non-normal or Z(trans, bi, lesbian, gay, and/or queer) (Butler, 1990). The social construction of sex and gender can be problematic for some individuals and groups (Butler, 1990). Namely, because X + Y binaries do not recognize Z as a legitimate sexual identity (Butler, 1990). Consequently, sex and gender are conflated into binomial (X + Y), rather than polynomial (X + Y + Z) sexual identities (Butler, 1990). Butler theorized that gender and sex is both socially constructed and entrenched in the foundation of written language; reasoning that:

“...a split is introduced in the feminist subject by the distinction between sex and gender... the terms queens, butches, femmes, girls, even the parodic re-appropriation of dyke, queer, and fag redeploy and destabilize the categories of sex and the originally derogatory categories for homosexual identity. All these terms might be understood as symptomatic of the ‘the straight mind,’ modes of identifying with the oppressor’s version of the identity of the oppressed (Butler, 1990, pp. 60, 122).”

The “straight mind” is shaped, influenced, and reproduced through binary language (X + Y); producing and reproducing straight minded narratives, which “indirectly and intermediately” (Schneider, 1962) reinforce and exasperate hegemonic ideologies and beliefs (Butler, 1990). Straight minded narratives are created by the state and are further ingrained into its citizens in forms of soft power. Soft power is distributed to the critical masses via public and private institutions of education, religion, mass media, and entertainment (Butler, 1990).

The unanticipated consequences of straight minded narratives reveal the nuances around a diverse American culture that is theoretically anchored in the “social mechanisms” (Gross, 2009) of freedom, inclusion, equity, and prosperity, which it is. However, in praxis, it also “indirectly and intermediately” (Schneider, 1962) produces and reproduces the transmuted social mechanisms (Gross, 2009; Schneider, 1962) of discrimination and malicious acts of violence against non-binary

sexes and genders (Butler, 1990). Dr. Louis Schneider (1962) theorized that transmutation mechanisms:

“...operate in the area ‘between’ individually realized goals and unanticipated outcomes taken or defined as social effects. . . It has been easier for sociologists to note the sheer existence of ‘unanticipated consequences of purposive social action’ than to demonstrate how and why specific purposive actions become transmuted into specific unanticipated consequences, and thereby identify and describe transmutation mechanisms (Schneider, 1962, p. 500).”

Schneider (1962) linked transmutation mechanisms to one’s reason, perception, and eufunctional ignorance (Schneider, 1962); arguing that:

“Ignorance is eufunctional in cases or conditions in which some of the results of action, if they became known to the particular actors who brought them about, would be ‘objects’ of indifference or even distaste or antagonism, and in which the following also hold: there is no manipulation; the results to which there is indifference or hostility are taken by definition or value assumption as generally socially desirable; there are additional results of action which are in the interest of the actors... it would be a gross misinterpretation of the paper to take it as a paean in praise of ignorance. It is the design of the paper to move toward an authentic theory through the presentation of a perspective, certain concepts, a number of tentative propositions about ignorance as ‘eufunctional,’ and a consideration of ignorance in relation to reason that is, influenced by the perspective and apparatus that will have been presented (Schneider, 1962, p. 494, 497, 498, 500, 501, 502, 504).”

I linked Schneider’s transmutation mechanisms (Schneider, 1962) to Dr. Neil Gross’s social mechanisms (Gross, 2009). Gross (2009) defined social mechanisms as:

“...more or less a general sequence or set of social events or processes analyzed at a lower order of complexity or aggregation by which - in certain circumstances - some cause X tends to bring about some effect Y in the realm of human social relations. This sequence or set may or may not be analytically reducible to the actions of individuals who enact it, may underwrite formal or substantive causal processes, and may be observed, unobserved, or in principle unobservable (Gross, 2009: 364).”

Shadowing Gross (2009) and Schneider (1962), I propose that agency and action relating to unprovoked acts of homophobic violence are needed to mobilize both transmutation mechanisms (Schneider, 1962) and social mechanisms (Gross, 2009). For action and agency to be consciously or unconsciously legitimate and unprovoked, Gross (2009) noted that action requires that, “we grasp how the relevant individuals understand the situations before them and act on those understandings, helping thereby to enact the mechanism” (Gross, 2009, p. 368). Regarding social mechanisms Gross

(2009) noted that, “pragmatists would view social mechanisms as composed of chains or aggregations of actors confronting problem situations and mobilizing more or less habitual responses (Gross, 2009, p. 368).

To better understand Butler’s (1990) theory of sex and gender, the hypothetical frameworks of this inquiry conjoined Schneider’s transmutation mechanisms (Schneider, 1962) with Gross’s social mechanisms (Gross, 2009). To test the validity of transmutation social mechanisms (Gross, 2009; Schneider, 1962), I will draw on the Matthew Shephard murder as an exemplar. Matthew Shephard was an openly gay student that was targeted and murdered by Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson in 1998 (Ott & Aoki, 2002). To murder Shephard, McKinney and Henderson employed non-manipulated agency, unprovoked action, and sensible communication, luring Shephard outside of a bar, pistol whipping him eighteen times with a 357 magnum, and then crucifying him onto a split-rail fence (Ott & Aoki, 2002, p. 484).

The unprovoked, malicious murder of Matthew Shepard was the ensuing result of both McKinney’s and Henderson’s pragmatic agency, action, and intercultural communication relating to their non-manipulated reason, perception, and eufunctional ignorance (Gross, 2009; Schneider, 1962). In this case, Shephard’s visual body relating to his sex and gender was the apparatus presented, becoming the visual aid needed to mobilize McKinney’s and Henderson’s transmuted social mechanisms (Gross, 2009; Schneider, 1962); which was the ingrained, hegemonic belief that non-binary sexes and genders are a direct, immoral violation of cultural values, linguistic rationality, religious ideas, and scientific principles .

Therefore, for these anti-gay terrorists, it is within sensible reason and communication to murder gay men - regardless of race, ethnicity, education, or socioeconomic status. Important to note, nobody manipulated McKinney or Henderson into murdering Shephard; rather, they accomplished that action and communication by their own free will (Schneider, 1962). Similarly, nobody manipulated anti-gay protestors in Texas, Kansas, and Colorado into both publicly mocking Shepard’s death and the LGBTQ community (Ott & Aoki, 2002). Rather, they communicated that action and agency by their own free will. I propose that these actions and emotions are indirectly and intermediately linked to the binary structure of language relating to sex and gender. (Butler, 1990; Schneider, 1962).

These exemplars enabled me to link the effects of transmuted social mechanisms (Gross, 2009; Schneider, 1962) to hegemonic actors, homophobic violence, and binary gendered norms entrenched in hegemonic language and culture (Butler, 1990). Shadowing Butler (1990), I suggest that hegemonic language itself is a transmuted social mechanism (Butler, 1990; Gross, 2009; Schneider, 1962); conflating sex and gender into the performance of binomial ($X + Y$), rather than polynomial ($X + Y + Z$) sexual identities (Butler, 1990). The collective theories of Butler (1990), Gross, (2009), and Schneider (1962) enabled me to link agency and action to the hegemonic, cultural intersectional mechanisms of sex, gender, and unprovoked public acts of homophobic discrimination and violence.

METHODS

A qualitative analysis was used to advance this inquiry. Internal materials are comprised of a 2017 popular press article taken from the New York Post (Woods, 2017). External materials were used to better contextualize my rhetorical artifact. External materials consisted of peer reviewed journal articles, popular press, and books; all of which were downloaded from both the California State University Library and Google online databases. External materials scrutinized unprovoked acts of homophobic violence directed against gay Asian American males. As mentioned hereinabove earlier, I conducted a cross-sectional analysis of my rhetorical artifact with these external materials. This methodology enabled me to successfully link the social mechanisms (Gross, 2009) of rational action and intercultural communication to malicious acts of violence directed at gay Asian American males.

FINDINGS

From a historical perspective, I found that language and visual aids have been used to negate and control the existence of non-binary sexes and genders (Ott & Okai, 2009). Presently, language and visual aids continue to function as emotional intermediates, attracting and attaching themselves to agency, action, and the intersectional space between hegemonic cultures, sex, gender, and unprovoked public acts of violence against non-binary sexes and genders (Ott & Okai, 2009).

Currently, unprovoked acts of public acts of discrimination and violence directed at both heterosexual and homosexual Asian American men continue to be pervasive in American culture. For instance, in Laguna Beach, California, a fifty-five-year-old heterosexual Asian American male was mistaken for being gay; consequently, he was attacked and assaulted by two White males in Laguna Beach, California (Pinsky & Le, 1993). In this case, anti-gay terrorists created their own transmutation mechanisms (Schneider, 1962) by visually labeling a straight Asian male as gay and then internalizing this emotion. The transmutation mechanism (Schneider, 1962) in turn mobilized the necessary social mechanisms (Gross, 2009) needed to cognitively assault the victim (Butler, 1990). These anti-gay terrorists were apprehended, convicted of hate crimes, and sentenced to lengthy prison sentences (Pinsky & Le, 1993).

I propose that these anti-gay terrorists are the victims of “implicit yellow face.” Ono & Pham (2009) noted that, “implicit yellow face, suggests that there is an “authentic” Asian look and character that can be played; and it assumes similarity of Asians and Asian Americans across the board” (Ono & Pham, 2010, pp. 53-54). Implicit yellow face also implies that there is a stereotypical gay man, which is not true. The unanticipated and aggregated consequences of this intercultural communicative phenomenon, “reifies Asian and Asian Americans status as forever foreigners” (Ono & Pham, 2009, p. 114). Other popular press articles reported unprovoked acts of violence against a White homosexual couple in Brighton, England (Heal, 2017); and in one case, a gay pro boxer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was reported to have beaten up a heterosexual man who was publicly berating him for being gay (Buzinski, 2017).

In order to better contextualize my rhetorical artifact, I needed to cross-analyze other media artifacts relating to the hegemonic “intersectional mechanisms” (Appelrouth&Edles, 2012; Gross, 2009) of sex, gender, and unprovoked public acts of violence directed against non-binary sexes and genders (Butler, 1990). My rhetorical artifacts a 2017 New York Post article. This article details how a gay Asian American male was the victim of an unprovoked gay bashing (Woods, 2017). According to the article, a gay Asian American male was walking to work when he accidentally bumped into another man, who in turn hurled anti-gay slurs at the man and then began to pummel and kick him repeatedly (Woods, 2017). Leaving the victim beaten and traumatized; even worse, the perpetrator has not been identified or caught (Woods, 2017) rather, they are still free, roaming the streets, lurking in the hegemonic daylight of American capitalism, law, and order. In this instance, anti-gay terrorists activated transmuted social mechanisms (Gross, 2009) Schneider, 1962), designed to both sensibly and communicatively label a gay Asian male as worthy of terrorist threats, physical assault, and unprovoked acts of homophobic violence. The transmutation mechanism (Schneider, 1962) is structured language relating to sex and gender, which in turn mobilized the necessary social mechanisms (Gross, 2009) needed to cognitively assault the victim (Butler, 1990). The social mechanism is the performance of sex and gender relating to the structured, objective definition of sex and gender.

Notably, I found that before each attack, both anti-gay attackers and terrorists first linked the victim’s body to stigmatization produced by hegemonic language relating to the social construction of sex and gender. Drawing on these exemplars, I propose that unprovoked, homophobic acts of violence are indirect and intermediate products of a hegemonic language that functions as a hegemonic platform in a hegemonic culture; enabling hegemonic actors to berate, physically assault, and in some case, murder members of the lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) communities (Schneider, 1962). These exemplars helped me to achieve my purpose, which is to link unprovoked acts of homophobic violence directed at gay Asian American males to binary gendered norms, values, and beliefs that are culturally entrenched in hegemonic language (Butler, 1990).

CONCLUSION

Hegemonic cultures understand that non-binary sexual identities challenge the validity of binary gendered norms, and ideas; creating a crisis of hegemony that could fragment the people and divide the state. To avoid a crisis of hegemony, hegemonic governments rely on non-coerced, willing participation from its base supporters in regulating the existence of non-binary sexes and genders.

Without the indirect and intermediate help from hegemonic base supporters, hegemonic superstructure norms, ideas, values, and beliefs cannot be produced, or further reproduced (Schneider, 1962). For instance, both hegemonic law makers and politicians cannot successfully pass anti-LGBTQ initiatives without employing rhetoric to influence and persuade hegemonic voters into voting for hegemonic initiatives. By rationally participating in hegemonic campaigns, hegemonic voters consciously exercise their right to vote, as well as unconsciously reason how non-binary sexes and genders are either religiously immoral, scientifically impossible, publicly obscene,

or both culturally immoral, and un-aesthetically pleasing. Hegemonic voters pragmatically participate in hegemonic political culture by linking language and visual aids to deep-rooted beliefs about stigmatized and marginalized groups. Non-coerced public participation is made possible by hegemonic platforms, which “indirectly and intermediately”(Schneider, 1962) provide the space needed to thrust hegemonic voters into the hegemonic intersectional social mechanisms (Gross, 2009) of sex, gender, and unprovoked public acts of violence and discrimination against non-binary sexes and genders.

In American culture, pro binary sex and gender rhetoric dominates every discourse of knowledge; including: science, religion, engineering, history, literature, poetry, government, media, cooking, and fashion, to name but a few. Pro binary sex and gender rhetoric creates a retaliatory platform for anti-gay sympathizers, anti-gay activists, and anti-gay terrorists to freely engage in anti-LGBTQ activism, support, and protests. Both the internal and external materials used in this inquiry demonstrate how homophobic violence directed at gay Asian American males, resulted from non-manipulated agency, action, and intercultural communication. Enabling me to better contextualize my artifact, relating to the hegemonic intersectional mechanisms of sex, gender, and unprovoked public acts of violence against non-binary sexes and genders (Butler, 1990).

REFERENCES

- Anthony, M. (2014). Challenges for Asian American LGBT students. Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Retrieved from <https://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/posts/challenges-for-asian-american-lgbt-students>
- Butler, J. (1990). Gender trouble. Routledge Press. New York, New York.
- Buzinski, J. (2017, February 21). Gay pro boxer beats up guy over homophobic comments. SBNation. Retrieved from <https://www.outsports.com/2017/2/21/14691020/gay-pro-boxer-yusaf-mack-beats-up-guy-over-homophobic-comments>
- Gross, N. (2009). A pragmatist theory of social mechanisms. American Sociological Review,74(3), 358-379.
- Halperin, D. (2003). The normalization of queer theory.The Haworth Press. Retrieved from https://cc.csusm.edu/pluginfile.php/888608/mod_resource/content/1/The_Normalization_of_Queer_Theory.pdf
- Heal, G. (2017, August 2). Beaten up for being gay: watch a shocking part of BBC’s new gay Britannia documentary. Gaytimes. Retrieved from <http://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/82018/beaten-up-for-being-gay-a-new-shocking-part-of-bbcs-gay-britannia/>

Ono, K., & Pham, V. (2009). Asian Americans and the media. Polity Press. Cambridge, United Kingdom.

Ott, B. & Aoki, E. (2002). The politics of negotiating public tragedy: Media framing of the Matthew Shephard murder. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 5(3), 483-505

Pinsky, M & Le, T. (1993, August 3). 2 plead guilty in O.C. 'gay bashing': Court: Pair attacked a man, 55, in Laguna they thought was homosexual. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/1993-08-03/news/mn-19798_1_gay-bashings

Schneider, L. (1962). The role of the category of ignorance in sociological theory: An exploratory statement. *American Sociological Review*, 27(4),492-508.

Woods, A. (2017, March 13). Cops hunt for thug who hurled slurs before attacking man. *New York Post*. Retrieved from <https://nypost.com/2017/05/13/cops-hunt-for-thug-who-hurled-slurs-before-attacking-man/>

(2017). Major Events2017. Maps of the World. Retrieved from <https://www.mapsofworld.com/events/year-2017/>