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### Homosexuality as a Psychological Problem in "Am I a Feminist or a Womanist" by Staceyann Chinn

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**Abstract:** Recently, homosexuality has become a very widespread phenomenon in the world even in the eastern Islamic societies though it is considered a forbidden behavior. It is, therefore, necessary to search behind this problem. The current paper aims at exploring the socio-political aspect of poetry as related to the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community. The analysis will be conducted through the poem "A Feminist or a Womanist" by Stacey Ann Chinn which is actually a warning against such approaches. Namely, she does so by developing the poem over an imaginary conversation with another woman who is asking her about her lesbianism. So, as she is being asked in a manner that she finds offensive, she replies to the imaginary conversation partner that she is not asking the right questions. She considered that the issue is not about being lesbian but about being a woman. She basically projects the idea that the problem is in

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-Accepted : 26/5/2019 Available online: 30/6/2019	womanhood, not in the fact that she is a lesbian and/or feminist. However, as there are two viewpoints to this behavior-- one is responded to it while the other one is against it, this paper is going to show the religious viewpoint in both Islamic religion and Christianity as well as the medical viewpoints regarding it through discussing the biological and psychological factors behind this disease which actually Chin herself suffers from.
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## الشذوذ الجنسي كمشكلة نفسية في هل أنا نسوية أو امرأة لستاسيان تشين

م. زينب صلاح الدين حسين

قسم اللغة الانكليزية/ كلية اللغات والعلوم الانسانية/ جامعة كرميان

الخلاصة:	الكلمات المفتاحية :
مؤخرا أصبح الشذوذ الجنسي ظاهرة منتشرة على نطاق واسع في العالم وحتى في المجتمعات الاسلامية التي تحرم هكذا سلوكيات. لذلك من الضروري البحث وراء هذه المشكلة ويجاد الحلول لها. يحاول هذا البحث تحليل الجانب الاجتماعي- السياسي لمجتمع المثليين من خلال قصيدة A Feminist or a Womanist للشاعرة Staceyann Chinn وذلك من خلال تطوير القصيدة عبر محادثة وهمية مع امرأة اخرى تسألها عن مثليتها. وبما انها سألتها بطريقة غير لائقة، حسب إعتقادها، لذلك فهي ترد عليها بأنها لا تطرح الاسئلة الصحيحة. حيث ان الشاعرة لا تعتبر المشكلة في كونها مثلية او نسوية وانما في كونها امرأة. تتمحور هذه الدراسة حول ابراز وجهات نظر كل من علماء الدين في المجتمعات الاسلامية والمسيحية وكذلك رأي الاطباء وذلك من خلال مناقشة العوامل البيولوجية والنفسية وراء هذا المرض حيث ان الشاعرة ايضا عانت من احد العوامل المجتمعية والتي ادت الى مثليتها.	المثلية المجتمع الإسلامي العوامل البيولوجية والنفسية معلومات البحث تاريخ البحث : الاستلام : 2019/5/15 القبول : 2019/5/26 التوفر على الانترنت : 30/6/2019

### The Origin of Homosexuality

Most LGBT people would be offended if one was to ask them what is the Lesbian or Gay theory. They do not like to be referred to as a militant political or philosophical group; they just

like to be referred to as people. They may be people with different sexual preferences, but they are people nevertheless and they only would like to be referred to as such (Bressler 227). Furthermore, it is one of the most important points in the poem, that people should not be treated differently because of their gender or sexual preferences; but these problems related to gender and sexuality must be solved in a socially responsible manner.

There are many social theories that deal with gender and sexuality related issues, but they do not belong to Gay people or are not used by them to achieve a political goal. Furthermore, even though the feminists are a somewhat political group the LGBT population is not. They have no political goals or political agenda. Yes there is a strong Gay lobby, but is more of a natural occurrence than a political direction. The LGBT population was and still is one of the most discriminated social groups.

It is therefore normal that they had organized themselves in order to protect themselves against social and other types of discrimination. In 2017 and without any clear evidence of homosexuality, Karar Al-Nushi was tortured and then killed in Iraq due to his long yellow hair and his strange fashion to the Iraqis culture (Adil). This is only a proof that the society is still not having the ability to comprehend the strange behaviour of others, to aid them overcome this problematic stage rather than tormenting and murdering them as happened with Nushi.

However, it is not something new that societies are incriminating and denouncing homosexuality because historically, even the term 'homosexual' was a repulsive word and it was forbidden to be mentioned orally or in books. In the Middle Ages the term "homosexual" was known as "sodomy" by Christians (Wingard) while in Islam cultures was familiar as "Liwat" (named after Lot and his people) and until nowadays Muslim communities called it with that title (Brown, A. C). Yet, the real obvious use of the term homosexual was mentioned by the Hungarian physician Carl Maria Benkert in his anonymously published pamphlet in 1869

(Wiedeman 386). Over time, different authors used to use different expressions to point to homosexuality, such as Carl Westphal who coined the term “contrary sexual feeling” in 1864 while K. H. proposed the expression “the third sex” (1869) (ibid.). Whereas, in 2014, the Iraqi professor in English Literature, Hamdi H. Yousif in his study "Queer Criticism as a Post-Modernist Critical Approach" generally referred to the term “queer” as a “shameful” word until the late twentieth century (Yousif 132), for before this time and until the second half of nineteenth century, it was known as “unspeakable crime” (Wiedeman 386). By focusing on the expression "queer", then, it is often used as an “umbrella for persons who are identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, and/or transgender, or by and for individuals who use the term as an alternative to LGBTI labels” (Giesecking). Queer theorists claim that human identities and sexuality are unstable and therefore it is pointless to examine what it means to be male or female because our sexual identities are all different, each being socially constructed” (Berssler 227).

Interestingly, the root of queer theory is traced back to lesbianism which has its origin within the feminist movement and it was not until the 1990s when the idea of homosexuality came to be in obvious use. Before that, time sexuality and sexual orientations were considered taboo by the churches in all around Europe (Tyson 329). Actually the nineteenth century may be considered a first step to constitute the term “queer theory” which turned all the traditional views to homosexual behaviour or the non-procreative sex into a "proud banner" (Bertens 223). In 1980s, Gay and Lesbian studies depended on feminist studies in the case of binary opposition. The feminist Kate Millett, in her book *Sexual Politics* (1969), asserts that sex is born while womanhood and manhood are created by the society. Thus, according to Millett “our sex which is biologically determined, fixed and stable, is different from our gender, which is mutable and attributive. Because gender is a product of social ideas” (Shulevitz). By confirming that gender is

the product of cultural beliefs and power institutions, feminist critics show their rejection to essentialism and binary opposition which are against women's rights.

Homosexual theorists start to use the same concept of feminism by redefining "the man/woman binary and emphasize gender differences, gay and lesbian studies target the heterosexual/ homosexual binary, emphasizing sexual differences" (Bressler 226). However, step by step and as lesbian school gets stronger and more spread, in 1900, lesbian critics declared about their independence from feminism because they thought that feminist critics did not do justice with them. As most people around the world, feminist criticism "saw lesbianism in essentialist term: as unchanging condition that is presumably either biologically determined or the result of psycho-social conditioning" (Bertens 226). Therefore, homosexuals commenced to refuse that essentialism in the course of dealing with them-- and they initiated to ask for accepting lesbianism "as social constructions that needed to be deconstructed to expose the binary oppositions at work within them" (Bertens 226).

### **Religious and Medical Views on Homosexuality**

According to this paper, it is not normal to live with such abnormal, homosexual people, neither culturally nor religiously because despite the fact that we are in the age of freedom, freedom of self-expression, but still as civilized human beings we have to conform to some specific rules, and sex and sexual orientations are among those rules. The homosexual dilemma is either a biological problem or a psychological one and in both cases it requires a great awareness of the community in order to deal properly with it for the purpose of healing and finding the most appropriate solution. A well-known Lebanese announcer, Toni Khalifa in an interview with four transgender converts and two religious men, one Christian and the other Muslim, all four of them asked the society to accept them as they are because even their families are unable to accept them. One of them states that his father has deleted his name from the

family record. Now all of them are without clear identity. However, the religious men strongly attacked them, accusing them with committing adultery and that God will punish them as He punished the citizen of Sodom and Gomorrah in the times of Prophet Lute.

Neither homosexuality or lesbianism is a choice as many people believe that man has the right to choose his way of life because as Ben Carson asserts that everybody has equal rights but that he “is not sure anybody should have extra rights” (Gass). Everybody in this world has the right to live peacefully but not destroying the essence of existence which is reproduction). The Messenger of Allah, Mohammed has said, “Of my tradition is to marry. So then whoever turns away from my tradition (Sunnah) is not from me (my nation)” (Bhimji). Thereby, it is impossible at least to allow homosexuality in Islamic civilization because recently several western countries have allowed it legally and considered it as personal freedom. On that account, it is essential to protect eastern societies from this plight.

Therefore, the eastern governments should provide special free clinics to help homosexual people overcome this ordeal and prepare them orderly to act normally with the society they are living in because not all the homosexuals are suffering from genetic problems as mentioned before, rather there are many gays and lesbians acting differently due to harmful accidents or what is called environmental factors either in their childhood or in their youth which leads to psychological complex and the behaviour turns to be addiction. For example, the seventeen years old Egyptian man, Saed, suffers from homosexuality. He says that he was raped when he was only seven years old and under threats he could not reveal about it to his parents but what is worse is that homosexuality has become a habit for him and now he asks for assistance (Wahid minalnaas). It is necessary to educate children against sexual harassment and more importantly is encouraging them to talk about it to their parents if it happened. Unfortunately, not all

homosexual people are having the ability to declare about their tendencies, Hans Bretens asserts that:

Lesbian and gay critics generally agree that lesbian and gay writers work from a special awareness of the constructedness language and culture and the fact that the constructions that they see in operation can be contested. After all, lesbian and gay writers have until very recently been forced either to hide their sexual orientation altogether from their audience or to present it so indirectly that only the initiates were in a position to recognize. (222)

The kind of revelation which this paper is looking for is not like the one that lesbian critics want; rather it is just a declaration about the problem to a specialist physician because throughout time and history, religion has a very clear prohibition against homosexuality, and any other relationship outside the marriage contract. As the substance of life is children birth in both Christianity and Islam hence homosexuality is opposite to this truth. Bible shows this reality in the following lines:

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate”.( **Matthew 19:4-6**)

Consequently, Medieval Christians considered homosexuality an unclean act in which it could not be put into words by the religious men and the word “heresy” was used instead. Moreover, whoever commits it, his/her penalty was execution on a stake (Wiedeman 386). Indeed, Christians are currently divided into two view points; one of them is still against this manner of living while, on the other hand, the other opinion is supporting them (homosexuals) or at least not barring them; for example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rt Revd Alan Wilson, Pope Francis,, etc. While religious scholars in Islam are completely declining this act and its penalty is 100 lashes despite the fact that recently such sanctions are pending in many Muslim countries.

The story of Prophet Lute is a very obvious proof of the Creator's anger towards homosexuals. Consequently, it does not belong to the religious scholars to approve of (homosexuality) or not. The Bible describes Prophet Lute's city as "the men of the city were so wicked that God decided to destroy it" (Genesis 19). The same story is also mentioned in The Holy Quran:

And when Our messengers came to Lute, he was perturbed by their coming and felt troubled on their account, and said: 'This is a distressing day. And his people came to him rushing. Before this they were wont to commit evil deeds. . . . And when Our command came to pass, We turned the town upside down, and rained on it stones of baked clay, one on another, marked from your Lord. Nor is the punishment far off from the wrong-doers. (Hud 77-93)

However, what is more important to be acknowledged is that religion means humanity and as homosexuality is a big sin, torturing others is also another big sin. Torturing others psychologically or physically is irreligious. Humanity is above everything and what ISIS did with the homosexuals in Syria by throwing them from the highest structures is plain evidence on their brutality. And yet, since religion has been coming to serve this universe, so that in the cases of real biological troubles, it is possible to convert sexually (Khalifa, minutes 43: 17-35).

However, as religious scholars especially Christians have differed in their views on dealing with homosexuals because Muslim clerics unanimously rejected it, physicians and psychiatrists also differed in their attitudes from one supporter to another rejecting the idea of homosexuality. For instance, the psychologist Sigmund Freud states his views on homosexuality as "homosexuality is neither an illness nor anything to be ashamed of, nor it should be a reason to reject a candidate analytical training" (Furman) while, the American psychologist and specialist in the treatment of homosexuality, professor Joseph Nicolosi in his study *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach* asserts that homosexuality is not a normal practice and it appears due to several factors in man/woman's childhood or teenager such as his/her relationship with their parents, self-false, rape, etc. which are in need for a long trip of



treatment. Nicolosi's treatment depends on both the patient himself (how much he has the desire and the ability to continue) and the physician's experience. His treatment focuses on the following points (xv-xviii):

- Self — acceptance.
- The power of gender — the impact of sexual identity (male or female) on specific behaviour, like clothing, walking, etc.
- Enabling the sexual identity, and encouraging him/her (homosexual) to represent it.
- Identifying the masculinity and femininity inside them.
- Reforming a strong healthy relationship with their parents. Either father or mother, it mostly depends on this case, for example in the case of homosexuality then there is imbalanced relationship with his father while in lesbianism, the imbalance occurs with mother.
- The therapeutic relationship — which focuses on the power of enabling the patient moving from the dependency on the doctor to the stage of self- independence.

Fortunately, there are many Arab physicians such as Dr. Amr Abu Khalil, Dr. Osem Wasfi, Dr. Mohammed Mahdi and others who also believe in the environmental factors and that the homosexuals should have a psychological treatment. The Lebanese professor, Raafat Radeh in Khalifa's program claims that among forty cases of homosexuality, thirty of them responded to the treatment just if they want (Khalifa). This survey is a glimmer of hope that patients could respond and that the society could perform to God's orders.

Finally, homosexuality is a great danger to the values of the universe, and it is fundamental to educate people to accept gays and lesbians until their recovery, for they deserve to live peacefully as the Catholic Church speech affirms "every human being is a child of God, and

every person deserves to be treated with dignity and love regardless of their actions” (Kinney). So that, as the society does its best to comprehend cancer patients and not hurting their feeling, the community should do the same with homosexuals. Homosexual treatment is a long way therapy and all the members of the society are partly responsible on this remedy at least not dealing with them as ‘others’ because they are too sensitive about their condition.

### **Lesbian Analysis of "Am I Feminist or a Womanist" by Staceyann Chin**

Staceyann Chin was born on 25 December 1972, in Jamaica. She is a poet of Afro Caribbean and Chinese origin, known for her extravagant and conceptual way of writing and performing. She currently lives in New York City where is well-known as a political feminist and lesbian activist who expresses her world view through a particular and extravagant form of poetry that celebrates femininity female love and a liberal society. In an interview she said: "I was born with an otherness attached to me,"(Lee, 1) and it is quite likely that this otherness caused her to be an extravagant person and an extravagant poet.

Some of the most important subjects that she deals with are politics, gay rights, female rights, racial issues and communication between people in general. Furthermore, at the first sight she may appear to be a radical but in reality she is not. She uses some tools that radicals use also as being loud direct and coarse, but finally one can see the irony in her performance as it is but a part of the show. Moreover, one may actually see that this radical approach is a part of her cynical appearance through which she basically mocks the radicals (Chin, “My First Period”).

Nevertheless, one must not disregard the anger in her poems and appearances. This anger is channeled, transformed into a form of art and mocked as it is obviously negative, but it is obvious that Chin is angry with violence in general and angry with violence against women in particular. However, the very important thing is that she does not express hatred against men in her poems but puts the things crudely and “matter of faculty” (ibid.).

Chin's poem "Am I Feminist or a Womanist" is not a technical poem, and it has no direct style, and for the lack of a better word it can be called a freestyle poem. Namely, it is rather a conversation than a poem and even though the stanzas are somewhat defined, they are rather defined conversationally than technically. As well as, the only thing that makes this performance into a poem is its constant rhythm and the tempo that remains that same throughout the poem. It is also an expressionist piece and is in many ways surreal; once again due to the tempo and the rhythm as the speed and the strength have a somewhat hypnotizing effect (ibid. "Feminist or a Womanist").

In this poem nevertheless, the author and the performer has directly tackled the issue of homosexuality and lesbianism in the poem, but that still does not determine a "lesbian approach" but rather shows that the author amongst others is dealing with the issue of female sexuality. However, female sexuality is not even the central point of the theme as it is only used to introduce the general subject, which is more about social stratification and polarization than about homosexuality. In addition, the very beginning of the poem and one of its main points is that homosexuality should not be treated as a theme or an approach but as something personal (Chin, "Feminist or a Womanist").

An NGO (Non Government Organization) working toward Global Human Rights or a Gay activist group or possibly several of them, have on several occasions organized actions in which they would go from person to person asking whether they are heterosexual and if they resulted to be so, they would ask when did you become heterosexual? People were of course stunned as they could not understand the question. They have always been heterosexual, and some were actually offended by the question. This was done in order to raise awareness regarding the feelings of gay people when asked about their sexuality (ibid.).

Even though realizing that one is Gay is a process that takes time so technically most Gay people do find out that they are Gay in a manner they do not feel comfortable when constantly asked about their homosexuality, how it works, how did you find out about it what did your mother say. This is also one of the main points in the poem at hand, as Chin begins the performance by telling of an encounter with another woman that asks her about how it is to be a lesbian. The first reaction to the question is facial; it is something between boredom and disappointment for being asked the same thing a million times over (ibid.).

Chin directly introduces two major female issues from the very beginning and that is done abruptly and loudly which is of course the author's trade mark. As she poses the question "am I a feminist or a womanist" she all of a sudden switches to whether the "student needs to know if she does only women or does men occasionally as well" (Chin, "Feminist or a Womanist"). This at once is the accusation not of men but of a society that disregards one's privacy and right to intimacy by educating both men and women to apply stereotypes.

She continues explaining that she is uncomfortable with having to explain things like that but is trying to respond with as much honesty as she can but her actuation shows the spectator that she is uncomfortable with the question. She continues by explaining that the "lesbian issue" is messy and brings on social tensions. By this she once again refers to the stigma that the gay population endures by having to explain their sexuality and matters that should remain private and not discussed at every occasion (ibid.).

Then, while still explaining to the imaginary person that posed the question, she turns to the matter of duality that many gay people adhere to in order to avoid stigma or simply due to the fact that they cannot cope with their sexuality in a society that imposes so many stereotypes and thus automatically stigmatizing the LGBT population. "Girls who are only straight at night" and

“a she who is actually a he” as she puts it, but then a sudden change occurs and she changes subjects as she starts to speak about “what really concerns her” (ibid.).

She is basically telling the imaginary acquaintance that she is asking the wrong questions as she is more concerned about girls who are being raped and abused. Sexuality is basically a private matter that a person should discuss intimately with people of her choice; and should not be the topic of conversation in every social meeting where gay people are present. So, by changing the subject Chin states two things, first that gay people should not be constantly probed about their sexuality and that there are many more serious gender issues than sexuality (ibid.).

Chin begins her autobiography with a rape scene telling the anonymous story of so many women all over the world who are abused in this manner. (Chin, “The Other Side” 1) However, the very interesting thing is that she does not blame men, but blames the society. When she goes on telling how women are being abused and raped and that they should be forgiven if they do not come with the truth at once; she does not attack men she attacks the society. She accuses the society of treating women as damaged goods; which is much more objective standpoint than accusing just men:

I tell her,  
I am concerned about young women  
who are raped on college campuses,  
in bars,  
after poetry readings like this one,  
in bars.  
Bruised lip and broken heart,  
you will forgive her  
if she does not come forward with the truth immediately,  
for when she does,  
it is she who will stand trial as damaged goods. (Chin, "Feminist or a Womanist")

She does mention the typical excuses that rapists put forward like “she asked for it, dressed as she was, she must have wanted it. The words will knock about in her head” (ibid.). She asked but she does not blame the man in particular but the society that allows men to grow into rapists

and women that support such a behavior. This is something that distinguishes her as an objective artist and social critic however loud she may scream sounding like a fierce radical. It can therefore be said that the lesbian approach in this poem is that whether a woman is a lesbian or not is utterly unimportant in the face of real world problems. People are too preoccupied with stereotypes and furthermore they are preoccupied with stereotypes that intrude into the privacy of other people. That is the same reason why it is likely that Chin would be offended if she was to be asked about a lesbian approach to her poetry (ibid.).

However, after that, the discourse shifts to more widespread problems that are actually at the base of violence against women. Namely, as she speaks about women/people that dress provocatively she also states that they are one thing that makes NY City so great and interesting. She celebrates diversity in all its form and stands up against the effort to unify the world and suggests unity through the celebration of diversity:

You know those women  
in blood-red stiletto heels and short skirts  
.....  
These women make New York City,  
the most interesting place.  
And while we're on the subject of diversity,  
Asia is not one big race,  
and there's not one big country called 'The Islands',  
and no,  
I am not from there. (Chin, "Feminist or a Womanist")

In the second half of the poem she turns to a personal example as she touches the issue that people have preconceived positions on how people should look and behave as she states that they are surprised to find out that her father is Chinese. She uses that to show how people are being manipulated throughout the centuries by stratification, made to believe whatever their governmental and religious institutions serve them:

There are a hundred ways

to slip between the cracks of our not so credible cultural assumptions  
about race and religion.

Most people are surprised  
that my father is Chinese.

Like there's some kind of preconditioned look  
for the half-Chinese, lesbian poet who used to be Catholic,  
but now believes in dreams. (ibid.)

Finally, she concludes the piece by judging the polarization and the stratification that the society projects not only gay or black people but the entire society forcing the humans to take side and choose leaders, idols and political side or as she puts it the society forces us to choose right from left:

The discourse is not on those of us who identify  
as gay  
or lesbian  
or even straight.

The state needs us to be either  
a clear left  
or right.

Those in the middle get caught in the cross  
fire away at the other side.

If you are not for us,  
then you must be against us. (ibid.)

However, "Am I Feminist or a Womanist" is a social poem that addresses the entire society and basically speaks of all of its wrongs. The government, the churches, the institution, men, women, parents, teachers are living in a polarized and stratified society that victimizes those who are different but victimizes (both) genders. So, there is more of a humanist than lesbian approach in her poem as purely human problems are addressed. Yes, sexuality is one important issue that is addressed but that is sexuality in general along with sexual violence, not lesbianism as the main point. Being lesbian for Chin is a just a matter of daily life like the food that is good for her system or the cream that is best for her skin. The fact that she is a lesbian is not a choice, it is her nature and that is why she feels that it should not be politicized and should not be into a constant conversation topic (Chin, "Feminist or a Womanist"). This is what she wants but the reality is

that she witnessed women raped around her where rape is considered as an element of environmental factors behind her unstable psychology and the reason for her lesbianism, but she cannot realize that. Besides, because she is a black woman, again another element of environmental factor arises and influences her greatly that leads her to come up with the idea of diversity. Those two reasons are enough for her to turn into a lesbian but unfortunately, she considers it as diversity and rights of human beings.

### **Conclusion**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century sexuality has been an important part of the artistic world and the more centuries developed so has the sexuality as an important social and artistic issue. By the end of the century sexuality has become one of the most important preoccupations of modern humans. Thus, religious men and physicians state their ideas about this dilemma as mostly a psychological problem and in other occasions is a genetic defect. Generally, all the psychologists believe that homosexuality is a complex inside humans due to several environmental factors such as child- parents' relationship, self-false, rape, etc. Staceyann Chin as she waves her big Afro styled hair in anal angry manner, as if there was something primitive and wild in her performance is an example of a black woman who was violated by men in particular and the society in general as she claims in her poem "Am I Feminist or a Womanist" leads to create a different woman who hates normal relationships.

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