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Queer Archaeology

"Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers" (Halperin 1995:62).

The reason I chose this topic is because we talk a lot about representation in history and anthropology, and the lack of it for certain groups of people. When we talk about ancient society we mostly hear about those who fit into the social model of that time and coincidentally the social model of man and wife is still presented as the only socially acceptable option for many people. Historians and anthropologists that came upon the existence of sexuality that was not man and women were discussed through a close minded lens if not just ignored. The point of Queer Archaeology though, is not to seek out evidence of Queer people in the past, because that would assume that there is validity in the dual model of heterosexuality vs homosexuality, but to ignore these binaries all together and produce research not clouded by these beliefs.

In archaeology, we are looking for answers for many questions and for many different types of people. These answers will fit into the set binary the question implies, and this is why Queer Archaeology is an important critique on the way archaeology has been performed in the past. We won't be able to uncover the truth if we can't acknowledge or accept it enough. Queer Archaeology is also about re-examining past interpretations of evidence to separate the research from the beliefs and lenses that clouded scholarly analysis of the past. It is of utmost importance to identify the biases that existed in the past in order to come to a greater understanding of the past itself. It is acknowledged by many that ascribe to this model that although we can look back at past archaeologists perspectives, one day our perspective will be re-examined as well, as

scholarly review is a pillar of academia and necessary. Our ideas of what went on in past societies could be clouded by what we wish to discover as well. It should also be acknowledged that mere ideas of the past could never fully explain the complexities and nuance that has always surrounded sexuality, maybe past ideas of sexual identity were not thought of in the way we think of them. This is where, to me, Queer Archaeology is very interesting. It is not self-serving to discover hidden truths of same sex couples, but that the idea that these couples were same sex in the first place might not have even existed for some. For QA, nothing is set into these notions everyone has in their head, regardless of personal identity.

Feminist and Queer archaeology both work to challenge the heteronormative ideas of the past that have been used to oppress certain groups and erase their cultural history. Both would be good to critique many theories on hunter gatherer societies, where it is assumed that women were passive background characters in the act of securing food for the whole while men were out hunting valiantly. In reality, most of the sustenance procured was done by the women. The discussion of social relationships in these societies can mistakenly be done through the lens of what we currently seek out as the perfect familial model, the nuclear family. Most assume that for one woman there was one male partner and vice versa. The reality is that there could be no distinction in partners or family as these groups relied on everyone, and children were raised by many (in some societies).

The critiques of Queer Archaeology, as mentioned, is that this can still be misused to apply a modern perspective to past societies, muddling the waters a little bit of what the true mission is. "The difficulties of bridging concepts of modernity to archaeological materials, however, are not insurmountable if we look to similar challenges faced by feminist

archaeologists 20 years ago."[1] Queer theory and feminist theory have been utilized to critique

dichotomies of all types, those that differentiate race, gender and class, one example is the term

commoner. Commoner is believed to be at the opposite of the wealthy elite, some groups being

labeled as passive and therefore less important, keeps their history from being truly realized and

invested in. They also become intertwined with modern day ideas of peasants, which are just

incorrect assumptions. Placing people into categories such as slaves, commoner, peasant, is not

acknowledging the complex social and artistic expressions and contributions done by these

people. No "commoner" is alike and their specific achievements may never be realized. If we

don't invest in the history of the "common" people, then who are we serving? Middle and lower

class individuals have a great sense of community, history, and culture kept alive through

resilience and personal expressions. It is well known that the "elite" look to minorities and lower

class people for trends and styles, and although their pictures will be on the forefront of history,

they cannot take credit for the origination of these creative expressions (in my opinion). We have

seen it today with the uptick and sudden interest and appropriation of black and asian heritages.

KPOP is rising in the charts when it was considered a joke at one point with "Gangnam style"

receiving a lot of hate circa 2013, and white women have started to wear the clothes and

accessories and nails that in the past, upper white women have referred to as "ghetto".

It is important to remind ourselves that the world has not been exactly as it is today, and

that the beliefs and attitudes of today are of today only. It becomes detrimental to our progress to

assume these binaries of elite and poor, passive and active, strong and weak, European and other,

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[1] Blackmore, Chelsea. "How to Queer the Past without Sex: Queer Theory, Feminisms and the Archaeology of Identity." *Archaeologies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, pp. 75–96., https://doi.org/10.1007/s11759-011-9157-9.

have held the same weight or ideological importance and politicized-ness as they do right now. We want to use the past to inform our present, but it is a challenge to separate ourselves from the naturalized categories we have used to identify others and ourselves for our entire lives.

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