

Chapter One

The more things change, the more they stay the same (Continuity & Change)

Deeply entrenched into the collective consciousness of Western Society are the perceived norms of conventional heterosexuality and the dissipation of the homosexual subculture, who, by the process of social differentiation are suppressed into a social underclass on the basis of sexual orientation. Heteronormativity is a pervading hegemonic cultural and institutionalised ideological system that naturalises heterosexuality as universal. Heteronormativity is present in our individual and collective psyches, social institutions, cultural practices and knowledge systems. Western mass media has been characterised by a pervasive heteronormative ideology, emerging as an institution of supremacy and influence as well as transforming media representation into a pervasive social issue. The media is a powerful institution of socialisation which enculturates social norms and presents an idealised view of what individuals should conform to, both in the microsphere and the macro world. Thereby, the hybrid nature of society is disregarded, ultimately culminating in the marginalisation and stereotyping of homosexual individuals. The purpose of this chapter is to examine continuity and changes in the detrimental depiction of the homosexual subculture as generated and perpetuated by the mass media's substantially prominent role in social discourse and the propagation of public knowledge.

The terms "heterosexism", "homophobia" and "heterocentrism" originate from the prevalent and persistent oppression against gay people. Heterosexism refers to the "stigmatisation, hatred, demoralisation, discrimination and prohibition of any sexual identity outside of heterosexual identity"¹. Homophobia is a term of social description that refers to the unreasoning fear or hatred of homosexuals and to anti-homosexual beliefs and prejudices. Homophobia incites and maintains heterosexism whilst lying behind discrimination and various categories of oppression. Heterocentrism, or falsely imagining that opposite-sex attraction is foremost and the only principled identity joins the terms heterosexism and homophobia to form a triad of interacting beliefs and behaviours that have sanctioned the prosperity of oppression. Each conception thrives off one another and collectively, assist in exacerbating and perpetuating discrimination as well as prejudice toward gay individuals, ultimately precipitating the marginalisation and stereotyping of the homosexual subculture.

¹ Petrocelli, Ann Marie. *Prejudice to Pride: Moving from homophobia to acceptance*. (National Association of Social Workers [NASW] Press, 2012)