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## **Opinion: My fight against homonormativity**

**By Jayson Flores**



By Ben Margot, AP

In the modern life of a homosexual male there are many places in the world where we are unwanted, unwelcome, and hated. As the vocalization against the gay community has grown in the past few years I became more prepared and worried for confrontation about my sexuality, because I am a considerably feminine male. However, one group I would

never have expected to feel unsafe amongst would be other gay males. After coming out of the closet in high school I thought the worst behind me, but my experiences of separation and judgment due to being a feminine male have truly stunned me. I have learned that this is not a rare occurrence and is referred to as a trend known as homonormativity.

Used prominently by Lisa Duggan, professor of social and cultural analysis at the University of Pennsylvania, in the early twenty-first century, homonormativity is a trend that is heavily related to something called heteronormativity. Before one can understand homonormativity, one must understand heteronormativity. Matthew Brim, assistant professor of queer studies in the English department at the College of Staten Island, CUNY (The City University of New York), states that heteronormativity is simply the expectation that, “biology, sexuality, and gender identity line up. A male baby would be expected to like women, look a certain way, and be masculine.”

One might ask how homonormativity and heteronormativity are related. Homonormativity takes the idea of heteronormativity, except it applies to the LGBT community. “Gay people have this pressure to act straight”, Brim states. Only certain kinds of homosexuality are accepted. Brim adds, “If you’re a gay man, and you like men, as a gay man you still have to be masculine. All of the other norms besides who you’re attracted to [biology and gender identity] could still stand. Gay guys who do this are

rewarded.” In essence, the gay men who were born feminine and display characteristics typically assigned to females are considered lesser than other gays because two of their norms (who you’re attracted to and gender identity) are already not lined up. Homonormativity dictates that the most worthy in the LGBT community are those that come the closest to mimicking heteronormative standards. For example, girls would look a certain way (being impossibly thin, having perfect skin, perfect hair, etc.), like men, and be feminine.

“Perhaps the largest problem with homonormativity is that many people see it as winning,” explains Brim. For a long time the members of the LGBT community were outsiders in mainstream society. Now there are some that have a chance to become insiders, but in order to get inside they have to conform to very specific norms, leaving the feminine and “unnatural” gays behind them. It becomes a choice of taking a bittersweet entrance into mainstream society by conforming or staying on the outside. To people who have always been insiders whether it is little Suzy down the road who has always liked boys, likes wearing dresses, and is petite and skinny, or troublemaker John who has always liked girls, likes tees and jeans, and is muscular, it is difficult to see the trends of homonormativity as negative, because heteronormativity has always rewarded those whose biology, sexuality, and gender identity line up.

Many people are unable to recognize the consequences that can come with the trend of homonormativity. J Mason, a black/trans/queer educator, co-director of Soulforce's 2012 Equality Ride, and training coordinator of the Attic Youth Center's Bryson Institute, talked about some of the terrible tragedies caused by homonormativity. "Young people are dependent on others for care, food, housing, services, and survival. [Those considered less worthy by homonormative standards] are more likely to be targeted for physical or sexual assaults." Young boys, for example, are told to things like "butch it up." The basic idea is that these youth will have a difficult time throughout college and throughout life because they are viewed as lesser than others in their community. Dr. Graciela Slesaranky-Poe, an associate professor in Arcadia's School of Education, states, "Heteronormative is the expectation because society considers heterosexuality to be better." She continued, by labeling such an attitude as "Heterosexual Supremacy."

Both homonormativity and heteronormativity are generally uncommon terms. I know when I was at the officer meeting for the gay-straight alliance I could never have comprehended the societal implications of the behavior displayed by the three gay males throughout my time in the club. In retrospect I am grateful for the experience. I was able to learn about something I had never heard of before, and was once again filled with a sense of pride in my sexuality and myself. With my newly

resurrected pride, it is my goal to help spread awareness about homonormativity in an effort to help those who are considered unworthy by homonormative standards. The LGBT community still has a long way to go in mainstream society, and there is still an immense deal of hate out there in the world against us, so we need to stick together, because as a united group we can be stronger in our fight for equality.

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