

How has Heteronormativity been challenged by Queer
Theory and how does that impact on LGBT identities?

Emma Doran

Faculty of Fine Art
Department of Print

2016

National College of Art and Design

Department of Print

Faculty of Fine Art

How has Heteronormativity been challenged by Queer Theory and how does that
impact on LGBT identities?

Emma Doran

Submitted to the Faculty of Visual Culture in Candidacy for the Degree of BA(Hons) in
Fine Art and History of Art (Joint Course)


2016

i

National College of Art and Design

Faculty of Visual Culture

I declare that the thesis is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed: 

Date: 11-1-16

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	p.4
Introduction	p.5
Chapter 1: Identity, Queer Theory and Heteronormativity – What are they?	p.8
Chapter 2: Challenges to identity caused by contributions from Heteronormativity and Queer Theory	p.13
Chapter 3: Keith Haring's Expression of Identity – how it relates to Queer Theory and Heteronormativity.	p.19
Conclusion	p.24
Bibliography	p.27

List of Illustrations

Figure 1 Keith Haring, Untitled, 1979, drawing Chalk on Paper, 53 ½ inches 136 x 185cm, New York.....21

Figure 2 Keith Haring, Untitled, 1980, drawing Sumi ink on Bristol Board, 20 x 26 inches 51 x 66.5 cm, New York.....22

Introduction.

My aim for this research project is to show how heteronormativity has been challenged by queer theory and how this has effected the identity development of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. I will argue that queer theory acted as the main catalyst for the development of homosexuality and how it changed the opinion that heteronormativity was the only 'norm'. I will discuss in great detail stages a homosexual goes through in accepting full recognition of who they really identify as. There are, of course, many other aspects of identity development that have been reopened by queer theory in order to stray from the confines of a heteronormative structure. For example, lesbian women's experiences as nurses (Duffy, 2010, p. 231-241), socialisation (Kitzinger, 2005, p.477-498) and even artistic freedom focusing on one main artist, Keith Haring (Bain, 2005, p.25-46). These are some of the areas which have been investigated in terms of non-normative identity construction. It will become evident through the in-depth research from literature books and articles that for us to develop our own individual identities we must be allowed to express who we are and who we want.

In Chapter one, I will discuss the term identity and how it is important for our development as individuals in many aspects of our life. Weeks (2010, p.88-89) suggests that our identity plays a major role in our everyday lives. It's what we have in common with others and what makes us different from some. Our identity gives us a sense of personal and social belonging. Heteronormativity as suggested by Kitzinger (2005, p. 477-498) relates to sex and gender.

Assuming that there are only two sexes that is seen as normal. These assumptions lead to people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender to be seen as abnormal and not a part of society. I will focus on Duffys (2010, p.231-241) article about lesbian nurses in the workplace explaining the effects it can have if you are not a heterosexual woman. I will highlight through this article how our identity is important for our development and by hiding your sexuality you feel trapped within the heteronormative structures that have been firmly placed on society. Dilley (1999, p.457-472) states that queer theory is seen as what is normal and abnormal among men and women and questioning why homosexuality is placed outside of heteronormativity. With the use of Dilley's (1999, p.457 -472) article on queer theory: under construction and the well-known theorist Michel Foucault I will define the term queer theory and highlight how queer theory rejects and challenges that heteronormativity is the only means of sexuality.

In Chapter 2, I will show how queer theory has challenged the assumptions of heteronormativity, that heterosexual married couples with biological children are not the only 'norm'. For example, the legalisation of gay marriage in Ireland in 2015 has begun to allow the LGBT community to integrate more fully into a wider social community, and this could have a significant impact on the development of a positive identity for those individuals, previously isolated by the normalisation of heterosexuality. Bilodeau and Renn (2005, p.25-39) discussed identity development stages a homosexual individual goes through to accept full recognition of one self as a homosexual. Through the example of same-sex marriage and identity development stages, it will be made

clear how queer theory has challenged the concept of heteronormativity, and the ways, in which, this has affected the development of identities among homosexual individuals.

In chapter 3, I will discuss how artistic expression as a homosexual individual is important for our identity development and by creating certain works of art it breaks the norms of heteronormativity. As far back as the Renaissance Saslow (1989, p.90-105) discusses how homosexuality has been shown through the use of artwork. Lampela (2000, p.113 – 112) discussed sexual identity in the art room proving that the acknowledgement of gay and lesbian identities reveals to have a positive effect on both homosexual and heterosexual students. Bain (2005, p.25-46) suggest that our ability to create works of art can challenge oneself and inspire others through our social and personal interactions. All this research leads on to the artist Keith Haring and his expression of his identity within his artwork and how it relates to queer theory and heterosexuality. Art is a major part of Haring's identity. The artists expresses how heteronormativity confines individuality in his work. Haring shows the viewers something different, and allows us to see how heteronormativity works, by reflecting on our own, shocked reactions. By doing this the artist suggests that we should break free from the constraints of heteronormativity, and be ourselves whether that be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Chapter one

Identity is who we are as individuals and even though nobody is born with an immediate identity it's a major part of our everyday lives. Identity is about what makes us different from others in terms of our personal feelings, political and social views as well as race, gender, class, religion and sexuality which are all important aspects that help to shape and form our identity (Rutherford, 1998, p.88-89). These aspects don't define our identity however they are processes that every individual encounters throughout their lifetime. Raja (1996, p.28-29) implied that our identity can be seen from the internal and the external. The internal represents how we feel about ourselves as an individual and the aspects that we feel are important to us. The external deals with how the individual is seen from the social point of view and how social interactions with others helps with our identity development (Raja, 1996, p. 28 -29). From this it can be said that identity is a process and by engaging with this process we express who we want to be, what our beliefs are leading to an unfortunate creation of conflict between other individuals. A major conflict is between the heterosexual and the homosexual. Once people began identifying as what was not seen as the 'norm' in terms of sexuality such as, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender the idea of individuality changed. The freedom of expression which is a major part of our identity development became a political debate. If you were in any way different from the heterosexual man or woman then you had to fight for your identity (Rutherford, 1998, p. 88-89). The homosexual should be seen as playing a social role in society rather than being ridiculed and questioned about the choices they make as individuals (Weeks, 2000, p.56). Just like heterosexuals, homosexuals too, have their own identity. Homosexuality is a form of existence. It has been suggested by Raja (1996, p.14-15) that an individual's identity

plays the role of a narrative. To tell a personal life story to another person is like opening a book, reading the first page of your life. And a story told by a gay man or lesbian woman would not fit into a heteronormative narrative.

The term heteronormativity relates to sex and gender and assumes that there are only two sexes a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman. Heteronormativity is seen as the only 'norm' and is incorporated in what people do then in what they believe conveying it as normal and unproblematic (Kitzinger, 2005, p.478). Kitzinger (2005, p. 478) suggests that what people believe to be the norm is the nuclear heterosexual family which entails a married couple with their biological children. If you are not married to the opposite sex and raise a child that is not biologically related to you then you would be placed outside the heteronormative lifestyle. If you were to witness a man and a woman taking a trolley with food and a baby in it nobody would question the couples actions because this couple fits in to the norm that leads them to be seen that way (Kitzinger, 2005 p.479). If the roles were reversed and it was a gay couple who took the trolley an immediate problem would occur, questions would be asked. Through these basic assumptions heterosexual people reflect privileges and oppressions of non-heterosexual people who are denied social institutions, such as family life (Kitzinger, 2005, p.479). Heteronormativity has disregarded the notion that homosexuality is also a major part of society. However heteronormativity was no longer the only means of sex and gender once people began identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Areas such as, family life, marriage, artistic expression and the workplace can evoke a strong sense that heteronormativity is still alive and this sort of attitude can lead to homosexuality being hidden amongst family, friends, peers or co-workers. This then

leads to certain gay men and lesbian women to keep their identity private rather than public for fear of being targeted or treated differently.

Work is an important part of everybody's identity and through the engagement of others the individual can understand him or herself. It provides an individual with the sense of who they are in society. A study was made on the experiences and difficulties lesbian nurses faced in a heteronormative culture of hospitals around Ireland (Duffy, 2010, p. 231). For women who identified as lesbian in the workplace had the tough decision whether to keep their sexuality private within work considering the effects it could have on herself and the others she encountered. Duffy (2010, p.232) suggested that lesbianism is visible in nursing through the gossip and stereotypes which leads to many lesbian nurses closeting themselves for fear of discrimination. For lesbian nurses to admit their true identity in the workplace requires trust but if trust is not evident lesbian women pose as heterosexuals. Duffy (2010, p.233) describes this as lesbians living a 'dual-identity', acting in both heterosexual and lesbian worlds. Living a double life between working as a nurse and socially connecting with other lesbian women can have an effect on their identity development. Effects such as, shame for identifying as a lesbian woman in the workplace and a sense of guilt for not being honest to yourself and the others you surround yourself with (Duffy, 2010, p.232). Thus through the stereotyping and jokes made within the workplace enables the lesbian nurse to imagine the judgment passed by the others pushing oneself further into the closet dragging their identity with them. The voice of one lesbian nurse was discussed in this study. One key element that she found hard to overcome was break-time chatter amongst fellow nurses. Family life for colleagues was a major topic of discussion where the norms and values

of heterosexual families were discussed ignoring other family structures such as, homosexual men and lesbian women (Duffy, 2012, p. 237). This caused a barrier between the heterosexual nurse and the lesbian nurse. She found herself disengaging with the conversations and if ever asked about heterosexual categories she would change the subject and successfully keep her lesbianism a secret (Duffy, 2010, p.238). By keeping her identity hidden she remains the constant listener for such repetitive conversations between fellow nurses. The outcome of this study highlights how identity is important for our development and for it to develop we need to engage with others. By hiding your sexuality you feel different through the heteronormativity of conversations amongst nurses.

Spargo (1999, p.9) suggests that queer culture associates itself with sex and gender just like heteronormativity. The only difference between the two is the sexual desires expressed by an individual who identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is for the same sex. Spargo (1999, p.8-9) has proposed that "Queer theory has been studied through a range of literary readings, films and imagery of same-sex desires also analysing and studying the social and political relationships within homosexuality". Queer theory examines what is seen as normal and abnormal among men and women questioning why homosexuality is situated outside the 'norm' (Dilley, 1999, p.469). The word queer is seen as any form of expression that is non heterosexual such as, gay man or lesbian woman (Dilley, 1999, p. 457). Queer is also a term used for discrimination against people who do not identify as heterosexuals (Kitzinger, 2005, p.477). Many heterosexuals who disagreed with the sexuality of people who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender were ridiculed and deemed abnormal. It has been proposed by

Dilley (1999, p. 458), the term 'queer' has been described as challenging typical interpretations of sexual identity by breaking down traditional norms that have maintained them. Spargo (1999, p.7) suggest that as far back as 1970 the work of literary theorists such as, Michel Foucault exposed that identities did not just mean a heterosexual man and woman. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender identities were a means of sexuality too. In the sense that sexuality didn't just relate to a heterosexual man and woman anymore. Sexuality is about our inner most desires and it is a natural feature of our identity. This became unnatural in certain areas when people began identifying as homosexual. The truth was revealed through a term used by Michel Foucault known as 'scientia sexualis' (Spargo, 1999, p.14). 'Scientia Sexualis' involved methods such as, psychoanalysis, medical practices and confessions. These were ways of getting men, women, boys and girls to admit their desires for the same sex. Similar to Raja (1996, p.14-15) who suggests that an individual's identity plays the role of a narrative, Foucault too argued that sexuality shouldn't be judged and that our sexuality is produced through the narratives we tell about our desires for the same-sex (Spargo, 1999, p.16). Foucault insisted that homosexuality be viewed as something you have always known rather than a discovery. Our sexual orientation is a major part of our identity. It has always been there and it is the root to all of our actions (Spargo, 1999, p. 20). Queer theory has placed itself outside the borders of normality excluding itself from heteronormativity. It rejects and challenges the view that heteronormativity is the only means of sexuality. These challenges made by queer theory represents a change from what is perceived as the norm between heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Chapter Two

As mentioned in the previous chapter homosexuality is seen as an occurring problem, characterizing certain people in a way that birthplace or deformity might characterize them (Weeks, 2000, p.55-56). Weeks (2000, p.55-56) suggests that if you were to look at homosexuality as a condition or an illness then you would either have it or not, leading to distinctions between the heterosexual and homosexual. Based on the concept of heteronormativity, a gay man or lesbian woman would not fit into the confines of a 'normal' society (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 478). These individuals are seen as abnormal, as they do not follow the nuclear construction of heterosexual families (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 478). A man or woman that identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender shouldn't have to hide their personal desires and feelings for the same sex. If homosexuality is seen as a condition, and if this condition was an invention of history, so, too, was heterosexuality. Homosexuality and heterosexuality should both be located within society. The choices an individual makes about their sexual orientation should not define who they are as a person. One cannot exist without the other.

Spargo (1999, p.7-8) suggests that heteronormativity has been heavily challenged by queer theorists, such as Michel Foucault, analysing and questioning heterosexuality's role in society providing theoretical information that it is not the only norm. The philosopher, historian and activist, Michel Foucault was one of many queer theorists who discussed sexuality in great detail opening up a new take on sexuality as a "category of knowledge rather than as a discovered identity" (Spargo, 1999, p.7).

The choices we make and the people we choose to surround ourselves with help to shape and form our identity on both a personal and social scale. Due to people doing what they want and being with who they want has led to form a group of individuals who do not fall into the heteronormative category, known as 'queers'. It has been suggested by Spargo (1999, p. 14 – 16) that queer theory began to challenge heteronormativity leading to an increase in the incorporation of 'queers' into a variety of studies, disciplines and social institutions. With the help of theory and activism the gay community made efforts to make their voices be heard. The LGBT individuals formed a resistance against the rules of heteronormativity creating a major life changing event that took place in Ireland in the year 2015. The legalisation of marriage for homosexual couples in Ireland in 2015 has begun to allow the LGBT community to integrate more fully into the wider social community, and this could have a significant impact on the development of a positive identity for those individuals, previously isolated by the normalisation of heterosexuality (Sheehan and Healy, 2015, p.1).

There have been a number of different views regarding the development of identity as a homosexual. An article on the analysis of the development of LGBT identities discussed stages an individual who identified as non-heterosexual went through to admit full recognition of their sexual orientation (Bilodeau and Renn, 2005, p.25). It has been suggested by Bilodeau and Renn (2005, p.26) that a number of non-heterosexuals move through a series of homosexual identity development stages during their teenage years. The homosexual individuals begin with a stage which involves

using a number of defence mechanisms to block out any feelings of sexual desire for the same sex. Due to the amount of energy which is consumed during this initial stage, it can have negative impacts on the mental health of a homosexual individual. They feel that the desire they have for the same-sex is unnatural and immediately feel that there is something wrong with them. However the next stage involves the gradual acceptance and recognition of same-sex desire, which leads to both emotional and behavioural exploration of homosexuality. This stage allows the individual to gain a sense of normality regarding their sexual orientation gaining the realisation that what they feel and want is completely normal. The sense of identity as a homosexual man or lesbian woman is viewed as a positive aspect of self (Bilodeau and Renn, 2005, p.26). Bilodeau and Renn (2005,p.27) have suggested that the end of a first relationship can lead to an identity crisis in which negative feelings about being homosexual may return. Following this, however, the individual will return to acceptance and a sense of identity once again, as a homosexual man or woman. For people who identify as transgender experience extreme identity problems with biological sex assignment and the social exception for gender expression as male or female (Bilodeau and Renn, 2005, p. 29). They experience stages such as, feelings of immediate discomfort about their assigned gender. This leads to a difficulty in participating in social, occupational or other areas of functioning in society causing mental health issues such as, depression, anxiety, stress or suicidal thoughts. (Bilodeau and Renn, 2005, p.30). It is not until they can be who they want that acceptance of themselves becomes evident. It could be inferred, based on the theoretical propositions made by Bilodeau and Renn (2005, p.25-36) that heteronormativity disrupts the development of a homosexual identity, as a heteronormative society leaves little room for either recognition of

homosexual desires, or for experimentation surrounding those desires. As a result, an inability to create or accept homosexuality as an aspect of personal identity is formed. Homosexual individuals have been therefore, unable to develop relationships with the same sex, a key element of identity formation. This analysis on the identity development of LGBT individuals is just one main example of how Queer theory has defied and challenged heteronormative assumptions, in the hope of creating equality among heterosexuals and homosexuals. Without the discovery of queer theory, heteronormativity would not have been so heavily challenged as to what is seen as normal and abnormal among individuals.

It has been suggested by Kitzinger (2005, p.477) that for the past thirty years, the LGBT community have been subjected and oppressed by forms of execution, psychiatric treatment, discrimination, hate crimes, to the everyday problems of gay jokes made by heterosexuals. Once again queer theory has challenged this construction, suggesting that there is more than just heterosexual relationships in existence, such as same-sex relationships. These relationships between the same sexes have challenged many of the legal, religious and medical assumptions which claimed that a 'normal' life was one of a heterosexual nature only. Queer theory has led to an in-depth investigation into homosexual individuals and their relationships, asserting that these, too, should be considered as part of the norm. As was previously mentioned, relationships are one of the key areas, in which, an individual learns to develop part of their identity (Kitzinger, 2005, p.477-479). Thus, societal acceptance of homosexual

relationships, according to the arguments made by queer theorists, such as Michel Foucault and the stage models of identity development (Bilodeau and Renn, 2005, p25) can be suggested to have increased the ability of homosexual individuals to engage in a more positive identity construction process. In recent years, the effect and the success that queer theorists have had in increasing acceptance of 'other' relationships has become increasingly more obvious. The referendum which was recently passed in Ireland with regard to the legalisation of marriage between same-sex couples highlighted the way, in which, society has begun to acknowledge the validity of these relationships. This majority vote has promised a future with the potential for a different way of being for the young and future generation of the LGBT community (Sheehan and Healy, 2015, p.1). Even though the majority vote means marriage equality there is a continuing stigma attached to non-heterosexual identities. However, it is clear from the passing of this referendum that the result of queer theory and activism is becoming increasingly more successful in normalising homosexual identity and homosexual relationships within our society.

Historically, heteronormativity confined the types of relationships which were accepted by society, thus restricting their influence on identity. However, it was proposed by Sheehan and Healy (2015, p.1) that when the gay marriage vote was passed and legalised a clear evidence of freedom was shown by putting into the constitution that 'Marriage may be contracted with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex'. This meant that people who identified as non-heterosexual would no longer be isolated from the restrictions that heteronormativity had put in place and branded not

normal for who they chose to love. Even though more has to be done a sense of belonging and acceptance is a lot clearer in today's society. The gay marriage referendum in Ireland was a turning point allowing LGBT individuals to fulfil their true potential in all aspects of life (Sheehan and Healy, 2015, P.1).

Without the social changes that occurred which was driven by queer theory in opposition to heteronormativity, the views of society regarding what is normal and not would not have expanded so greatly. This expansion of the 'norms' has developed the concept of relationships and broadened the societal definitions of the types of relationships that exist. Relationships within the workplace and between individuals are just two examples out of many others that highlight the way, in which, areas of identity have been shaped by heteronormativity, but then later challenged by the development of queer theory. There are, of course, many other aspects of identity development that have been re-opened by queer theory in order to stray from the confines of a heteronormative structure. It has become increasingly clear through more current research that queer theory has succeeded in challenging the assumptions of heteronormativity. As a result, it has greatly increased the ability of homosexual individuals to develop their own identities through work, social relationships and artistic creativity more successfully.

Chapter Three

The expression of homosexuality within the art world dates as far back as the Renaissance period (Saslow, 1989, p.90). Through creativity and self-expression the inner most desires of homosexual men and lesbian women was portrayed through some artworks. Similar to our identity development, artistic identity can also be seen from the internal and the external. According to Saslow (1989, p.100-101) on a personal level artists who express homosexual imagery in their artwork have a tendency to bond with people who share the same sexual desires as the artist themselves. If the homosexual artwork were to be viewed by an outsider that being a heterosexual man or woman they would not share the same views and admiration for the piece. Lampela (2000, p.113) discussed sexual identity in the art room stating that many third level teachers acknowledge gay and lesbian identities revealing it to have a positive effect on both homosexual and heterosexual students. To gather a more clear and concise understanding of certain artists such as, Keith Haring the discussions of sexual identities are important within the art world arguing that the exclusion of an artist's sexual identity is depriving students of a complete education (Lampel, 2000, p.115). By doing so, heteronormativity is no longer the means of sexual identity. For Haring the activity of his artwork is central to understanding how he chooses to identify himself. Be that as a homosexual man or an expressive artist. Bain (2005, p.27) proposes that creativity through work has the ability to challenge oneself and inspire others through our social and personal interactions. 'Many of us spend most of our working hours engaged in it. It absorbs our energies and preoccupies our thoughts. It involves us in close relations with other people and gives us our sense of identity' (Bain, 2005, p.26-27). It is evident that for one's self to break free from the heteronormative restraints that have been

pushed on us we must be true to ourselves and express our inner most desires be that through discussing sexual identity within an art class or expressing our sexual identity through the creativity of our work.

Keith Haring's artwork has been described as an expression of optimism representing homosexuality as a positive and normal aspect of oneself (Phillip, 2007, p.1). Even though some homoerotic imagery of Haring's is quite pessimistic and sexuality explicit the artist still succeeds in showing the restraints that society puts on people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. By creating both optimistic and pessimistic views on homosexuality the artist is challenging the heteronormative rules that are so firmly set in place. Both politically and socially Haring tackled homosexuality. According to Phillips (2007.p.1) back in the 1980's which would have been Haring's period the view on homosexuality was that of a disease and if you had it then you were unwell however Haring tried to change this message portraying homosexuality in a more positive light. He tackled the problems homosexuals faced with great passion and dedication, and created works of art that showed intense feelings of anger, frustration, freedom, love and humanity.

Haring understood how to combine his unique, creative personality and his explosive art into every concept he used (Kolossa and Haring, 2010, p.7). It was Haring's true belief that the power and ability of art could change the pessimistic views set on the world that gave him such recognition and admiration for the work he had created for

his time (Kolossa and Haring, 2010, p.8). Two main pieces by Haring entitled '*Untitled, 1979*' and '*Untitled, 1980*' acted as a stimulus for one of his main themes, sexuality. It is also clear from these two works of art the close connection he has for homosexuality and expressing who you want to be. The first piece '*Untitled, 1979*' was drawn with chalk on a sheet of graph paper (Kolossa and Haring, 2010, p.8). A close inspection of the drawing reveals tiny symbols that represent the penis. The tiny collection of penises is Haring's way of expressing his love for the same-sex. Thus by creating this piece, Haring conveys to the viewers that this is how he feels showing that he has no problem expressing his non-heterosexuality to anyone who comes in contact with this meaningful piece of artwork. Maybe not purposely but Haring has set aside the notion that heteronormativity is the only norm and incorporates the knowledge of 'queer' into this piece. It is through artistic practice and cultural expression that heteronormativity was challenged by artists such as, Haring who identified as homosexual.

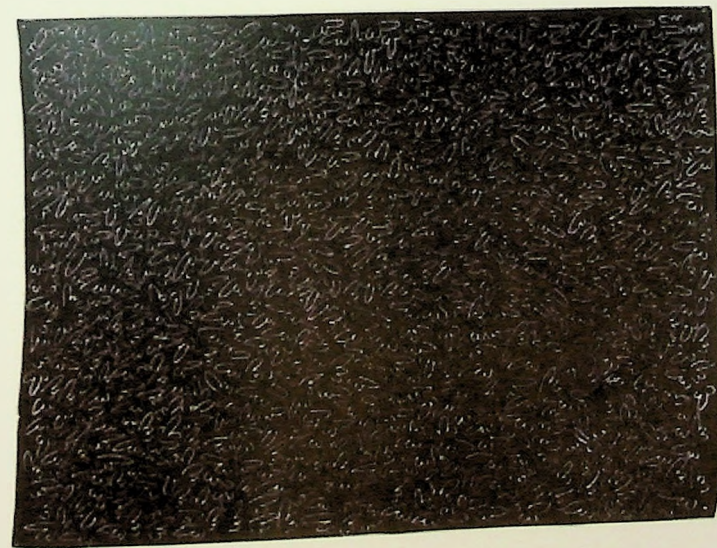


Fig 1. '*Untitled, 1979*', Keith Haring, Courtesy Deitch Projects, New York.

The final piece, 'Untitled, 1980' was also a drawing using sumi ink on a Bristol board (Kolossa and Haring, 2010, p.16). This piece comes shortly after 'Untitled, 1979'. It is clear from the short gap between the two pieces created by Haring that he focused a lot on expressing freedom of being yourself within his artwork. 'Untitled, 1980' is a black and white image with three main figures and a UFO hovering above them (Kolossa and Haring, 2010, p.16). According to Kolossa and Haring (2010, p.16) the UFO shoots out rays of energy and power giving the people it comes in contact with a special strength allowing them to be free and to do as they please. In this image Haring has created a world free of judgement and oppression. In this world freedom of expression is allowed, a world where who you are, no matter how different, is not going to be judged by anyone. Yet again another clear example of how Haring broke free from heteronormativity and expressed what he felt rather than being told what is right and wrong when it comes to sexuality.



Fig.2 'Untitled, 1980', Keith Haring, New York

Haring incorporated social and political aspects in *Untitled, 1979* and *Untitled 1980*. The social aspect refers to an ability to reaching out to a world that struggles with their sexuality and gender. The political refers to the disapproval from others who identify as heterosexual due to the expression of individuality, whether that includes being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Similar to how heteronormativity stated that heterosexuality is the only form of sexuality and how queer theory aims to change that view stating that homosexuality is too a form of sexuality. By Haring fusing both the social and political world as well as his own personal world he creates a world that is outspoken and very intimate speaking to everybody on all levels of gender and identity. Kolossa and Haring (2010, p.8) states that Keith Haring died of AIDS on February 16th, 1990 at just the age of 31 leaving behind his creativity for creating pieces of artwork that engaged with real world issues focusing mainly on optimism and pessimism that was felt by the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. Keith Haring broke free from the oppression of heteronormativity and expressed his sexual identity through his artwork. Haring steps outside the restrictions of heteronormativity expressing individuality in his work. The artist shows the viewers something different, and allows us to see how heteronormativity works, by reflecting on our own, shocked reactions. The artist created works of art that spoke to both the heterosexual and homosexual individuals. Without queer theory, artists such as, Keith Haring would not have succeeded so greatly in portraying what he wanted in his own artwork.

Conclusion

In summary heteronormativity has been challenged in many ways regarding queer theory and the activism of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Heteronormativity is the assumption that a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman is the only means of sexuality. Through these basic assumptions people who identify as heterosexual reflect privileges such as, family life and marriage whereas people who identify as homosexual are denied such social institutions (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 479). Queer theory questions why homosexuality is placed outside heteronormativity with theorists such as, Michel Foucault stating that homosexuality is too a means of sexuality. Identity is what shapes and forms oneself and for our identity to be fully developed our sexual identity needs to be acknowledged no matter what our sexual orientation is. Raja (1996, p.28-29) suggests that who we are as individuals is seen from a personal and social point of view. Personal being how we feel about ourselves and what is important to us and social being the people we surround ourselves with. And identifying as something other than heterosexual such as, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender meant you had to fight for your identity (Rutherford, 1998, p.88-89). An example of how heteronormativity is still so strongly active in this day and age is the study that was made on the experience and difficulties lesbian nurses faced in a heteronormative culture of hospitals around Ireland (Duffy, 2010, p. 231). One of the main problems that occurred daily was the amount of heteronormative conversations between nurses. The voice of one lesbian nurse found it increasingly difficult to partake due to identifying as a lesbian and not sharing the same interests such as family life with the fellow nurses. This study clearly highlights that for your identity to fully develop you need to be honest about who you really are. And through the

heteronormativity of conversations amongst nurses and many heterosexual nurses not acknowledging that homosexuality is too a major role in society pushes the lesbian nurse further into the closet.

Queer theory began to challenge heteronormativity when theorists such as, Michel Foucault provided theoretical information that it is not the only norm. Unfortunately in many ways heteronormativity has disrupted the development of a homosexual's identity. A clear example of this is the article on the analysis of the development of LGBT identities. Bilodeau and Renn (2005, p25-39) suggests that for a homosexual individual to admit their true feelings they go through a number of stages. These stages include denial and feelings of disgust towards themselves and then they come to acceptance of themselves. The following stages rely on relationships and interactions with the same-sex. Without the discovery of homosexual identities and the stages they encountered to admit full recognition, heteronormativity would not have been challenged as to what is seen as normal and abnormal between sexes. Queer theory succeeded in many ways of proving that heterosexuality is not the only form of sexual identity. As well as the artist Keith Haring who suggests that we should break free from the constraints of heteronormativity and be ourselves, be homosexual, be unique, be exactly who we are and not conform to the 'norm' that has been heavily impacted on society. Haring created works of art that dealt with homosexual individuals and homosexual relationships similar to queer theory that opened up a whole new take on homosexuality and their relationships, stating that homosexual relationships should be seen as part of the norm.

With the help of queer theorists such as, Michel Foucault, LGBT activism and stage models such as Bilodeau and Renn (2005, p.25 – 39) LGBT identity development models have increased the ability for a homosexual to engage in a more positive identity process of oneself. The passing of the gay marriage referendum vote in Ireland in 2015 was a clear sign that equality among the LGBT community was more evident. Queer theory and the activism of the LGBT community had made it more possible in normalising homosexual identities and homosexual relationships within our society. Heteronormativity has had a hold over society for a long time stating what is normal between men and women and what is not. It was with the help of queer theory proving that homosexuality is too a form of existence and should be seen as normal and constantly questioning why homosexuality is situated outside heteronormativity that made people believe that homosexuality belongs in society. Activism of the LGBT community has helped a great deal in pushing us further up the ladder of what is seen as normal and abnormal. Today in Ireland in the 21st century lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are freed from the restrictions that heteronormativity had put in place. As a result, the knowledge of queer theory and the activism of the LGBT community has increased the ability of homosexual individuals to develop their own identities through work, social relationships and artistic creativity more successfully.

Bibliography

Bain, A. (2005) 'Constructing an Artistic Identity', *Work, Employment & Society*, 19(1).

Bilodeau, B.L., and Renn, K.A. (2005) *Analysis of LGBT Identity Development Models and Implications for Practice*. New Directions for Student Services, 2005 (111), 25-39.

Dilley, P. (1999) 'Queer theory: under construction', *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 12(5), 457-472

Duffy, M. (2010) 'Diversity in the Workplace – Lesbian Women's Experiences as Nurses', *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, 10(3), 231-241.

Kitzinger, C. (2005) 'Heteronormativity in Action: Reproducing the Heterosexual Nuclear Family in After-hours Medical Call's', *Social Problems*, 52(4), 477-498.

Kolossa, A. and Haring, K. (2004) *Haring*. America: Taschen.

Lampela, L. (2000) Sexuality in the art room, *real-world readings in art education: Things your professor never told you*, 113-122

Phillips, N.E. (2007) *The Radiant (Christ) Child*. *American Art*, 21(3), 54-73.

Raja, T. (ed)., 1996 *Identity, culture and the postmodern world*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

Rutherford, J. (ed). (1998) *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart

Saslow, J.M, (1989) Homosexuality in the Renaissance: Behaviour, Identity, and Artistic Expression. *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, 90-105

Sheehan, B., Healy, G. (2015) *Yes Equality: Truly a nation of equals*. Available at: <http://www.yesequality.ie/> [Accessed 15th December, 2015]

Spargo, T. (1999) *Foucault and Queer Theory*. Uk: Trumpington.

Weeks, J. (2000) *Making Sexual History*. Cambridge: Polity Press.