

Interrupting Homonormativity

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EXERCISE

“For queer theorists, it is . . . important that queer lives do not follow the scripts of heteronormative culture; they do not become, in Judith Halberstams’ provocative and compelling term, ‘homonormative’ lives. Such lives would not desire access to comfort; they would maintain their discomfort with all aspects of normative culture in how they live. Ideally, they would not have families, get married, settle down into unthinking coupledness, give birth to and raise children, join neighborhood watch, or pray for the nation in times of war. Each of these acts would ‘support’ the ideals that script such lives as queer, failed and unliveable in the first place. The aspiration to ideals of conduct that is central to the reproduction of heteronormativity has been called, quite understandably, a form of assimilation.” (Sara Ahmed, “Queer Feelings” in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (NY: Routledge, 2004) p. 149)

“Queer lives remain shaped by that which they fail to reproduce. To turn this around, queer lives shape what gets reproduced: in the very failure to reproduce the norms through how they inhabit them, queer lives produce different effects. . . . So the closer that queer subjects get to the spaces defined by heteronormativity the more *potential* there is for a reworking of the heteronormative, partly as the proximity ‘shows’ how the spaces extend some bodies rather than others.” (Sara Ahmed, “Queer Feelings” in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (NY: Routledge, 2004) p. 152)

[1] Discuss and analyze the two quotations from Sara Ahmed and use them to create a definition of ‘progressive politics’ in a diverse world.

[2] Apply that definition to the work that four popular TV shows do: *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *The L Word*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, and *Will and Grace*: first talk the complex ways each show has decided to do queerness and then rank them in the order of their progressiveness, with arguments about the ranking.

[3] Raise the issue too that these shows are predominantly ‘white middle and upper class’ shows and discuss how that does or does not affect claims about the relationship of assimilation or homonormativity and progress.