



## The Essential Homonormativity as an Alternative of Heteronormativity in A. K. Summers' Graphic Novel *Pregnant Butch*

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### Abstract

This research examines the portrayal of homonormativity and heteronormativity in the graphic novel *Pregnant Butch* by A. K. Summers. The novel follows the story of Teek, a butch who is experiencing pregnancy. This study explores Teek's unique identity as a form of homonormativity during her pregnancy journey. Butch itself is a gender expression embodying a masculine role in lesbian relationships. The researchers gathered data for this analysis by carefully reading the graphic novel, focusing on Teek's perspective, compiling dialogues and interactions, and categorizing data into themes. Through qualitative analysis, the study emphasizes the distinction between homonormativity and heteronormativity present simultaneously in Teek's pregnancy in the graphic novel. Teek's experience of homonormativity as alternative to heteronormativity enriches her butch identity, highlighting the balance of masculine and feminine aspects during her queer pregnancy. This study underlines the importance of both homonormative and heteronormative elements in Teek's unwavering expression of her butch identity. The complexities of natural and unnatural situations in queer pregnancy also plays a crucial role in shaping her identity.

**Keywords:** *A. K. Summers; Butch; Heteronormativity; Homonormativity; Lesbian; Pregnant Butch*

### INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality is essentially characterized by feelings of romantic or sexual attraction towards individuals of the same gender or sex. It is crucial to recognize that individuals labeled as "homosexual" can also be part of the broader LGBTQ+ spectrum, which includes people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex,

asexual, queer, and more (Tinoco-Giraldo et al., 2021; Wijaya, et al., 2023). Nevertheless, it is important to note that within the framework of heteronormativity, where heterosexuality is deemed the dominant societal norm, homosexuality is often seen as a minority orientation. There are perspectives that view homosexuality as a neutral trait, while others believe it is influenced by nurturing and environmental factors (Damayanti, et al., 2023; Ibrahim, et al., 2023). Similarly, just as gender roles vary across cultures, it is vital to analyze the concept of homosexuality within these cultural contexts.

When considering sexual diversity within society, there are terms such as Heteronormativity and homonormativity, which represent distinct concepts. Heteronormativity sheds light on how heterosexuality is favored in social interactions, pushing sexual minorities to a marginalized position (Pujimahanani, et al., 2023; Robinson, 2016). Heteronormative standards and discourses that justify the discrimination of sexual minorities are prevalent in various institutions such as religion, family, education, media, law, and the state. Within the framework of dominant heteronormative norms, heterosexuality and homosexuality are viewed as binary opposites.

One of the literary works that explores the concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity is the graphic novel titled *Pregnant Butch* by A. K. Summers. The story itself revolves around the main character Teek, who begins by identifying as a butch but later develops a desire for pregnancy. The story traces Teek's journey through the experience of pregnancy while still maintaining her butch identity, initially rooted in her past fantasies about having pregnancy with her high school ex-girlfriend. Teek's aspiration to conceive as a butch individual is driven by a desire to challenge heteronormative norms, suggesting that even within a masculine role in a relationship, traits such as pregnancy can emerge (Summers, 2014). Throughout the challenges and complex moments she experiences, Teek's pregnancy journey illustrates her intention to invent her own unique identity as a representation of homonormativity.

## METHOD

Through a qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this research. Written through description, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between *the Pregnant Butch* graphic novel and the idea of homonormativity and heteronormativity alongside literary concepts and cultural studies ideas. Analysis data is formed by reading the graphic novel intensively, comparing the literary work within the homonormative ideas, analyzing the dialogue and the written narratives, quoting it into the article, and writing a list of references related to both primary and secondary sources of analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### The Delineation of Homonormativity through Teek's Butch Pregnancy

Teek, a lesbian who presents herself in a more masculine manner while residing in a predominantly heterosexual environment, aims to establish her own terminology to define herself beyond the confines of traditional heteronormative standards. Through A. K. Summers' graphic novels, Teek tries to expand her self-concept by questioning conventional norms and embracing her distinctive journey as a pregnant butch individual, representing a form of homonormativity. Although Teek's pregnancy experience diverges from societal expectations rooted in heteronormativity, she also encounters instances where she inadvertently conforms to these norms. The persistence of traditional gender expectations within society unconsciously reinforces and

perpetuates the power dynamics associated with sex, gender, and sexuality, thus upholding heteronormative ideals (Kerr & Dellinger, 2013; Manders, 2020). The data confirming heteronormativity and homonormativity is demonstrate in the following below;

*The wise crones we found a how-to book, the essential guide to lesbian conception, pregnancy, and birth (ckimtoevs & stephanie brill, 2002). It was dedicated to the goddess. I nicknamed its authors the "wise crones." (Summers, 2014, page 19)*

From the quotation above, Teek encounters a book titled *The Essential Guide to Lesbian Conception, Pregnancy, and Birth*, indicating her interest in gaining further knowledge about being a pregnant butch and the potential benefits it could bring. Embracing the role of a pregnant butch, Teek becomes more receptive to information about pregnancy, the adjustments of homosexuality to pregnancy, and her evolving identity (Summers, 2014). Alongside undergoing medical checkups in preparation for pregnancy, Teek delves into research about lesbian pregnancy, showcasing her well-informed decision-making. Within her butch identity, Teek acknowledges the significance of expanding her knowledge about her own community, as she prepares to embrace a new identity as a pregnant butch. The concept of queer pregnancy is already unconventional within a heteronormative context, and a butch pregnancy is even rarer and more exceptional, even within the LGBTQ+ community itself. Consequently, individuals embarking on queer pregnancies consciously choose this path and take pride in accomplishing their goal (Annasai, et al., 2024; Shelton & Dodd, 2020).

Furthermore, heteronormativity and homonormativity function within society to counter discriminatory attitudes and practices against sexual and gender minorities. They serve as systematic processes of control and exclusion, particularly evident through the operation of heteronormativity and homonormativity in conjunction with patriarchy, racism, imperialism, class exploitation, and other oppressive structures in society (Robinson, 2016).

*"No one is going to force you to get an epidural-"  
"--unless you decide you want one"  
"we're interested in using the birth center"  
"i'd really like to do this naturally"  
hey-i think it's great what they do there...  
"Of course, my bottom line will always be this..."  
"the safety of your child" (Summers, 2014, page 31)*

Teek and Vee discuss their birth plan and express a desire for a natural birth. Teek mentions her interest in using the birth center, but Dr. Gay acknowledges his preference while emphasizing that the safety of the child is always the priority. Nonetheless, Teek persists in her belief that natural childbirth is the best option for herself and her baby. This reflects her aspiration to adhere to the conventional image of mothers who typically opt for natural delivery (Summers, 2014).

The identity of a pregnant woman who identifies as a butch is regarded as unconventional, not only within heteronormative circles but also within the broader homosexual community. Pregnant butches represent a unique aspect within the diverse spectrum of butch identities. While defining the essence of butchness is inherently challenging, common characteristics shared by many butches can be

explored through the emerging concept of homonormativity (Kaos, 2020). Embracing her pregnant butch identity, she may face numerous challenges due to the rarity of this identity, even within the LGBTQ+ community.

*We Invited All Our Friends, Including Some We Hadn't Seen In A Long While. Due To The Arcane, Nature Of The Term "Second-Parent Adoption" A Couple Of Straight Friends Showed Up And Were Astonished To Discover I Was Pregnant! Second-Parent Adoption- Truly A HalfAssed Accommodation To Gay Humanity (Summers, 2014, page 62)*

As a pregnant butch individual, Teek still engages in some heteronormative practices, even in a manner that challenges conventional norms. For instance, she and Vee invite their entire circle of friends, including heterosexuals, to celebrate their upcoming baby shower. Speculation arose among attendees that Teek and Vee might have opted for adoption as their path to parenthood. However, to everyone's surprise, it was revealed that Teek is actually pregnant (Summers, 2014).

Interestingly, Teek's preference for a natural childbirth approach also challenges heteronormative expectations. In heteronormative contexts, achieving motherhood through 'natural' means is often idealized, and medical interventions during pregnancy may be perceived as undermining a woman's capabilities. Women have various reasons for choosing natural childbirth, including a desire to fully experience the birthing process, embracing the physical sensations and accompanying hormones, and avoiding additional interventions associated with pain medications (Brill, 2017). Despite being considered a virgin due to her lack of sexual intercourse with a man, Teek remains committed to pursuing natural childbirth, even after Dr. Gay warns her that virgin childbirth may entail more pain.

Therefore, the concept of a baby shower stems from traditional heteronormative beliefs. Teek faces misconceptions about her pregnancy, with some assuming adoption or that her partner is the expectant parent. Even among her non-heterosexual friends, the influence of heteronormative thinking is evident, as baby showers are typically associated with heterosexual couples. Despite being a celebratory and preparatory event for impending childbirth, baby showers often reinforce gender norms and heteronormativity, potentially creating negative experiences for those who diverge from such identities (Whisenand, 2022).

It is noteworthy that while Teek strives to be unique and different by embracing pregnancy as a butch, she also desires to be perceived as 'normal,' aligning with a form of heteronormativity. Nevertheless, Teek's ability to maintain her butch identity while navigating pregnancy is noteworthy. She approaches pregnancy in a non-feminine manner, showcasing her adeptness at balancing masculine and feminine traits (Ryan, 2013).

*Dealing with straight people who assume that your femme girlfriend must be the pregnant one.  
"so, how far along are you, veronica?"  
"not far at all" (Summers, 2014, page 20)*

This dialogue explores the common expectation that individuals, especially heterosexuals, might assume the femme partner to be the one who becomes pregnant or adopts a child when encountering a pregnant butch. However, this is not always the case, emphasizing the rarity of a pregnant butch which is a phenomenon that may even be unfamiliar within the homosexual community itself. This underscores the fact

that a pregnant butch remains an uncommon occurrence, even among lesbian communities (Summers, 2014). Nonetheless, Teek is determined to challenge and debunk the misconceptions surrounding butch and femme, specifically targeting the widespread assumption that the femme partner is typically expected to become pregnant.

Teek aims to break away from these stereotypes deeply embedded in patriarchal norms. Such assumptions are efforts to align homosexuality with heterosexual norms perceived as natural and typical (Kerr & Dellinger, 2013; Manders, 2020). Consequently, when society reinforces traditional gender roles, individuals unintentionally perpetuate the cultural power dynamics surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality that reinforce heteronormativity (Kerr & Dellinger, 2013; Manders, 2020).

*Vee studied all the time. One night we finally got some  
leisure time.*

*"i just want to watch american idol--"*

*"and then lookup baby names on the internet"*

*"where ya goin'?"*

*isn't this supposed to be the husband's experience?*

*"goddammit" (Summers, 2014, p. 51)*

Teek aspires to assume both husband and wife roles despite being pregnant, embracing her identity as a pregnant butch. In the cited passage, she discovers that her partner, Vee, is researching baby names online, a responsibility typically associated with the husband's role. Teek believes this task should be hers as the butch partner. However, Vee is the one handling it, making Teek feel inadequate as a 'husband' due to her butch identity. This realization slightly upsets her, highlighting her heightened sensitivity during pregnancy. While recognizing pregnancy as embodying femininity, Teek strongly asserts her identity as a butch. Her struggle reflects a desire to strike a balance between being a wife and a husband (Summers, 2014).

In heteronormative society, there is a prevailing notion that "normal" lesbian couples adhere to a dynamic where one partner is more masculine as the butch and the other is more feminine as the femme (Manders, 2020; Wallace, 2022). Teek, however, challenges these norms by existing in a middle ground between masculine and feminine, refusing to conform to a specific gender expression. This indicates that she is constructing homonormativity within herself, as she expresses opposition to heteronormativity while still, to some extent, adhering to it.

*"Boohoo hoo why oh why did I leave Dr. gay?!"*

*[sniff]*

*"I thought she was fine"*

*"what?! didn't you hear that business about "artificial"*

*insemination?! that homophobic cuntrag! putting me in my  
place! she reminds me of my high school librarian"*

*"Oh calm down. it was just a form"*

*"easy for you to say. how'd you like to find yourself in the  
greatest pain of your life, at your most vulnerable, under the  
care of somebody who thinks you're a whiny ridiculous white  
girl with a bad attitude?"*

*"i am not" (Summers, 2014, page 34)*

Teek regrets opting for a homophobic midwife over the gay doctor she initially chose. She visibly shows frustration at the midwife's remarks regarding "artificial"

insemination, perceiving them as discriminatory. Vee attempts to reassure her by dismissing the incident as a trivial hormonal reaction. However, Teek continues to voice her concerns about receiving care from someone with negative perceptions of her (Summers, 2014). As a butch, adhering strictly to masculine roles and rejecting the notion of being a mere replication of male roles, Teek inadvertently embraces heterosexism by using terms like 'husband' and 'wife.' While she may intend to challenge stereotypes, her choice of terminology aligns with heteronormative conventions (Huynh et al., 2022).

Teek's challenges extend beyond gender and sex to include her desire for a childbirth experience that aligns with her identity, posing a contradiction with medical norms. Teek experiences heightened sensitivity and irritation as she undergoes hormonal changes during pregnancy, leading her to feel offended by individuals with negative views towards her. She perceives the midwife's mention of "artificial insemination" as derogatory, which triggers feelings of frustration within her. It is intriguing that Teek seeks respect for her butch or lesbian identity even as she undergoes a reproductive process (pregnancy) that conforms to heteronormative norms. This paradox underscores her unique portrayal as a pregnant butch (Summers, 2014).

Despite not conforming to feminine roles, Teek desires the freedom to openly express her identity, akin to any heterosexual woman. This concept of freedom is associated with the ability to initiate a new beginning rather than rebellion. Childbirth is often seen as the prototype of such freedom, with mothers symbolizing its embodiment (Kristeva, 2005; Taranova, 2016). In Teek's case, she strongly desires the freedom of being a pregnant butch without compromising her masculine identity or being dominated by the femininity associated with pregnancy. Unlike heteronormativity, which typically encompasses only masculinity and femininity, Teek's experience highlights that heteronormativity extends beyond default standards, as homosexuality differs from heterosexuality.

### **The Perpetuation of Heteronormativity and Homonormativity as Pregnant Butch in its Implications on Definitions and Interpretations**

Traditional gender roles considering masculinity to men and femininity to women are often viewed as inherent, with intimate relationships. Monogamous, procreative heterosexual unions, emphasized in marriage, are typically favored over other forms of sexual expression, embodying heteronormativity (Robinson, 2016). Conversely, Homonormativity explores a depoliticized and privatized approach to sexual politics under neoliberalism, wherein the LGBTQ+ community conforms to prevailing heteronormative beliefs and structures without challenging them, thus perpetuating existing norms in a distinct manner (Luo et al., 2022).

Heteronormativity depicts heterosexuality as the sole acceptable sexual orientation, often portraying it positively while implicitly casting non-heterosexual orientations in a negative light. Historically, "homosexuality" has been viewed as immoral in various contexts (Lane, 2021). Conversely, Homonormativity challenges prevailing heteronormative constructs and stands in opposition to the predominant norms in a cisgender heterosexual society. As a form of sexual minorities, Homonormativity seeks rights through practices such as consumption, monogamy, polyamory, marriage, domesticity, and reproduction, albeit in alternative forms to heteronormativity (Robinson, 2016).

Homonormativity characterizes and evaluates tendencies within the broader LGBTQ+ community, favoring specific topics and political viewpoints deemed less

challenging to the neoliberal and heterosexual mainstream. Sexual minorities strategically pursue progress and inclusion within certain valued structures of society, such as legal marriage equality and military service, over pursuits like labor rights and equitable healthcare access that may be considered more radical (Robinson, 2016; Squires, 2019). It distinguishes the publicly recognized, respectable "good" gay from the dangerous, indecent "bad" one, contributing to a normative formation that makes homosexuality more acceptable in heteronormative society (Luo et al., 2022).

Homonormativity has garnered significance in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, human geography, as well as interdisciplinary fields like gay and lesbian studies, queer studies, gender studies, and postcolonial studies. It aligns with and perpetuates neoliberal ideals of privatization, individual freedom, and independence from society and the state (Luo et al., 2022).

In the context of lesbian relationships, heteronormative society has constructed roles such as butch and femme. Butch represents a lesbian individual's masculinity and dominance in the relationship, characterized by masculine looks and traits. Femme, on the other hand, presents a more feminine appearance and behavior (Harrow, 2022). Despite being constructed by heteronormativity, both butch and femme identities challenge default norms as a form of homonormativity (Putri, 2023). Both butch and femme identities transcend traditional gender roles and should not be oversimplified as reproductions of male and female stereotypes (Gunn et al., 2021). Gender is complex and multifaceted, evolving over time and across situations. Not every butch adheres to specific characteristics, and their expression of butchness can evolve (Manders, 2020; Putri, 2023).

The assumption that masculine individuals should naturally be attracted to feminine counterparts perpetuates heteronormativity. Society's observation of conventional gender roles unintentionally reinforces cultural power dynamics associated with sex, gender, and sexuality (Kerr & Dellinger, 2013; Manders, 2020).

## **CONCLUSION**

The portrayal of homonormativity and heteronormativity in Teek's pregnancy as a butch commences from the early stages of her pregnancy. Choosing to experience pregnancy consciously as a butch, she progresses through childbirth in this role and proceeds to nurture her son as a butch mother. Throughout her transition from pregnancy to motherhood, she steadfastly maintains her butch identity while embracing inherently feminine experiences. The challenges she faces during her pregnancy as a butch reflect elements of both heteronormativity and homonormativity. As women navigate through different life stages, evolving from daughters to mothers or grandmothers, they demonstrate remarkable courage in embracing new beginnings, particularly the arrival of new life.

In her role as a pregnant butch or a butch mother with masculine traits within lesbian dynamics, Teek explores deeper into her butch identity, challenging the perception that being butch solely involves assuming a masculine role as a form of homonormativity. Despite identifying as a lesbian and a butch, she embodies eternal womanhood. Like any woman, Teek experiences moments of femininity despite her butch identity. As she engages in traditionally feminine experiences, her masculinity naturally recedes without being eclipsed by her femininity. Teek's journey as a pregnant butch and a butch mother underscores the importance of maternal passion in her life, allowing her to effectively balance her masculine and feminine roles.

Despite encountering various stages, Teek remains steadfast in her pursuit of pregnancy, unwavering in her determination. Consequently, her identity becomes even

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