

Selected Theoretical Foundations of The Current Form of Homonegativity and Transnegativity

Vybraná teoretická východiska současné podoby homonegativity a transnegativity

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Abstract:

This contribution explores homonegativity and transnegativity, highlighting ongoing prejudice against LGBT+ people. Despite advancements in human rights, negative attitudes towards non-heterosexual orientations and gender nonconformity persist, impacting individuals and society. Homonegativity targets not only gays and lesbians but also other queer individuals and allies. Similarly, transnegativity affects not only those with non-cisgender identities. The article examines how heteronormativity and cisnormativity reinforce these biases and discusses their harmful effects, including mental health challenges, societal exclusion, and the restrictive impact of gender stereotypes.

Keywords:


Homonegativity; transnegativity; heteronormativity; cisnormativity

Abstrakt:

Tento příspěvek se zabývá koncepty homonegativity a transnegativity a upozorňuje na přetrvávající předsudky vůči LGBT+ osobám. Navzdory pokroku v oblasti lidských práv přetrvávají ve společnosti negativní postoje vůči osobám s neheterosexuální orientací a genderově nonkonformním osobám, což má dopad na jednotlivce i společnost. Homonegativita zasahuje nejen gaye a lesby, ale i další queer jedince a podporovatele jejich práv. Podobně transnegativita postihuje nejen osoby s jinou než cisgender identitou. Článek zkoumá, jak heteronormativita a cisnormativita posilují a podmiňují tyto předsudky, a rozebírá jejich škodlivé dopady, včetně problémů v oblasti duševního zdraví, společenského vyloučení a omezujícího vlivu genderových stereotypů.

Klíčová slova:

Homonegativita; transnegativita; heteronormativita; cisnormativita

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Introduction

Homonegativity and transnegativity, two concepts that reflect persistent societal prejudices against people from the LGBT+ community, are still deeply rooted in mainstream approaches to sexuality and gender identity today. Despite significant progress in the areas of human rights and equality, prejudice and negative attitudes towards people with minority sexual orientation or gender identity continue to affect their lives, both at an individual and institutional level. So what is the current shape of homonegativity and transnegativity? And where do they come from?

In general, it is known that non-heterosexual orientations and various deviations from the perception and experience of the female-male gender divide based on bodily qualities have appeared in various forms in all cultures known to us. Some have found it easier to accept these deviations from the currently perceived norm, others more difficult, and in many they have been and continue to be severely sanctioned. In the European context, we are currently seeing more respect... or rather "lenient" tolerance in the legislative sphere, but this is not the rule either. In the field of real interpersonal relations, then, the situation is usually even further away from respect.

Let us first look at the phenomena of homonegativity and transnegativity themselves, by describing their possible victims, manifestations and impacts, and their connection to heteronormative and cisnormative approaches.

Homonegativity or homophobia?

A better known and more familiar term than homonegativity is homophobia. It can be defined as hostile attitudes and negative prejudices towards people with non-heterosexual preferences (Čechová & Hajdíková, 2016, p. 6). The reason why, for example, Pitoňák prefers the term homonegativity (binegativity, transnegativity) is that it is more appropriate from a professional point of view. The suffix "-phobia" suggests the presence of fear, which causes inaccuracy (Pitoňák, 2022). In fact, homonegativity and transnegativity are more likely to be associated with an attitude, whose components do include an emotional component, but logically this alone is not the only determinant.

Possible victims of homonegativity: not just gays and lesbians

The victims of homonegativity, although the name would suggest it, are not only gays and lesbians, but also people with a different queer orientation (bisexual, pansexual) or people who are associated with queer or are considered queer by their surroundings as a result of (gender) stereotypical thinking (cf. Čechová & Hajdíková, 2016; Fafejta, 2016). Thus, they may be supporters of LGBT+ rights or anyone else who reminds people of gay or lesbian people by their appearance or behaviour. In a gender-stereotyped society, this can also be a feminine-looking man/masculine-looking woman, a transgender person, and others (cf. Fafejta, 2016).

Blumenfeld points out that homonegativity and sexism do not only harm their targets. Hating LGBT+ people remains an "acceptable" prejudice in our society, even though it causes widespread damage in everyone's lives. Sexism, along with homonegativity, forces individuals into rigid gender roles and exerts an oppressive force (Blumenfeld, 1992). This, in turn, naturally stifles freedom to choose and develop personal interests and talents, can negatively affect the development of an individual's emotional skills, and

interferes with the establishment of authentic relationships. As a result, the full potential of individuals is not realized and used, which can and does negatively affect social progress.

Forms and shades of homonegativity

Homonegativity manifests itself in many different forms and levels, from the individual to social structures. In recent years, the term **internalized homonegativity** (or homophobia), which is a manifestation of disgust or fear of non-heterosexual preference in the self, has been most widely used. It stems from the belief that a heterosexual preference is superior to a gay, lesbian or other preference. As a result, the individual suffers and hides their sexuality from the outside world, sometimes not even admitting it to themselves. This may or may not also manifest itself in **interpersonal homonegativity** that is oriented towards other people (cf. Blumenfeld, 1992; Fafejta 2016; Lyong, 2019; Pitoňák, 2022).

Blumenfeld also distinguishes between **institutionalised** and **cultural homonegativity**. Institutionalized refers to discriminatory attitudes and policies embedded in formal institutions, typically in legal frameworks or even in the structures and rules of social subsystems (Blumenfeld, 1992). Cultural homonegativity is also found in societies where its institutionalized form does not occur – it is present in everyday interactions between people, in customs, norms, media, language, and manifests itself in the reproduction of stereotypes, negative innuendo (Blumenfeld, 1992) or microaggressions, which are characterized by their unobtrusiveness, cumulative nature and, when exposed over a long period of time, have a negative impact on the mental health of individuals (Nadal, 2023).

Another seven "shades" of homonegativity are presented by Lyong based on his research on the analysis of scholarly texts dealing with this issue. These seven shades are:

- **radical;**
- **prohibitionist;**
- **denialist;**
- **avoidant;**
- **morbidity;**
- **tepid;**
- and **veiled** (Lyong, 2019).

The radical form includes direct physical and non-physical violence or calls for it. In some countries, it goes as far as stoning or executions or "corrective rape" as a way of "curing" lesbianism in some cultures; elsewhere, it is about laws against homosexuality involving the sanctioning of their violation through physical punishment; and elsewhere, it is "just" hate-speech, literally translated as hate speech that takes on a dehumanizing character (Lyong, 2019). Although this form of physical violence tends not to appear in European culture, it is not entirely absent. An example from recent years is the media-famous hate-motivated murderous attack in a gay bar in Bratislava (Český rozhlas, 2022). **The prohibitionist** form is characteristic of regulatory and value-based social systems that reject or condemn same-sex relationships but, unlike radical homonegativity, do not use physical violence as a means to enforce this prohibition (Lyong, 2019). This and the radical form could be classified as Blumenfeld's institutionalized form.

As Lyong goes on to write, the **denial and avoidance** forms are both typical of individuals whose same-sex preference is latent, and at the same time internalized

homophobia is present. The denial form involves a refusal to acknowledge the existence of homosexuality in a given society or culture, or a refusal to recognize homosexuality as possibly innate. Avoidant is characterized by a strong desire to avoid physical contact/interaction with homosexual individuals. The degree of avoidance can range from a gross unwillingness to discuss the topic of homosexuality at all to a more restrained effort to limit contact. **Morbidity** homophobia is related to the perception of homosexuality as a disease or the cause of a disease. In the case of **the tepid** form, society or the individual is not opposed to the practice of homosexuality but is opposed to the extension of gay rights traditionally associated with heterosexuality, such as marriage and adoption rights. Thus, homophobes in this form recognize the rights of non-heterosexual individuals, but only to a certain extent. The extent of rights allowed may vary context by context depending on what the heteronormative individual or society is comfortable allowing at the time. **Veiled** homophobia refers to disguised, latent forms of prejudice against gays and lesbians. Homophobia that falls into this category is often subtle and may go unnoticed because it is cloaked in some excuse or justification that can range from flimsy to elaborate. This type is more likely to manifest in contexts where anti-discrimination laws exist and where expressions of homophobia are frowned upon (for example, in the workplace or in politics); as a result, people or institutions here are more tactful in their prejudices against non-heterosexuals (Lyong, 2019).

Heteronormativity and minority stress

It is clear that although homonegativity manifests itself in different ways, it often stems largely from the belief and is defended by the argument that heterosexuality is the only natural and therefore the only normal one. In addition to the fact that we have known about the occurrence of non-heterosexual behavior since the ancient history of man, we also know about the occurrence of such behavior in various species of animals. So much for naturalness... As Pitoňák explains, for example, this normative system of understanding that heterosexual orientation (and cisgender identity) is the only normal, and expected, one on that basis is called heteronormativity. Such an approach thus condemns non-heterosexual preferences as unnatural, inferior, even undesirable, and conditions stigmatization and discrimination (Pitoňák, 2022).

(Not only) from the heteronormative setting of society then arises **minority stress**, which Pitoňák defines as *"the unnecessary stress to which individuals from stigmatized groups are exposed as a result of their minority position."* (Pitoňák, 2022, p. 9) Excessive minority stress is then experienced by those who belong to different minorities at the same time. Nadal calls this phenomenon intersectionality. It typically affects people who are both non-white and LGBTQ+ (Nadal, 2023).

Specifics of transnegativity

Although some of the specifics of transnegativity are essentially the same as those of homonegativity – as its forms and actors; and some authors even mention the possibility of classifying transnegativity under homonegativity (e.g. Pitoňák, 2022), we find among them, besides the obvious differences in the affected group of persons, there are some other fundamental differences.

In the Czech Republic, according to research from 2022, non-binary and other gender non-conforming people most often feel discriminated against or harassed (e.g., by insults,

threatening gestures, or inappropriate stares) on the basis of their non-heterosexual orientation or gender, 52 % of these people in the research sample, compared to 36 % of lesbians and 28 % of gays (Pitoňák & Macháčková, 2022). It is clear from this that transnegativity appears to be a more widespread problem – and this statement does not represent an attempt to downplay homonegativity in any way. This difference could be justified by the different length of time these topics have been present in public discourse and, among other things, the resulting different levels of public awareness of sexuality and gender issues.

As a result of fear of harassment, assault and threats, the respondents of the above-mentioned research most often hid their sexual orientation at school and in public space, i.e. in public transport, streets, squares, parks or public buildings (Pitoňák, Macháčková, 2022). We can surmise the effects of feeling the need to hide part of one's identity in public on establishing and maintaining relationships, stress levels, feelings of life satisfaction, and more.

Trans*parent writes that **transnegativity** (they use the term transphobia) is discrimination, dislike, or irrational fear of non-cisgender identity or gender diverse people (Trans*parent, 2023). Čechová and Hajdíková define the term as hostile attitudes and negative prejudices toward trans persons or people who transcend the stereotypical image of men or women (Čechová & Hajdíková, 2016).

Transnegativity can manifest itself in identical forms as homonegativity, under which it falls according to some sources (e.g. Pitoňák, 2022), but it also has some specific forms. Trans*parent mentions, for example, **dead-naming**, i.e. the inappropriate use of a name that is no longer used by the person in question, usually by a trans person. Also **misgendering**, which is the use of inappropriate pronouns, e.g. "he" when referring to a person who identifies as a trans woman. Both of these phenomena can be a manifestation of misgendering, but also of indifference or a deliberate attempt to offend (Trans*parent, 2023).

Westbrook and Schilt point to the often-occurring paradox whereby people can only be recognised by society as belonging to the gender category with which they identify if their claim of identity is accepted as legitimate by other people determining their gender - rather than being recognised as legitimate on the basis of the person's claim (Westbrook and Shilt, 2014).

Possible victims of transnegativity; reflection on changes in the concept of transgender and transsexuality

Transgender people, unlike cisgender people, are all gender non-conforming people, that is, people whose gender (identity) or gender expression at some point does not match the gender they were assigned at birth or the gender (identity) society assigns to them. However, it is not the rule that all such persons are targeted for transition, i.e. hormonal or surgical interventions leading to a change in primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (cf. Cannoot, 2022; Čechová & Hajdíková, 2016; Doležalová et al., 2021; Trans*parent, 2023).

It is important not to confuse the term transgender with the term **transsexual**. Trans*Parent says this term is an outdated and inappropriate concept that is tied to diagnosis, and gender identity is not related to sexuality (Trans*parent, 2023).

As written, for example, by Čechová and Hajdíková, who add to this statement, the latter term is used only for people who, as a result of the discrepancy between their gender and biological sex, are seeking or have already achieved a change in primary or secondary sex characteristics (Čechová, Hajdíková, 2016). Cannoot classifies these individuals as a subgroup of transgender people who experience gender dysphoria (Cannoot, 2022). All of these sources comment on the term transgender but tend to distance themselves from it. In fact, the term transgender captures multiple individuals; both those who experience discomfort associated with their anatomical sex and/or who seek gender reassignment, and those who do not experience said discomfort or seek gender reassignment. At the same time, it is a label that is more correct and up-to-date.

Non-binary (or genderqueer) **persons** are people whose gender (identity) is neither male nor female, or who identify as both male and female at the same time, as different genders at different times, as neither gender, or who deny the very idea of only two genders (Cannoot, 2022). **Intersex persons** are people who are difficult to clearly identify at birth as male or female (Trans*parent, 2023). These are all congenital conditions in which there is a mismatch between a person's genetic (i.e. chromosomal) sex and the appearance of internal and external reproductive structures, on the basis of which the sex of the child is usually determined in the delivery room (Fafejta, 2016). Thus, some authors have raised the question of whether it might be appropriate for us as a society to stop clinging so much to binary perceptions of the various components of sexual identity (e.g., Cannoot, 2022; Fafejta, 2016). This is because, among other areas, it is not sufficient or helpful in determining the gender of those children in hospital whose chromosomes and genitalia are not clearly male or female, and so corrective surgeries occur that may have consequences for the person's health (e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2017). This too is a manifestation of the impact of applying cisnormative principles.

Again, we can anticipate that not only the individuals explicitly mentioned may become victims, but also those who are perceived to belong to these groups.

Gender dysphoria

Manifestations of homonegativity and transnegativity do not, of course, remain without consequences for those who are their targets. Gender dysphoria in trans, non-binary, and intersex individuals involves social rejection of their gender identity and physical distress over their sex characteristics. Social or physical barriers during gender transition can exacerbate this distress (Cannoot, 2022). Trans*parent defines dysphoria as negative feelings triggered by inconsistencies between physical traits or social roles and perceived gender. In therapy with transgender clients in the Czech Republic, according to research by Doležalová et al., this is the sixth most common topic, alongside issues like social acceptance, body dysphoria, and emotional pain, often linked to homonegativity and transnegativity (Doležalová et al., 2021). Many of these themes are then closely related to homo/transnegativity. It is clear that the attitude of those around trans people is a crucial factor in their process of coming to terms with their own situation.

Cisnormativity

Just as heteronormativity is rooted in the subsoil of homonegativist thinking, so it is with transnegativist thinking and cisnormativity. **Cisnormativity**, as Cannoot writes, is an essentialist principle that assumes that all persons born with male sex characteristics

have a male gender/identity, and all persons born with female sex characteristics have a female gender/identity (Cannoot, 2022).

Gender stereotypes impose expectations on individuals based on the gender binary. Men are expected to be rational, emotionally reserved, and interested in masculine activities, while women are expected to show empathy, engage in feminine activities, and prioritize caregiving and appearance (cf. Jarkovská, 2013; Fafejta, 2016; Cannoot, 2022). As soon as a person breaks out of these stereotypes, he or she can easily become, as mentioned above, a target of homophobic or transphobic slurs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, even today, when most European countries are making improvements in the area of sexual minority equality legislation, homonegativity and transnegativity are still rooted in our society, and much more deeply than it might seem at first glance. In social systems, homonegativity may be most evident in legal subsystems, but it is most prevalent in culture. It can be harmful not only in its more radical forms, but also in hidden forms that are dangerous in their cumulative nature and more difficult to detect and convict. Transnegativity is in many ways similar to homonegativity, but it can manifest itself specifically in dead-naming or misgendering. At the same time, it is more widespread, which we can try to justify by the shorter period of presence of this topic in informed discourse.

Ultimately, it is not only lesbians, gays and transgender people who are victims of transnegativity and homonegativity, but all those who somehow deviate (or, out of fear, do not deviate) from the stereotypical expectations that gender stereotypes place on people, in this case manifested by heteronormativity and cisnormativity. Let us therefore consider it important to again and again reopen this topic and look at it critically, with respect and open mind.

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