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Acceptance through Restriction: Male Homosexuality in Ancient Athens

Brigid Kelleher

When investigating any culture, sex and sexuality are always important keys in understanding the society. In modern America, sex is everywhere, but there are limits on the kind of sex that can be portrayed. While the limits on heterosexuality are defined, the United States continues to struggle to accept homosexuality. Debates remain today regarding the rights and liberties of homosexuals. For instance, same-sex marriage is a critical issue in American politics. Despite the prevalence of homosexuality throughout its history, the United States government is officially accepting homosexuality only now—in certain arenas and with certain restrictions. As described in the *New York Times*, “[those] opposed to same-sex marriage agree that marriage is a fundamental bond with ancient roots.”¹ While this might be true, what those opposed to same-sex marriage seem to omit is the historical prevalence of homosexuality. Homosexuality is a natural condition, handled differently by different societies—some have a recognized acceptance, even thinking it in ways noble. To use historical evidence in contemporary debates that immediately affect the rights of the population, it is imperative that facts be checked and the truth be told.

¹ The New York Times, “Same-Sex Marriage, Civil Unions, and Domestic Partnerships,” *The New York Times*, <http://tinyurl.com/yhrhm8u> (accessed 10 January 2011).

Ancient Greece, and specifically Athens, is well known for its tolerance of homosexuality. In Sir Kenneth J. Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* (1978), Dover differentiates ancient Greek homosexuality from modern by observing Greek culture's "readiness to recognize the alternation of homosexual and heterosexual preferences in the same individual [and] its implicit denial that such alternation or coexistence created peculiar problems for the individual or for society."² Dover claims that ancient Greek society accepted homosexuality because it was permissible by older generations.³ Dover's work is an in-depth analysis of homosexuality, using copious primary sources with the majority of the evidence from Athens. Dover's work is a very useful source, and provides much specific evidence on social rules that governed homosexual relations in Athens.

Like Dover, James Davidson provides an extensive overview of homosexuality in ancient Greece in *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece* (2008). Most significantly, Davidson dedicates the first portion of his work to the etymology of the ancient Greek words for love, grace, to favor, and other terms used to define relationships in ancient Greece. As Davidson describes, dissecting these words helps to avoid "a minefield of possible misunderstandings and embarrassments" when explicating the complicated relationships in

ancient Greece.⁴ This section of Davidson's work provides a useful analysis to reading primary sources regarding homosexuality in ancient Athens.

Other scholars find the study of law a rich field for their research. John J. Winkler's collection of essays, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (1990), examines various topics of homosexuality in order to show how sexuality and gender influenced an ancient Athenian's daily life. Winkler's second chapter, "Laying Down the Law: The Oversight of the Men's Sexual Behavior in Classical Athens," provides the most pertinent information, particularly in its treatment of the ever-present competition among males and the moral weight given to self-control.⁵ Winkler sets up the chapter by defining the "cultural images of right and wrong manhood," comparing the hoplite, the citizen-soldier who can afford his own armor and is of sound mind enough to protect his state and his home, with the *kinaidos*, "a man socially deviant in his entire being, principally observable in behavior that flagrantly violated...the dominant social definition of masculinity."⁶ He offers a number of examples from laws and trials in front of the Athenian Assembly to illustrate the way in which Athenians distinguished the two. A hoplite was a model citizen, while a *kinaidos* was a self-destructive fool within ancient Athenian society.

⁴ James Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece* (London: Phoenix, 2008), 11.

⁵ John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (NY: Routledge, 1990), 45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 45-6.

Simon Goldhill's *Love, Sex and Tragedy: How the Ancient World Shapes Our Lives* (1992) supplements Winkler's work by considering the specifics of homosexual courtship within the restrictions of self-control. Through primary sources, Goldhill examines the rituals of the gymnasium culture and the practice of pederasty, a homosexual relationship between an older male and a teenage boy who has not yet reached full maturity. He links this to the ancient Greek veneration of the phallus, which exalted the male, demeaned the female, and nurtured a cult of the perfect male physique. As Goldhill points out, to have a poor physique was considered to be irresponsible and amoral. One had to "exercise hard, or suffer the humiliation of a bad body, which [meant] being a bad citizen."⁷ Goldhill also presents other material on sexual practices and on female inferiority that reinforce his interpretation.

Like Goldhill, Joseph R. Laurin uses archaeological discoveries and ancient literature to provide a concise rubric for *Homosexuality in Ancient Athens* (2005). Laurin devotes each section of his book to a specific characteristic of homosexual love in ancient Athens, including pederasty, effeminacy, and lesbianism. As many scholars have, Laurin analyzes such texts as Plato's *Symposium* to reveal the ancient Athenian sentiment toward the practices of homosexuality. In his "Epilogue," Laurin declares that the lack of primary sources on homosexuality in ancient Athens leaves a gap between what actually happened between homo-

sexual couples, and what we think happened.⁸ It is clear, however, “that homosexuality was neither queer nor threatening but normal and equal in the men’s free and open society.”⁹ Despite the small pool for primary sources on homosexual interactions in ancient Athens, the idea that it was permissible in specific parameters is definite.

What were these specific parameters in ancient Athens? A dialogue such as the *Symposium* defines homosexuality in its most noble light. Like modern times, what society might agree to be the most moral form of any given institution or tradition, might not actually describe how it was practiced. This discrepancy in ancient Athens regarding homosexuality is key in linking modern debates about homosexuality to the past. It is the purpose of this study to compare the philosophic justification of homosexuality in ancient Athens in Plato’s *Symposium* with the restrictions and penalties imposed by Athenian law on certain extremes of homosexual behavior to reveal the profound anxiety ancient Athenians felt regarding the destructive potential of this practice.

It is important to understand the different manifestations of “love” in ancient Athens. There were different categories for desire, and not all applied to proper homosexual relationships. Among others, *philia* and *eros* were such categories of “love” that played the most significant role in ancient Athenian homosexual desire. *Philia* included “all close relationships, family members, business partners, coevals, dear ones and

⁸ Joseph R. Laurin, *Homosexuality in Ancient Athens* (Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford Publishing, 2005), 171.

⁹ *Ibid.*

lovers, as well as friends.”¹⁰ *Philia* was a rational and intimate kind of love that conveyed respect and reciprocity. It was the “active direct engagement with the beloved,” involving both parties in a relationship.¹¹ *Philia* was the goal, that *eros* inspired.

Eros, which originally appeared “to have been a specifically Athenian (‘Attic’) term,” was the all-intoxicating sexual urge one had for another.¹² It entranced its victim to pursue with a “particular kind of targeting energy.”¹³ *Eros*, which was a one-sided ordeal only experienced by the pursuer, transformed a person into an obsessive hunter from a distance, who was desperately in love with the pursued.¹⁴ This engulfing form of love, when properly displayed, created a “servile-looking but [honorable] and competitive devotion,” which hoped to reel in the pursued and culminate in *philia*.¹⁵ *Eros* could have been extremely destructive as a social force, if it was allowed to gain so much momentum for a citizen to lose self-control.¹⁶ As described by Sophocles, “*Eros* [dragged] the minds of just men into injustice and destruction,” and needed to be carefully monitored to avoid public humiliation and shame.¹⁷

Eros was not simply a word, but it was also the name of a deity. Ancient Athenians could blame their heartache on Eros, Aphrodite's son (the Roman Cupid). Eros struck from a distance and consumed his target, "goad[ing]...with his whip [and] driv[ing] [his victim] mad."¹⁸ Eros' inspiration was an assault that ruthlessly pained the victim. For *eros* to result in *philia* was supremely gratifying after a long, torturous struggle. Despite the torture Eros might inflict, characters in Plato's *Symposium* declared that Eros did not get his due credit from the Athenian citizens.

According to Goldhill, "Plato [used] *eros* in his dialogue the *Symposium* to express the highest philosophical longings for the Good Itself, longings which [transcended] the physical and [sought] the fulfillment of the soul's deepest needs and capabilities."¹⁹ Plato's philosophical depictions of homosexuality, therefore, were void of carnal corruption. In the dialogue, Eryximachus, a guest at the banquet for Agathon's prize for tragic poetry, proposes that the group "make a speech in honor of [the god] Love."²⁰ Of the speeches then made, three particularly stand out: those of Pausanias, Aristophanes, and Socrates. Pausanias declares that there are two Loves spawned from two Aphrodites.²¹ One goddess Aphrodite was born of the union between Zeus and Dione, a male and a female. Love that is produced from this Aphrodite is "common."²² The second goddess Aphrodite, however, was

¹⁸Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love*, 14.

¹⁹ Goldhill, *Love, Sex and Tragedy*, 48.

²⁰ Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1956), 19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² *Ibid.*

born of Uranus, a man, only. The love produced from her is called “heavenly.”²³ With disdain, Pausanias explains that common Love “has no discrimination...and is of the body rather than of the soul.”²⁴ Common Love was lustful, casual, and careless fornication. To Pausanias, common Love would lead a man to women and (male) youths too young to pursue, and that a practitioner of common Love “[did] good and evil quite indiscriminately.”²⁵ Heavenly Love, on the other hand, inspired the male to “turn to the male, and delight in him who is the more valiant and intelligent nature.”²⁶ Heavenly Love caught the hearts of men who saw youths as intelligent persons in whom reason was beginning to be developed.²⁷ Men engulfed by heavenly Love did not deceive these youths, but intended to remain their companions, if not lovers, for life. In such a pursuit, the pursuer “[endured] a slavery worse than any slave,” that to Eros.²⁸ To be such a slave, however, did not matter to the scores of men who devoted themselves to boys on the verge of adulthood. As Pausanias explains, “a man fairly argues that in Athens to love and to be loved is held to be a very honorable thing.”²⁹ Heavenly Love was a noble and commendable form of Eros, which disregarded a one-time lustful tryst instead for an everlasting disposition.

Aristophanes gave his praise to love in a tale of the origin of man. Originally, there were three sexes: male, female, and “the union of the two.”³⁰ This third sex was “Androgynous” (“Andros” man + “gyne” woman), an upright creature that had “four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike.”^{31, 32} As the humans grew too proud, however, Zeus decided to split the Androgynous in half as “a lesson of humility.”³³ Henceforth, the halves could only embrace each other in attempts to reunite as they had before. Fortunately for humanity, all sexes could still procreate.³⁴ Aristophanes briefly explained that future generations of men who came from “Androgynous” were lovers of women, lustful and potentially adulterous. Women who came from the part of the woman were only attracted to other women. The men who came from the part of man were only attracted to other men. These “slices of the original man” are both “valiant and manly,” for “they embrace that which is like them.”³⁵ These men understood the importance, superiority, and value of the male, who was superior to the female. They embraced the adult male as a youth, and they in turn would share their love with a youth when they were adults. These men were statesmen, virtuous in deed and followed the law. They procured lasting relationships with their other halves.³⁶ Should

³⁰ Ibid., 30.

³¹ Laurin, *Homosexuality in Ancient Times*, 33.

³² Plato, *The Symposium*, 30.

³³ Ibid., 31.

³⁴ Ibid., 32.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

they have married a woman, they would have done so only to abide by Athenian law because they were honorable citizens. Aristophanes concluded his speech by praising the righteous men who love men, and instructed his friends that in order to ever find their other half, they would need to be just as righteous and virtuous as the original homosexual man who was the model citizen.

Socrates instructed his friends through the mechanism of a woman from his youth: Diotima of Mantinea. After asserting that Eros was a daemon, an intermediary between the gods and humans, she began to interchange the words “beautiful” and “good.”^{37, 38} When Diotima spoke of “good,” she meant the moral and virtuous. She was referring to the same sort of honor that Pausanias bestowed upon men who devoted themselves to intelligent youths, and that Aristophanes bestowed upon similar men who would find their other half only in other men. Diotima declared that the happy desire the noble, and that “all desire of good and happiness is only the great and subtle power of love.”³⁹ Love is moral and virtuous, and a lover should only find a beloved if the beloved, too, be virtuous and honorable. This love, then, is “of the everlasting possession of the good.”⁴⁰ Like Pausanias and Aristophanes, Love implied a lifelong commitment. Men then sought out virtuous souls to beget children (thus, in this instance, women), so that their own virtue might be immortalized through their

offspring.⁴¹ As he matured, this male offspring would be “guided by his instructor,” to seek out in the world “the beauty of the mind,” which, “[was] more honorable than the beauty of the outward form.”⁴² This could only be found in the male. When he approached a virtuous soul, “he [would] be content to love and tend him,” and would encourage this youth intellectually.⁴³ The male offspring, then, in turn became the instructor after he matured, “[compelling his pupil] to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws.”⁴⁴ As such, love was virtuous and recurred through the generations. The female’s role was to beget children, imprints of virtuous souls. The male’s role was to make a boy a man through the same tender guidance and devotion that Pausanias and Aristophanes preached regarding youths.

According to Plato, however, this story of Diotima of Mantinea was not all that Socrates had to offer in terms of understanding Eros. With the conclusion of Socrates’ speech, a late invitee arrived: Alcibiades, who was already drunk. With liquid courage, Alcibiades began to divulge his homoerotic passion for Socrates. Alcibiades echoed the torture of Eros when he described his longing for Socrates as suffering and agony, and declared that he “was at [his] wit’s end; no one was ever more hopelessly enslaved by another.”⁴⁵ Alcibiades’ passion was not based on material goods or superficial looks, however (especially since Socrates was infamously ugly). Instead, Alcibiades confessed he

⁴¹ Ibid., 50.

⁴² Ibid., 51.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Plato, *The Symposium*, 60.

was drawn to an indefinable quality in Socrates, a feeling connected to Socrates' ability to "assist [him] in the way of virtue."⁴⁶ He felt he would have been a fool to have withheld any favors from Socrates. As his *eros* for Socrates developed, Alcibiades admitted, he had become the pursuer even though he was the youth. This was the opposite protocol of homosexual courtship, which the previous orators described. He sent away his attendant to steal moments alone with Socrates and challenged Socrates to wrestling matches in the *palaestra*.⁴⁷ Socrates, however, handled all these encounters with "natural temperance and self-restraint and manliness."⁴⁸ Their most physically intimate moment was sleeping in one another's arms. (Alcibiades never mentioned copulation.) Alcibiades seems to be presented at this point in the *Symposium* to illustrate the distinction between philosophy and reality. Whereas Pausanias, Aristophanes, and Socrates preached the magnificence of *eros* and its various manifestations using myth or theory, Alcibiades presented an autobiographical anecdote about pederasty. Despite what Pausanias, Aristophanes, and Socrates argued, pederasty and homosexual relationships were highly restricted within ancient Athens. Their philosophic justifications described a society of open sexuality, in which carnal desire of an adult male could not corrupt his intentions when pursuing a homosexual relationship. In reality, however, social and legal restrictions in ancient Athens described how love could be corrupt and

needed to be regulated. Philosophy was very different from practice.

Pederasty, the common motif in the *Symposium*, was the sexual and emotional relationship between an older male and a teenage boy that was distinguished from pedophilia by having had a “noble purpose.”⁴⁹ The elder partner was the *erastes* (lover) and the younger partner was the *eromenos* (beloved).⁵⁰ In ancient Athens, “the approved homosexual relations [were] not between social equals,” which made the age discrepancy between the two lovers vital in the formation of the relationship.⁵¹ One partner was always superior to the other. Social restrictions defined the boundaries of the age of the *eromenos*: “Pederastic partnership was considered reprehensible before the boy was twelve years of age, preferable at about the age of fifteen, and terminated or adapted to a new style after the age of eighteen when the boy’s beard was fully grown.”⁵² As the *Symposium* described, pederasty was based on a mentorship, although physical attraction sparked an *erastes*’ interest. “As a general rule, the *erastes* mentored the boy in right and wrong, helped him develop good character, self-control..., wisdom, and provided other forms of education, including initiation into the society.”⁵³ An *erastes* taught by example through public decorum, and also engaged in

⁴⁹ Laurin, *Homosexuality in Ancient Athens*, 74.

⁵⁰ Goldhill, *Love, Sex and Tragedy*, 56-7.

⁵¹ John Thorp, “The Social Construction of Homosexuality,” *Phoenix*, Vol. 46 (1992): 59.

⁵² Laurin, *Homosexuality in Ancient Athens*, 76.

⁵³ Marina Fischer, “Sport Objects and Homosexuality in Ancient Greek Vase-Painting: The New Reading of Tampa Museum Vase 86.70,” *Nikephoros* 20 (2007):165.

philosophic and intellectual discourse with his *eromenos*. *Erastai* took *eromenoi* to aristocratic *symposia*, and even introduced the *eromenoi* to heterosexual intercourse by taking them to prostitutes.⁵⁴ Thus, the relationship was not only about sexual pleasure for the *erastes*. “Pederastic education included developing in the boy sexual habits consonant with manly virtue,” however, and this included the greatest favor an *eromenos* could grant in gratitude for his mentorship: “intercrural intercourse, i.e. between the thighs.”^{55, 56}

The majority of these relationships originated in the gymnasium, which was the social and athletic center for Athens’ elite, and was restricted to its free male citizens. All athletics within the gymnasium were practiced naked “to showcase the beauty of young male bodies in motion.”⁵⁷ *Gymnos* meant “naked.”⁵⁸ The gymnasium provided the opportunity for older males to gather and converse, while it provided younger males the opportunity to show their worth in physical activity. Because winning an athletic event made a youth more attractive to potential lovers, older men soon became admirers from afar of certain youths who put their “masculinity on trial.”^{59, 60} Any moral or dutiful citizen honed his body in the gymnasium in preparation to become a hoplite, a citizen-soldier and model citizen. Hoplites had to be physically fit in order

to fight on the battlefield. With every athletic victory in the gymnasium, the youths gained increased honor for themselves as they grew into citizens who would one day protect Athens. This honor transferred to everyday life, as the youths were also seen as potential defenders of their *oikoi* (households).⁶¹ Thus, hoplites demonstrated their acceptance of duty and responsibility to the polis. Within this military context, pederastic mentors, or *erastai*, were therefore considered to be sculpting the minds of these potential defenders of home and society, who would one day contribute positively to the polis.

Men and youths did not simply pair off, however. There were laws regulating the public access to young males. "Teachers were not to open their schools, nor trainers their gymnasiums, before sunrise, and must close them before sunset."⁶² This Athenian law protected male youths from sexual predators, who might have lurked during the twilight hours. It was not appropriate for a male citizen to merely grab a boy at will, especially a boy who would have eventually become an Athenian citizen. "A law stated who should be the young men who attended [schools and gymnasiums], and of what ages they should be, and what control of them there should be."⁶³ Such a law prohibited men of a certain maturity from co-mingling with the youth of Athens. This law also prescribed that these young men should have escorts to take them to and from school and the gymnasium. These escorts,

⁶¹ Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, 47.

⁶² Douglas M. MacDowell, "Athenian Laws about Homosexuality," *Revue Internationale des droits de L'Antiquité*, 3^{ème} série (2000): 15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 16.

normally slaves, could act as witnesses of a boy's conduct, or of the conduct of a man who approached the boy. Escorts would therefore have been deterrents to any lewd and lascivious behavior that might embarrass a boy's family or ruin his reputation, a considerable concern because "[gossip], rumor, and common knowledge [were] very intense in a community like that of ancient Athens, even though it was a comparatively large polis."⁶⁴ Finally, of laws regarding the supervision of boys, "the chorus-producer [of an assembly of boys] had to be over forty years of age."⁶⁵ This law supposed that men over the age of forty had less "homoerotic impulses."⁶⁶ It forbade those younger than the required age to have any direct control over a group of youths. This protected youths from becoming the prey of unmarried or recently married men (since Athenian men were around thirty years old on their wedding day) who might have still sought to become an *erastes*.⁶⁷

Such laws protecting boys from sexual advances from older men betrayed an anxiety among the ancient Athenian legislators that homosexual eroticism would have corrupted the youth. At the very least, these laws suggest that introducing homosexuality to boys at that age would have done some kind of harm. Particularly, these laws prohibited acts of hubris, which broadly meant "any kind of [behavior] in which one [treated] other people just as one [pleased,] with an arrogant confidence that one [would have escaped] paying any

penalty for violating [the rights of the victim].”⁶⁸ In ancient Athenian law, however, the crime of hubris was linked to sexual assault. If convicted, the accused faced the death penalty.⁶⁹ To convince a jury that the accused committed an act of hubris, the prosecution had to prove that the assailant committed the act of assault “from a wish on his part to establish a dominant position over his victim in the eyes of the community,” and “[laughed] at equality of rights under the law.”⁷⁰ Hubris, then, in accordance with the laws protecting the accessibility of young boys, was a sexual assault against the future generation of Athenian citizens, which implied that these boys were submissive and inferior. These two characteristics, submissiveness and inferiority, were reserved for women and slaves. To claim this insulted the Athenian state. Further, such laws were implemented out of a fear that this homosexual behavior would follow the boys into their maturity, as “Aristotle [applied] the same standard to boys when he [said] that some males [enjoyed] homosexual intercourse because they were subjected to hubris as boys.”⁷¹ A subtext running through Athenian law on these matters is the fear that such homosexual interaction would have left the upcoming generation, who would rule and progress the polis, submissive and inferior, which was antithetical of what the polis strove to be.

To avoid conviction of hubris, pederasty had to be engaged in as a type of noble courtship, in which the

⁶⁸ Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 34.

⁶⁹ David Cohen, “Law, Society and Homosexuality in Classical Athens,” *Past & Present*, No. 117 (Nov. 1987): 7.

⁷⁰ Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, 35.

⁷¹ Cohen, “Law, Society and Homosexuality,” 8.

erastes wooed the *eromenos* into granting the former favors. Favors did not have to be sexual, however, it was generally presumed that the ultimate goal of the *erastes* was to succeed sexually with the lad.⁷² Because law prohibited men from directly engaging with youths, the interaction between potential *erastai* and *eromenoi* was that much more complicated, in that *erastai* had limited opportunities to impress an *eromenos*. Again, the gymnasium was a crucial nexus. As Dover explained,

“The gymnasium...provided opportunities for looking at naked boys, bringing oneself discreetly to a boy’s notice in the hope of eventually speaking to him... and even touching a boy in a suggestive way, as if by accident, while wrestling with him.”⁷³

The gymnasium, therefore, did not limit competition to physical recreation. Further, while the *erastes* pursued the *eromenos* with gifts, such as a hare, the *eromenos* was expected to remain chaste, and to refuse his pursuant.⁷⁴ *Eros* was supposed to be felt only by the *erastes*, and without reciprocation from the *eromenos*. The *erastes* hoped to procure *philia* within the *eromenos* through gifts, guidance and noble persistence.⁷⁵ An *eromenos* inspired by *philia* through admiration, gratitude, and compassion, granted the *erastes*’ favors (i.e., intercrural intercourse).⁷⁶ An

eromenos did not sexually desire his *erastes*, but instead cultivated a bond with his *erastes*, as a mentor who delivered him into intellectual, political, social and sexual circles of knowledge. Homosexual intercourse between the two was an expression of this bond. As Aristophanes' speech illustrated, "the homosexual activity [was] an expression of something which [lay] deep in the soul," and was not a form of prostitution in return for the *erastes* guidance.⁷⁷

To not only avoid legal sanction, but also social ruin, the entire pederastic courtship, pre- and post-gratification, was to be done with self-control. Public behavior was to be "decorous and circumspect."⁷⁸ In the case of pederasty, should either party not work within the social and legal constructs of this courtship, respective peers of the couple would have vilified them in public, which could have ruined the reputation of the *eromenos/erastes* and his family and could have opened the *eromenos/erastes* and his family to blackmail.⁷⁹ Humiliation, ridicule, and blackmail were powerful disincentives to flamboyant public displays of homosexual relationships in ancient Athens.

Despite these powerful social and legal penalties, pederasty was commonly practiced in Athenian society, and was commonly accepted if it was done discreetly. Because family honor was on the line, so long as the *eromenos*' family did not think their name was being besmirched, intercourse between the couple was at their discretion. Through self-control and proper courtship in public arenas, an *erastes* and an

⁷⁷ Thorp, "The Social Construction of Homosexuality," 58.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Cohen, "Law, Society and Homosexuality," 19.

eromenos protected themselves from social and political ruin. These men (or boys to be men) were always fearful of their rights as free citizens, especially the right to speak in public and political forums, and the right to hold office. An unmanly man could be stripped of those rights. Men who could not control their desires and indulgences were the opposite of the hoplite citizen. They disgusted Athenians and were feared by them. Such a man was a *kinaidos*—a male prostitute. As Winkler described, “The three components of the accusation [of a *kinaidos* were] promiscuity, payment, and passivity to another man’s penetration.”⁸⁰

Kinaidoi were considered promiscuous because they no longer had control over their desires. While an *erastes* might have patiently waited for gratification, a *kinaidos* was rash and had sex whenever and with whomever he wanted. As a prostitute, *kinaidoi* accepted payment for the sexual use of their bodies. “[As] a symbol, the money pouch,” which was often found in vase-painting depictions of female prostitutes, “[reinforced] the man’s awareness of the victory of male over female, which formed the psychological basis of his existence.”⁸¹ By accepting payment a *kinaidos* was, therefore, a woman—effeminate and inferior. Paid *kinaidoi* willingly accepted the role of an inferior, which might accept defeat when faced with an outside military enemy. Through anal penetration, a *kinaidos* further submitted himself to the passive role of the

mounted woman. In the context of pederasty, “any penetration of a free boy would be called an outrage, a desecration,” because it made that boy a woman, who was not a citizen.⁸² If a *kinaidos* engaged in oral penetration, he was considered even lower in morals and honor. In ancient Athens, “any person who [allowed] his or her mouth to be used in such a way [was] thought quite disgusting.”⁸³ He was a vile being, void of virtue. Engaging in promiscuity, accepting payment, and being passive to penetration, marked a *kinaidos* as a reckless, effeminate threat to the proper citizen. His unmanliness threatened the safety of the entire polis, and protection of the polis was the ultimate purpose of every citizen.

The *kinaidos* was a sufficiently repellent figure that “to call anyone a [*kinaidos*] was a violently hostile act.”⁸⁴ Instead of mastering his desires, a *kinaidos* was a slave to them, and therefore the opposite of a proper male soldier-citizen.⁸⁵ While *heitarai*, or female courtesans, existed for men without any social disgrace or general penalty under Athenian law, there were laws prohibiting male prostitution.⁸⁶, ⁸⁷ Further, most male and female prostitutes were destitute and not citizens, marking a *kinaidos* that much more pathetic and

⁸² Goldhill, *Love, Sex and Tragedy*, 64.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸⁶ Martin, *Ancient Greece*, 139.

⁸⁷ Athenian law stated that any father who prostituted his son “had deprived the son of his freedom of speech,” and therefore, the son was free from providing for his father in the latter’s old age. Any citizen who procured a free boy could be sentenced to death. MacDowell, “Athenian Laws about Homosexuality,” 18.

desperate. By accepting payment and lowering oneself to the status of the mounted, who in proper sexual relationships was not a male citizen (i.e., a woman, slave), a *kinaidos* essentially stripped himself of many of his rights as a citizen. The penalties in Athenian law for being a *kinaidos* were outlined in 346/5 B.C.E. by the prosecutor Aiskhines in the trial against Timarkhos, who was accused of being a *kinaidos* in his youth.⁸⁸ Aiskhines declared, “If any Athenian...is a [*kinaidos*]...let him never deliver an opinion either in the Boule or in the assembly,” thus enforcing a significant amount of disfranchisement.⁸⁹ A *kinaidos* lost every political right except his silent vote by hand.⁹⁰ This loss of citizen rights was done to protect and preserve the polis, which suggests an anxiety that if homosexual intercourse was practiced outside the confines of Athenian law, it would corrupt the practitioner. The practitioner, then, unless stripped of his citizen rights to give public and political speeches, would corrupt Athens and incur its fall. Further, the Athenian polis did not believe in the reformation of the *kinaidos*. The polis would not risk its power, prestige and existence on any man proven to flout the legal and social laws regarding homosexuality. Such a man desired to be inferior, and therefore could doom Athens to inferiority in context to other poleis, and to outside enemies.

In ancient Athens, homosexuality was a source of some anxiety. The concepts of proper love, of *eros* and of *philia* were the key components to the acceptance of

certain kinds of homosexuality. In the ideal conception articulated in Plato's *Symposium*, an adult male citizen found *eros* in a younger male partner because the former desired to impart virtue, wisdom, and guidance within a youth that had the potential to achieve virtue as a free male citizen. This issued a continual supply of citizens who would embody the virtues of the polis, and who would help maintain the dominance and wellbeing of the polis and its people. The reality of homosexual practice was different, however. An anxious Athenian populace sought to control homosexual practices tightly through social taboos and restrictive laws. Pederasty was permitted, but had to be practiced through a refined courtship marked by self-control and dignity. Laws protected youths from the sexual aggression of adult males. Laws also stripped adult males who lost their self-control and sold their bodies to the sexual and psychological dominance of other adult males. Though ancient Athens permitted limited forms of pederasty, restrictions on male prostitution reveal a deep-seated fear that if not checked, homosexuality could corrupt its citizenry and subvert the polis. Similar fears can be seen in contemporary America. Like the Athenians, modern Americans have hedged homosexual relationships with myriad legal and social restrictions. Many opposing the legalization of gay marriage cite its potential for subverting the family unit or even the United States government. As political and social parties look to history for guidance, it is important to understand the truth behind these ancient taboos and legislature, regardless of one's position in the contemporary debate.

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