



Gay Bashings and Gay Rodeos are both Wrong – for the Same Reason

Anyone knows it's wrong to clothesline a baby animal, body slam him to the ground, tie his legs so he can't move, and drag him by the neck. If this were done to a puppy, the offender would be charged with a crime. In rodeos, however, it's called calf roping, and supporters claim it's a sport.

Most gay people agree that mainstream straight society has in place a coercive system that attempts to force particular sexual behaviors on all people. We see entrenched systems of artificial rewards (financial, emotional, legal, religious, etc.) for heterosexual behavior (or the semblance of it) and substantial punishments for non-heterosexual behavior. We protest that this is wrong – ethically and functionally undesirable.

Coercing humans to behave in particular sexual ways against their natural inclinations is an exercise of power. People who have greater numbers, more money, more legal access, or greater social acceptability use that power to force their preferred behavior on others. They justify this by saying that gay people are fundamentally different, and straight people have a “natural right,” a biblical right, or a right of necessity to do so. Gay people, having been on the receiving end of this treatment, recognize it for the abuse of power that it is. We don't see it as “the natural order,” justifiable, or right.

Similarly, coercing non-human animals at rodeos, racetracks, and circuses to behave in particular ways against their natural inclinations, solely for human amusement, is an exercise of power. People who have greater numbers, more intelligence, or more weapons, use that power to force their preferred behavior on other animals. They justify this by saying that non-human animals are fundamentally different, and humans have a “natural right,” a biblical right, or a right of necessity to do so.

Many people feel that these two situations are completely different and that it is acceptable treatment for animals, but not for humans. Is this a reasonable distinction to make?

Is it justifiable to treat animals this way because their measurable intelligence is different or less than ours? If that were true, we could justify treating young children, the developmentally disabled, or the mentally ill this way. Is it justifiable to treat animals this way because we can feel and animals cannot? Hardly. Most non-human animals display at least as much capacity to feel pain and discomfort as human beings do (although they may be less overtly vocal about it).

Is it justifiable to treat animals this way simply because we are human and they are not? This is the most frequently cited reason, so let's examine it more closely.

To argue that we are justified in goading animals into entertaining us for the reason that we are human and they are not, is to set up a special category of animal called *human*. Animals belonging to that category get preferential treatment and exercise power over animals not in the category, using and abusing them as they see fit.

In recent history, the special category of human, *heterosexual*, has been defined. Humans who belong to that category are accorded preferential treatment and exercise power over humans not in the category, using and abusing them as they see fit. There are also other special categories such as *wealthy*, *male*, and *white*.

If gay people are to convincingly argue that it is unjust for society to mistreat them because they aren't in an exclusionary special category, *heterosexual*, then we must also object to the mistreatment of animals based on the same paradigm. The same mental model for treatment of other used to justify a gay rodeo is also used to justify a gay bashing. If we assert that one is unjust, we must assert that both are unjust, or it's not justice we're talking about, but selfishness – “mistreat someone else, but don't mistreat me.” Not an argument that carries much weight.

*Commentary by Howard Pierce, reprinted from
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