



ALTERNATE ROUTES

A JOURNAL OF CRITICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH

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Volume 16, 2000

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Editorial Policy/Call For Papers

Alternate Routes (AR) is a refereed multi-disciplinary journal published annually by graduate students in the department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University Ottawa, Canada, K1S 5B6, altroutes@ccs.carleton.ca. As a peer reviewed journal, *AR* provides a forum for debate and exchange among North American and International graduate students. We are therefore interested in receiving papers written by graduate students (or co-authored with faculty), regardless of university affiliation.

The editorial emphasis of the journal is on the publication of critical and provocative analyses of theoretical and substantive issues which have clear relevance to progressive political intervention. Although we welcome papers on a broad range of topics, members of the editorial board work within a feminist and (post) Marxist tradition. Therefore, we encourage submissions which advance or challenge questions and contemporary issues raised by these two broadly defined perspectives. We also welcome commentaries and reviews of recent publications and works in progress.

Alternate Routes is currently seeking submissions for Volume 17, 2001. Papers should be submitted double-spaced and in triplicate, following the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing system, keeping end-notes to a minimum. Floppy disks formatted in WordPerfect or Microsoft Word are required for papers accepted for publication.

Back issues of alternate routes are available at the following prices per volume: *Current Issue* (Volume 16, 2000) — Individuals \$12.00; Students/Un(der)employed \$6.00; Institutions \$21.50. *Volume 15/14 (99/97)*: Individuals \$12.00; Students/Un(der)employed \$4.00; Institutions \$12.00. *All previous years*: Individuals \$3.00; Students/Un(der)employed \$1.50; Institutions \$6.00 .

Alternate Routes is indexed in *Sociological Abstracts* and the *Left Index*.

The *Alternate Routes* Collective gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the Carleton University community; the Departments of Sociology and Anthropology and it's Chair, John Shepherd; the late Dean of Arts and Social Sciences, Bill Jones; the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, Roger Blockley; and the Vice-President of Research, John ApSimon. We also wish to gratefully thank all the anonymous reviewers.

Perspectives

Sexual and Ethnic Scripts in the Context of African American Culture

Rory Johnstone

The study of North American homosexual integration within a predominately heterosexual environment is not a new endeavor. On the other hand, there has been minimal examination of the same issue when focusing on ethnic minority groups. The following discussion explores the challenges of homosexual life in the context of the "Afrocentric¹" framework. The difficulties of interlocking modern homosexuality and modern African American culture can be attributed to societal scripts² that dictate insular boundaries and rules based on ethnic origin and sexual orientation. These scripts are founded on widespread, narrow-minded notions of perceived truth and, consequently, prescribe the direction of cultural behaviours. Society has created gay male and black male modes of behaviour while simultaneously dictating that one can be aligned exclusively but never mutually. In order to understand the lack of cohesiveness one must first investigate the scripts allied to the homosexual male and the afrocentric male. Through examination of these clashed outlines it becomes apparent that aligning oneself equally with both scripts is next to impossible and any attempt to do so is, in essence, social suicide.

Homosexuality has existed throughout human history and therefore sexual orientation is linked to genetics and is not a script. That said, the traits that society has linked to sexual orientation is a script. Society instills a notion that heterosexual males and homosexual males must act

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in a radically different way, but this behaviour is grounded in gender roles and not sexual orientation. It could be argued that experimentation with gender roles is the most elementary form of societal script defiance but the rebellion has been progressively organized to form a convenient distinction between heterosexuals and homosexuals. The celebration of homosexuality through the rise of 'gay' culture has coded new conventions of behaviour for the homosexual. The shift from the 'closeted' lifestyle to the 'out of the closet' lifestyle has created a new context for gay males, where distinct cultural recognition has become crucial for social and relational life. Concurrently, society creates a script for gay males that becomes the antithesis of the script for 'straight' males. More specifically, the script for gay males becomes congruent with the script for the female gender role. Gay males who abide by the script tend to be bound to stereotypically effeminate social behaviour. The behaviour is recognized in the context of social situations and functionally provides a type of relation filtering. In essence, the creation of contrasting scripts is a social effort to segregate between the heterosexual and the homosexual.

Modern African American culture has also been written an underlying script. Societal perceptions of the 'Afrocentric' male are bound to traits of rebelliousness, vigor, power, athleticism and, consequently, the idyllic notion of masculinity. Recalling that the script for the gay male is essentially the repelling of masculinity, it is no wonder that 'afrocentricity' and homosexuality do not have a symbiotic relationship. Building on this tension, a report conducted by Adams Jr. and Kimmel (1997) suggests that gay culture is dismissed as a "white phenomena" within the African American Community. This notion may be reinforced due to the fact that gay black men are much more likely to have an interracial partner than heterosexual black men. A study by Peplau et al. (1997) showed that 42% of the men involved in her research were engaged in an interracial relationship, predominately with white men. This can lead to a perception that black gay males are conforming to 'white culture' and simultaneously abandoning their 'Black roots.' The danger in this theory, among other things, is the aligning of sexual orientation with 'authentic ethnicity.' Wallace (1979) suggests in her book, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, that the complexities of black and white sex issues are grounded in the sexual exploitation of African American slaves during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nine-

teenth centuries. Wallace suggests that a black man having sex with a white man symbolically suggests inferiority and slavery. There is an entrenched perception that the black partner in an interracial relationship "reduces himself to the status of our black grandmothers who, as everyone knows, were fucked by white men all the time" (Wallace, 1979: 68). Prominent black leaders have also played an indirect role in this issue. Malcolm X, not unlike most political dignitaries, embodies the charismatic qualities of "the patriarchal macho..." (Wallace, 1979: 68). He is a role model for contemporary black males, yet his vigor, militancy, and strength are far removed from the homosexual script. His powerful and commanding leadership in the profound Black Liberation movement has unintentionally created the sentiment that males who repel their "masculine" traits are counterrevolutionary, regardless of their political stance. All of these elements and issues further segregate the homosexual black male and the heterosexual black community. Bounded to this is the inevitable fact that social institution cohesive to gay culture, such as clubs, are generally not located in African American communities. This ultimately reinforces the segregation in terms of demographics (Peplau et al. 1997). In summation, this conflicting situation between heterosexual and homosexual and, inevitably Black and White, is a result of societal scripts which continue to reinforce stereotypes and ultimately distance human beings.

In contemporary society, the social script defines our world and our sense of self-identity. It commands and forcefully guides our evolution into abstract categories which are in essence, the prison cells preventing our freedom. Within this strata our individuality and autonomy are eliminated because we have deliberate barriers that prevent full social integration. These barriers are so entrenched in our mentality that we perceive them as irreversible fact. This discussion focused on two segregated categories: gay males and Black males. It has been suggested that today's society cannot bridge the gap. One cannot be a gay Black man and be treated with the legitimacy of a heterosexual Black man. North American society is unable to decode both scripts at the same time; they are considered to be incompatible. Abstractly, the discussion examined the dynamic and underexposed relationship between sexual orientation and ethnicity. It is apparent that society has forced many ethnic groups to be unjustly exclusive with a sexual preference. It is this authors hope that the realization of these limiting conventions will advance the aware-

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ness of social scripts and the eventual abolition of them. Moving into the future, there is hope that all cultural minorities of ethnicity and sexual orientation will come to the realization that they are on a congruent quest for equality and justice within society.

Notes

1. 'Afrocentric' framework is an African American term referring to culture based on the Black Power movement.

2. Societal scripts is the concept of conventions based on ethnic, sexual and cultural stereotypes that inhibit deviation from stereotypes (Appiah, 1994).

References

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