

Rush to Straightness: Compulsory Heterosexuality in Greek Letter Organizations

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Abstract: The social power observed within collegiate fraternities and sororities has long been a source of interest for social psychologists in observing their organizations' social influences and ability to foster group mentality amongst their members. Limited research, however, has been conducted in analyzing how the powerful socialization of fraternities and sororities can influence the behavior of their queer members and their ability to instill an environment for compulsory heterosexuality within their spheres. This literature review seeks to define and investigate the role of social-collegiate fraternities and sororities in influencing compulsory heterosexuality behavior in their members. This review breaks down the components of compulsory heterosexuality and addresses the ways in which collegiate Greek Letter Organizations (GLOs) adhere to this phenomenon by examining their influence on identity formation, heteronormativity, and sexism and gender expectations. This review also warns against leaving this environment unchallenged by examining the relationship between compulsory heterosexuality, the fostering of toxic masculinity, and the prevalence of rape culture within fraternities.

Introduction

It is commonly known that humans are social creatures. Due to their highly social nature, people often seek to align themselves with a group they can call “home” (Baumeister & Leary, 2007). In undergraduate life, no group presents the possibility of being part of a community as clearly as those found around campus calling each other “brother” and “sister” while wearing matching letters emblazoned across their chests: Greek-letter fraternities and sororities. Collegiate Greek-letter organizations, otherwise known as “Greek life” or “GLOs,” are undergraduate collegiate social fraternities and sororities that are often formed around a common set of values. These organizations

allow students to meet a variety of people, make networking connections, foster school pride, serve communities through philanthropic means, and develop leadership skills. Despite their marketable qualities, GLOs are often recognized for less exemplary reasons. GLOs are infamously known for their reckless party culture (Sharp, 2022), long history of suppressing marginalized identities (Wellemeier, 2020), dangerous hazing practices (Medina, 2021; Pitofsky, 2022), and the frequency of rape and sexual assault cases that occur within fraternities (Guerrero, 2021; Turkewitz, 2019). Due to their unique social environment and group influence, GLOs possess the capability of perpetuating many potentially dangerous dogma, compulsory heterosexuality among them.

While GLOs continuously make headlines for these problematic reasons, the focus of this paper is an exploration of an unsaid sentiment: the fostering of homophobic attitudes and a group expectation of heterosexuality within its members.

Compulsory heterosexuality is the theory that heterosexual relationships and strict gender ideals are expected and subtly enforced in society (Rich, 1980). This commonly upheld social practice influences the way children are raised; often with a strict gender binary, which fails to consider the possibility of queer identity (Kane, 2012). By furthering the narrative that heterosexuality is the norm, compulsory heterosexuality categorizes anything outside as an abnormality. Previous literature examining GLOs have often focused upon their powerful social influence in terms of group dynamics, social conditioning, conformity, intense group mentality, and the enforcement of traditional gender norms (Basow et al., 2007; DeSantis, 2007; Duran & Garcia, 2021; McCreedy & Dahl, 2022). However, few studies have examined how this unique social culture contributes to the perpetuation of compulsory heterosexuality. This literature review will examine the various ways in which social-collegiate fraternities and sororities facilitate an environment for compulsory heterosexuality.

Compulsory Heterosexuality

Compulsory heterosexuality (or *comp het*) is a term originally coined by Adrienne Rich in her article *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* in 1980. Rich defines *comp het* as the theory that heterosexuality is assumed of and enforced upon women in a patriarchal and

heteronormative society. In rejecting a woman's autonomous sexuality, Rich argued that compulsory heterosexuality denies the possibility of lesbian existence. Essentially, heterosexuality is treated as the norm within society and anything outside of heterosexuality is "othered" and, therefore, ostracized. Anything that does not strictly fall into the category of heteronormative, socially assigned gender roles and sexual habits are ostracized (Rich, 1980).

Though Rich focused on its impact on queer women, *comp het* has since been broadened to a general understanding that heterosexuality – along with gender roles and the rigid gender binary – is a socialized tendency that serves in a greater scheme of institutionalized homophobia and transphobia. These heteronormative-cisnormative sentiments are enforced by laws, religious institutions, and popular culture, as well as by social behaviors, such as social desirability and fear of social exclusion. So infused are these power structures in modern culture that it is difficult to realize their effect without the benefit of close reading, which is why this section will closely examine the powers that inform *comp het* in four specific dimensions: gender-and-sexism, heteronormativity, identity formation, and social desirability.

Gender Performance

Gender is commonly thought of as a fixed and essential aspect of oneself set from birth (Kane, 2012). This concept of gender allows for the justification of suppressing or dominating certain genders by reducing them to the essentials of their biology. Rather than viewing gender as an extension of one's biology,

gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler (2020) conceptualizes gender as a performance. Gender performance explains gender as a set of behaviors and practices that are learned from one's society and performed for social acceptance. The performance of traditional gender expectations both normalizes the idea of a strict gender binary (compheh) and the societal power that enforces this social norm (patriarchy). Therefore, compheh is not only understood as a compulsion to fulfill heteronormative expectations but it is also the compulsion to perform traditional gender expectations.

While numerous academic literatures focus on men's negative attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals, Wilkinson (2006) found that women who held anti-lesbian sentiments were also more likely to possess a benevolent sexist attitude regarding men. They believed that men and women are fundamentally different from one another, possessing different yet complementary strengths, and often supported the idea of male domination as men were "naturally" better leaders than women. These women praised men's protection of women in heterosexual relationships and were bothered by lesbian existence as it "endangered the institution of the family" and disrupted the "natural order" of gender differences. Benevolent sexism assumes that women need the protection of men. Therefore, women entering into a heterosexual relationship with a man is not only encouraged but is deemed entirely necessary (Wilkinson, 2006). This position supports Rich's theory that compheh, particularly in women, is inherently a patriarchal power struggle where women are assumed to be subservient to men and are

expected to perform their gender expectations so as to not challenge the patriarchal power.

Heteronormativity and Homophobia

Though gender and sexuality are different social constructs, they are intrinsically connected to each other and feed off of one another to perpetuate compulsory heterosexual norms (Oswald et al., 2005). Compulsory heterosexuality (compheh) establishes heteronormativity as the moral code which society is structured to support and uphold. Heteronormativity layers itself throughout the fabric of life, establishing itself so easily as the norm that its influence becomes a passive affair. This process begins early on; the binary is assigned in the morals of children's storybooks, a soft blue onesie reading "ladies' man," and the critical social-correction of children's behavior (Kane, 2012). Compheh is continuously reinforced by interpersonal relations, such as adults joking amongst themselves that two children of different genders playing together would make a cute couple if romantically involved. Suggesting that children should be focusing on the romantic facet of their lives at such a young age already showcases how deeply ingrained heterosexual romance is within popular culture; even before one develops a concept of sex or sexuality, it is already clear what is deemed appropriate and desirable behavior.

What happens when individuals betray compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity? Herek (1988) found that heterosexual men expressed more hostile sentiments towards LGBT+ people than heterosexual women did, with particular vitriol

towards gay men. The findings from both Herek (1988) and Parrott (2002) indicate that straight men link homosexuality with femininity. As queerness in men is perceived to be feminine, queer men are seen as a divergence from traditional gender norms (Parrott, 2002). Parrott (2002) further found that homophobia is related to men with heightened levels of masculinity; that the more masculine a man is, the more threatened and hostile he is towards femininity (both women and gay men). Heterosexual men often do not harbor homophobic sentiments towards gay men simply due to their sexuality. They do so because of the perceived betrayal in gender performance by gay men from masculinity to femininity, thus violating the norms set by comphet and heteronormativity.

Like heterosexual men, heterosexual women often carry homophobic tendencies against members of their gender who do not subscribe to heteronormativity: lesbians. Wilkinson (2006) found that women holding anti-lesbian sentiments believed that lesbian existence “endangered the institution of the family” and disrupted the “natural order” of gender differences. This furthers the idea that homophobic sentiment is caused by a perceived violation in gender norms, as homophobic heterosexual women clearly linked lesbianism with a failure to fulfill feminine gender expectations (Wilkinson, 2006).

As noted by the previously mentioned studies (Herek, 1988; Parrott, 2002), homophobic sentiments often come from a place of insecurity in one’s own sexual and gender identity. Therefore, the perpetuation of heterosexuality being the only “socially acceptable” sexuality is closely related to

discomfort over one’s relationship with their gender identity and gender performance. Compnet compels people to fulfill heteronormative expectations, even if they are not necessarily interested in them, as it provides the comfort of normalcy. Thus, this desire to maintain conventionality creates the cyclical effect of the compulsion to uphold “tradition”, which in turn reinforces the compnet norm.

Identity Formation

In addition to regulating their emotional well-being while adjusting to a new environment and managing their desire to belong, college students are at a stage in their life where they are attempting to form a sense of identity (Arnett, 2007). One of the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality is able to successfully propagate itself is due to compnet’s influence on identity formation.

Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1950) developed a model for conceptualizing “healthy personality” developmental stages for each major life milestone from infancy to late adulthood. Erikson’s psychosocial development model conceptualizes the “main developmental crisis” for each major life stage during an individual’s “ego development” and also outlines the “basic virtue” this individual will acquire if they manage to successfully resolve their emotional conflict (Erikson, 1950). This model conceives the main psychological distress for adolescents to be identity versus role confusion. This is to say that people between the ages of 12-18 (some giving a larger age range of 12-21) often struggle with a clear sense of identity and belonging.

For many people, going to college will be the first time they are able to leave their formative environment – family, friends, teachers, neighbors, and peers – and begin to learn self-reliance. Students are also able to explore and discover what truly fascinates them; all of these changing factors make college an important period of self-exploration and identity formation (Arnett, 2007). The desire to explore oneself, combined with a quest to find like-minded individuals, drives students into joining various affinity clubs – “Greek Life” being one of the most prominent social groups among them all.

GLOs are successful in attracting new college students as they offer an available social group and a sense of belonging. As new students are looking to be accepted into a social group, they are willing to compromise aspects of themselves in order to fit within the expectations of a social structure; it is more challenging to discover one’s identity than to conform to one already provided (Marcia, 1980). This position can be understood by observing the different ways in which heterosexual members and queer members conceptualize their sexual identities. It is common for people who identify as heterosexual to report having identity foreclosure; meaning that they are not likely to examine and explore different identities, thus choosing to stick to traditional gender roles and expectations. Meanwhile, queer people were more likely to report identity achievement. They have explored themselves and feel completely comfortable with their identity, living as their authentic selves (Konik & Stewart, 2004). As queer people have gone through the experience of challenging social conventions, shedding

their limiting beliefs, and have thus reinvented themselves, their sense of identity is not as moldable in comparison to their straight peers. The rigidity of a queer-individual’s self-identity is a result of needing to create a sense of self that is entirely self-constructed. Since the sexual identity of heterosexuality does not stand in opposition to heteronormative society, straight individuals do not often question if certain gender values or gender-behavioral norms are actually in alignment with their personal values. Instead, they are more likely to accept these gender norms as universal truths. This can make straight individuals more susceptible to taking on rigid gender and sexual-behavioral norms, such as those observed within the comphet culture of GLOs, without much conscious thought.

When finding new recruits to join their organization, GLOs tend to find individuals who not only fit into their organization's culture and values but are also new students. The logic behind this is that the earlier in their undergraduate career a new member is, the more likely they are to stay with the organization and the more financial revenue the organization receives in membership fees. While it is strategically within the GLO’s best interest to find someone who will be loyal to the organization for as long as possible and the ultimate goal may not be to coerce an impressionable individual into joining their group, the end result remains that an ideal GLO candidate is often someone who is socially vulnerable and lacks a strong identity.

Social Desirability

Compulsory heterosexuality compels individuals to conform to heteronormative ideals through a phenomenon known as social desirability. Social desirability, proposed by Allen Edwards (1957), refers to the tendency for individuals to misrepresent themselves, whether knowingly or not, in order to convey a more socially favorable version of themselves. Social desirability can also refer to the way in which people conform to societal expectations in an effort to be viewed as likable by others. This phenomenon has been found to affect the self-reporting of an individual's sexual behavior (King, 2022), as well as an individual's actual sexual behavior (Wesche, 2019). Socially acceptable sexual habits in a comphet society are understood to mean heterosexuality.

Ultimately, social desirability plays into people's need to be accepted and feeds off of their fear of social exclusion. People are often willing to compromise their authentic selves in the name of social acceptance. Thus, a pattern of social rejection has been associated with individuals changing themselves emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally, biologically, and neurologically (DeWall & Bushman, 2011). These studies indicate the fundamental truth of compulsory heterosexuality: the socially-constructed phenomenon of comphet is a standard that is upheld by individuals – even by those who are oppressed by this same structure – rather than an inherent state of being. Factors such as heteronormativity, homophobia, sexism, gender expectations, and social desirability all inform each other to perpetuate a general environment that is exclusionary of any identity expression outside of a cis-gender heterosexual power structure.

Sexism and Gender Expectation in Greek Life

Understanding gender as performance enriches the conversation in understanding the fundamental reasons behind why GLOs operate the way that they do: their organization's behavioral codes are rooted within a comphet performance of gender roles. These gender performances can be observed in the hypermasculine personas of fraternity brothers and in sororities refraining from certain behaviors to appear "lady-like." Sororities never hold their own parties; alcohol is typically prohibited on sorority properties due to drinking and party culture being against "sorority values" or coded as un-womanly behavior (Paquette, 2016). Yet restricting sororities from hosting their own parties denies sorority women the ability to have a space in which they would have control and protection for themselves and their guests. Instead, fraternities hold social power on college campuses, due to both patriarchal reasons and due to their control over their popular parties (Meleedy, 2022). These same parties often facilitate the issues of sexual assault on college campuses committed by fraternity men. Applying the previous research regarding gender and sexuality raises questions regarding what is allowed in fraternities but not sororities.

Much of the homophobic ideology within fraternities is driven by the desire to maintain a hyper-masculine image of their social organization. The group's conceptualization of masculinity is entwined with the expected traditional behaviors associated with masculinity: manly men attract beautiful women (Hall & La France, 2007). Fraternities strongly value traditional

“masculine” attributes and enforce hegemonic masculine behavior onto their members (Ram, 2019). Fraternity men view queerness as fundamentally contrary to masculinity. Due to comphet enforcing a strictly binary conceptualization of the world, anything that is not masculine must be feminine (Parrott, 2022). As queer men cannot be viewed as “masculine” they are seen instead as feminine, and anything “too feminine” is worthy of contempt.

However, an environment does not need to be actively hostile towards LGBT+ individuals in order to perpetuate a queer-exclusive environment. While homonegative sentiments are quite overt in fraternities, sororities are not nearly as direct in their approach. Neumant et al. (2013) found that a majority of straight sorority members report viewing themselves as accepting of their queer members and did not believe that homosexuality was inconsistent with their sorority values. This is not the same, however, as suggesting that sororities are exempt from perpetuating this same heteronormative environment. Though straight sorority women claim to not view queerness as contrary to the organization’s values, the queer members themselves often feel excluded as they do not believe their identity fits within the organization’s mold (Anderson, 2021; Welter, 2012).

While it has been previously indicated that queer individuals often have a stronger sense of self-identity (Konik & Stewart, 2004), they may compromise aspects of their identity in order to fit within the subtle cultural expectations of a social group. Anderson (2021) notes that queer sorority members often engage in “identity brokering” where a queer member

may minimize or even reject aspects of their identity in order to adhere to the comphet norm of gender expectations. The reasoning behind this identity brokering can be understood by analyzing the subtle culture of gender expectations within GLOs.

While most sororities may not be overtly homophobic, heterosexual members may be favored and given special opportunities as a reward for modeling feminine gender performance (Berbary & Johnson, 2012). Sororities often adhere to a certain idealized concept of femininity – hegemonic femininity – which operates in support of hegemonic masculinity. Queer sorority members are often viewed as non-conforming to gender expectations or existing contrary to hegemonic femininity. Sororities may not necessarily discriminate against LGBT+ potential members, however, they hold a preference for candidates that adhere to traditional gender expectations and satisfy the male gaze (Stone & Gorga, 2014; Schippers, 2007). Rewarding members for adhering to gender norms perpetuates an environment in which it is not necessary for direct discrimination to occur in order for one to understand the implicit message: that queerness and non-gender conforming attitudes are not tolerated within GLO culture. Homophobia, along with compulsory heterosexuality, sits upon a bedrock of sexist ideology; one cannot understand the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality infuses itself into everyday life without understanding the implicit power dynamics of gender and sex embedded in society.

Heteronormativity in Greek Life

Traditional values along the gender-sexual behavior axis encompass the heteronormative dilemma that is compounded and reinforced through Greek life. Within the social convention of GLOs, every member is presumed to be straight unless explicitly told otherwise, as is the rule in a heteronormative society. Many LGBT+ identifying members will choose to never disclose their true sexuality or gender identity to their peers. Even without the presence of overt homophobia, queer GLO members choose not to reveal their sexual identity due to a belief that queer identities would not be accepted and do not fit into the social culture of GLOs (Welter, 2012).

As previously noted by Herek (1988) and Parrott (2002) men tend to display overt hostility towards LGBT+ individuals which translates over to homonegative attitudes in fraternities. The hostile attitude held by straight fraternity members towards their gay members is related to the group's desire to preserve the status of their male-male relationships as a brotherhood. Many fraternity members view the ability to attract women as a pivotal aspect of their culture (Hall & La France, 2007). If a pivotal aspect of the group's cultural identity is attracting women, gay men ruin this value. Hostility against LGBT+ individuals by straight fraternity members are related more to their discomfort over diverging from deeply held concepts of sex and gender relations than contempt for the LGBT+ individuals themselves. This struggle between attitudes relating to one's sexuality and conceptions of gender illustrates the inseparable relation

between heteronormativity and gender expectations.

Rape Culture and Toxic Masculinity in Fraternities

To place this review in the context of more tangible, interpersonal consequences rather than broad societal concerns, similar themes relating to compulsory heterosexuality are implicated in the prevalence of sexual assault within fraternities. Within the American cultural imaginings, fraternities have become a symbol of college party culture; where the lights are kept down low, the alcohol flows, and the music can be heard nearby every weekend.

Maintaining this social image matters greatly to fraternities; not only as a place for fun, brotherhood, and philanthropy but to maintain their socially dominant status (Ram, 2019). The intense concern of appearing socially dominant is linked to a problematic ideology known as toxic masculinity: a set of traits, values, and behaviors derived from patriarchal maxims that defines what it means to really be "masculine," often resulting in internal harm and harm to society.

These toxic ideals of masculinity express themselves most clearly through the ways in which men interact with one another. The way fraternity brothers communicate among themselves, particularly about homosexual fraternity brothers, drives homophobic sentiments among its members. Straight fraternity brothers often view their gay members as reducing trust and cohesiveness within the group, impeding their recruitment, and damaging the group's relationship with

sororities – causing them to view their gay members with contempt (Hall & La France, 2007). This contempt for homosexual members has been associated with men who possess a hypermasculine identity, hold sexist beliefs, and are of a more close-minded personality (Barron et al., 2008).

This culture can lend itself to dangerous consequences, demonstrated by the prevalence of sexual assault cases within collegiate fraternities. A study examining the attitudes of rape-supportive sentiments of college students (across gender, race, ethnicity, and GLO status) found that GLO-affiliated men indicated higher rates of believing in rape myths than any other group tested (Canan et al., 2018). Though fraternities are culturally associated with issues relating to sexual assault, they fail to recognize the harm that they perpetuate. Fraternities also fail to address the cultural attitudes in their organizations that incite this group behavior: values such as encouraging social dominance above all else and devaluing anything associated with femininity (Adelman, 2021; Parrott, 2002). Fraternities promote a hyper-masculine image and expect their members to perform these traditional masculine attributes and uphold these values. Being “socially dominant” eventually becomes the most important value to protect; it begins to take precedence even over other people’s safety and autonomy (Ram, 2019; Seabrook, 2018).

Fraternities are the quintessential example of a hyper-masculine environment that holds hostile beliefs, from the inherent gender inferiority of women to the emasculating sexual desire of gay men, which in turn manifests into dangerous acts against people within these marginalized identities. A study linking

homonegative attitudes with right-wing authoritarianism and narcissistic entitlement (Adelman et al., 2021) suggests that men who possess homophobic sentiments are more likely to adhere to a rigid, conservative conception of gender. Not only is negative sentimentality towards queer people a defensive response to the deconstruction of gender norms, but it is also related to the egotistical belief in upholding patriarchal power.

Discussion

This literature review details the factors that constitute compulsory heterosexuality as a societal phenomenon and specifically links each factor to an aspect present within collegiate GLOs. This review aims to demonstrate that GLOs are able to facilitate the formation of a comphet environment due to a rigid adherence to traditional views on sex and gender combined with a uniquely homogenous social environment. It is noteworthy that many fraternities and sororities are actively changing their organization’s official policies and language to be more inclusive of LGBT+ identifying individuals. This acceptance, however, varies largely between individual organizations, specific GLO chapters, and university policies. While some organizations are more accepting of LGBT+ members – many LGBT members even becoming board members of their organization – there still exists a pervasive comphet environment weaved into the culture, often protected under the name of maintaining the organization’s “traditions”.

There are several factors to consider when weighing the applicability of this review. It is important to note that individual fraternities

and sororities vary widely across Greek-letter organizations, specific GLO chapters, and campuses. The ways in which one GLO behaves will depend not only on the local cultural climate but also on location. The behavior observed within a GLO in a large, public land grant university will be completely different than that of a GLO located at a small, private college - although they technically share the same values as an overall organization. However, the most important limitation to consider is the cultural nature of GLOs and how this impacts self-reported research. Most of the research applied to this review specifically concerned fraternities and sororities, meaning that any interviews or anonymous surveys were taken by people who are either currently or were formerly in a GLO. The concern to consider with this is that GLOs possess an organizational culture of loyalty and secrecy among their members - making them challenging subjects to study. Even if the subject is assured anonymity, they are unlikely to be completely truthful in their responses as their concern is not for themselves but rather for the protection of their organization.

While GLOs were the focus of this review, it is imperative to note that the issue of compulsory heterosexuality does not solely exist within collegiate fraternities or sororities. Rather, these organizations serve as a useful sample in understanding the various effects that comphet tendencies can cause in one of the most intense manifestations. Comp het is not an issue that exists solely within GLOs nor are GLOs uniquely awful for displaying similar comp het tendencies; comp het is an issue that plagues society as a whole. GLO members possess a similar psychological make-up to the

average person, only differing in a higher association with grandiose narcissism but nothing more (Kay, 2022). GLO members are just like anyone else, they are no more morally worse than the average person. This same heteronormative expectation can be seen in any highly homogenous group - especially those with an emphasis on preserving "tradition".

Not only are collegiate fraternities and sorority organizations homogenous due to being divided along a strict gender binary - men versus women - but most have a long history of being predominantly white organizations (Hughey, 2010). GLOs have evolved over time as society has changed, however there exist relics of this white supremacist cultural preservation in the modern-day (Hughey, 2010). When academia began accepting students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, social organizations were expected to become more inclusive to reflect this change (Gillion et al., 2019). GLOs, however, sought to find ways to preserve their "tradition." Thus, legacy status became a factor of consideration for recruitment. Possessing a "legacy" status indicates to the organization that you are related to or a descendant of a former GLO member. Since most GLOs only had white members, factoring in the legacy status for acceptance in the group became a way to ensure a predominantly white organization. This combination of legacy skewing preference toward new white members and a lack of economic accessibility due to membership fees results in GLOs remaining predominantly white organizations. This racially homogenous group is likely another factor in the enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality within GLOs as a pressure to conform can be observed in any

racially homogeneous group (Gaither et al., 2018).

While this literature review is focusing on the problematic dogma of compulsory heterosexuality within GLOs, it is important to acknowledge several sociocultural factors as both complicit and white supremacy are by-products of social power and privilege. Research conducted on queer violence and homonegative tendencies has often focused on factors such as personality and motivation when studying these hate crimes, finding that these factors have been understood to be a reaction to the “perceived loss of white male privilege” (Franklin, 2000). In any conversation that concerns social power, white supremacy is an important arm of influence to consider - one that is particularly relevant when considering the racist origins of Greek-Letter organizations. Future research should look into the racial makeup of fraternities and sororities to observe how race influences compulsory heterosexuality.

Much progress has been made within the past two decades in terms of the legal and cultural acceptance of LGBT+ individuals. Some studies within this review, such as the one directed by Herek (1988), were conducted during the peak of the AIDS crisis in the United States. This sexually transmitted disease devastated the American public, especially LGBT+ people, thus an association between the

disease and queer people emerged – which plays a factor for the severity of hostility sentiments towards LGBT+ identifying people. While examples of overt and hostile displays of homophobia are not as common in our modern century as they were in the past, the underlying sentiments that drive homophobia still exist within society. Compulsory heterosexuality examines the unspoken sentiment of queer identity existing as an anomaly to societal expectations. This belief of queerness as an anomaly is still a prevalent issue in the modern political climate of the United States with the resurgence of overtly homophobic legislation such as Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill (Laviertes, 2022).

Transphobic rhetoric and the resurgence of traditional gender expressions is rampant in online spheres, indicating a continued discomfort with queer existence and the belief that queerness exists counter to the dominant culture (Hunte, 2019). Compulsory heterosexuality will not be fully resolved until there is a cultural conversation examining the ways that gender is experienced and performed. As long as the belief and enforcement of rigid gender expressions continue unchallenged in modern culture, compulsory heterosexuality will likely continue to be a problematic reality for queer people.

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