The Laramie Project: Themes and Analysis

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Matthew Shepard, Hate Crime, and the Central Conflict of The Laramie Project

Most people perceive the abuse meted against Matthew Shepard as a hate case, which, according to me, is true. The testimonies and evidence from the charges were suggestive that Matt was assaulted due to his sexuality. However, the criminals Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney never knew Matt prior to the night of the incident, raising curiosity as to how they came to know he was gay. What is assumed is that the gender performance of Matt was revealing itself and thus unacceptable to these guys. Instead, it was a reaction to his gender affiliation, as in their adopted performances. In fact, the killing of Matthew Shepard was an act facilitated by gender performance but fueled by hate.

We always express our gender identities through gender performance. Each of us crafts our gender roles or a narration through the integration of stories learnt from others with our life experiences. People tend to select elements that are significant to them and craft them into a full-gender performance (Foss, Domenico, and Foss 141). Once they have drawn their gender affiliations, they exhibit them. Production is a way in which we share our gender experiences with the external environment, enabling others to embrace and view others as they do.

The Laramie project outlines that Shepard's gender view was a reliable indicator that he was gay. The taxi driver, Doc O'Connor, stated that Matt was revealing this sexuality and even confided with Doc that he was gay, and they were headed to a gay bar. He was proud of his gender performance, and he was determined to make people understand him. In reality, Romaine Patterson, who was Matt's friend, explained to the theatre project that Shepard was initiated into the gay and lesbian bar during a campus week before he was murdered (Kaufman 20). Apparently, Matt was not ashamed of his status. He was always honest and open about it and is therefore sensible that he openly acted as a gay to Henderson and McKinney.

Sexual Identity, Stereotype, and the Social Construction of the Victim

Additionally, Matt acted in a way that most think only a stereotypical gay man ought to. Matt, as described by the bartender Matt Galloway, was known as a decently dressed man with a clean cut, a

statement supported by Patterson's confession that Matthew was from a financially strong background, possessed nice stuff and was always careful about his than even his money. The homosexual was nicely dressed and extravagant at times but is still flamboyant in our minds as compared to his gay partners, whom we perceive as covered with beer stains and grease. As a result of this gender category, it would be easy for the killer to come to the conclusion that he was homosexual.

Doc also remembers the man as a slight person of around 97 pounds and 5'2″ ", soaking wet." It is assumed that if Shepard was a 6'3″ homosexual bodybuilder, the event would not have taken place. However, Shepard was never a masculine-hyped male and exhibited no violent interests. He was quite a social person who easily mingled with others. Due to his modest and slight nature, he was perceived as an easy target. According to the Laramie Project, a decade later, we realize that McKinney always looks forward to executing a crime that day (Kaufman et al. 53). He thought of Matt as a perfect prey due to his sexuality as well as his costly attire, and furthermore, as an efficient target since he was gentle and slightly in nature.

Masculinity, Gender Performance, and the Motives of the Offenders

It is essential to note that the perceptions of gender performance by McKinney and Henderson also played a role in the offence. Taking into account the statements made by McKinney's father, who claimed poor treatment of his son as a result of his crimes, one can conclude that Aaron was raised in a manner that did not embrace or respect gays (Kaufman 49). Residing in a small town that barely accepted homosexual acts and was apparently not a norm, one can easily see how the homophobic attitudes exhibited by McKinney developed. In interviews conducted later, McKinney is described by Henderson as an assertive person who always leads (Kaufman et al. 41). McKinney's character is over-masculine. He is seen as a healthy, confident and energetic person who should always be in control of any situation. The greed for power is a significant reason why there was no crime prevention.

Other than the sexual attitudes of the person, the interactions of the performance are also important. One of the significant elements of gender roles is the fan (Foss, Domenico, and Foss 172). The viewer perceives the gender affiliation of others and assesses it through either rejecting, tolerating or supporting it (Foss, Domenico, and Foss 207). In this case, McKinney's audience was Russell Henderson, who, at first, opposed this violent gender attitude. Russell attempted to manipulate McKinney's performance through persuasion, which was unsuccessful. This, therefore, prompted him to tolerate the performance despite the fact that he did not embrace it (Kaufman et al. 41-42). A decade later, Henderson reveals his regret regarding his gender category. If he had been stronger and not much of a pushover, he could have prevented the act. He even remembers trying to put sense into McKinney's action, and he also went ahead to giving Matt an opportunity to run away

(Kaufman et al. 41). However, taking into account that Henderson was more of a follower, he was poor in the persuasion of McKinney and curbing Matt's murder.

The aim of this essay is not to blame the victim, and in truism, it was not Matthew's mistake that got him assaulted. Instead, the paper is used to explain the events as they unfolded regarding gender theory. Shepard's audience was McKinney and Henderson, who used violence to reject his performance. Other people argue that it was Matt's wealthy nature instead of homosexual performance that led to his assault. However, the perpetrator's homophobic aims were only clear when McKinney attacked Matt for, as alleged, trying to get hold of his manhood (Kaufman 91). This indicates that the rejection of the performance was brought about by homophobia, and consequently, the killing of Matt was purely a hate crime. By comprehending gender performance, it is easy to understand the roles played by each man in the Laramie project, and it is possible to work to curb hate crimes.

Works Cited

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