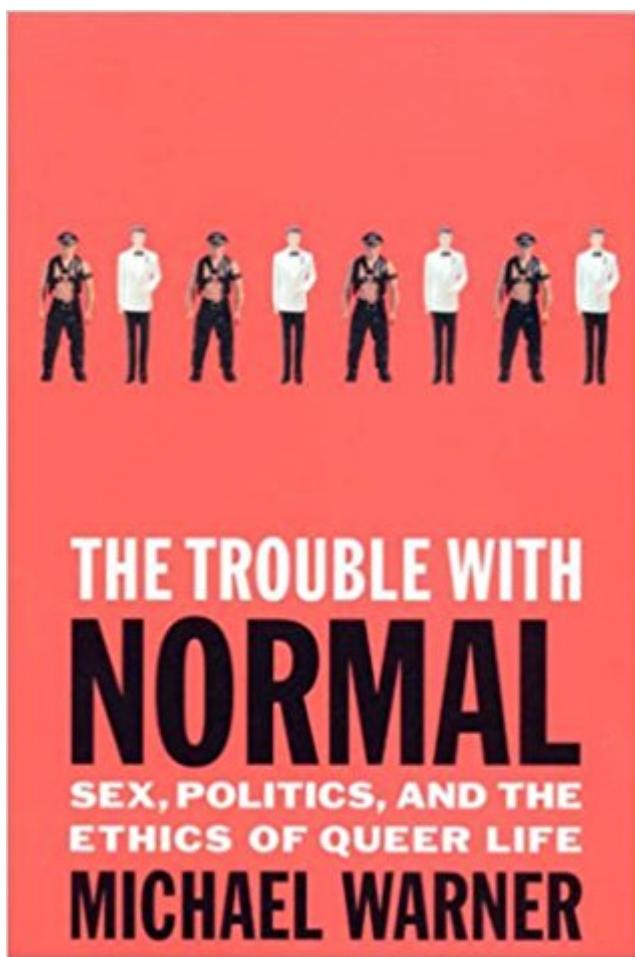


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The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, And The Ethics Of Queer Life



Synopsis

Michael Warner, one of our most brilliant social critics, argues that gay marriage and other moves toward normalcy are bad not just for the gays but for everyone. In place of sexual status quo, Warner offers a vision of true sexual autonomy that will forever change the way we think about sex, shame, and identity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

To the aspiration to conformity and the domination of the 'normal,' Warner opposes a moral argument based upon an ideal of autonomy and liberty, upon the idea that a democratic culture needs to encourage, not to stifle, innovations and deviations in living, in order to discover the most fruitful ways to realize its ideal of human dignity...Warner is a deft and thoughtful writer who turns his own experience of the margins into a source of genuine understanding about America and its sexual politics...For what Warner's book finally demands of us is...genuine reflection. (Martha Nussbaum New Republic) In The Trouble with Normal, Warner offers both a sharp-witted defense of 'sexual autonomy' and a prescription for 'sexual ethics' that rests on the real experience of individuals rather than the imagined wisdom of the group...Warner lambastes the current course of gay activism, arguing that the drive to marriage and the illusion of normality are founded on a phony morality that will only further stigmatize the queer community at large. (Peter Kruth Salon.com)

Michael Warner is Seymour H. Knox Professor of English and American Studies at Yale University. He is the editor of American Sermons: The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King and Fear of a Queer

Planet. He also writes for The Nation, The Advocate, The Village Voice, and other periodicals.

Interesting in the wake of marriage equality to read this screed, alarmed at the dangers of capitulating to the institution. I agree in principle with the idea that the focus on marriage takes us away from other, more important issues, and to a degree I also agree that - however paranoid sounding - as a group we're being sucked into that very essence of hetero-normativity we should be resisting. Finely written and argued. The Andrew Sullivan take-down is particularly welcome.

Michael Warner opens *THE TROUBLE WITH NORMAL* by tackling the imbedded sexual shame in our culture. He sees the desire of gays and lesbians to marry as part of their desire to be accepted as "normal" and a part of mainstream culture. The desire for marriage comes about in many of the same ways for gays and lesbians as it does for heterosexuals. Marriage, in Warner's words, is yoked to the benefits of status, respectability, and other countless privileges, such as health care, housing and tax preferences, and parental rights. He recommends separating these rights from legal marriage, which the state already regulates in ways that are too intimate and controlling. He says we should redefine "family to reflect the reality of people's [extended] relationships." (page 120) Many states still have laws prohibiting oral, anal, and group sex, even for married persons. Warner describes most eloquently how gay marriage is likely to alienate other sexual "deviants" who are lower on the sexual hierarchy, such as prostitutes and other sex workers, transgendered persons, and others. Those who prefer some kind of public sex or "who aspire to a different kind of sexual maturity besides that of a married couple" will be further ostracized and demonized by the split in the LGBTQ communities into those who are married and those who are not (and don't want to be). This split mirrors what has already happened to people in the heterosexual communities who choose intimacies that are different from those who choose traditional marriage. For non-gay populations, this would include "queers" who are polyamorous, bisexual, and celibate. Warner's analysis of the politics of shame applies to all "sexual outlaws." He raises important questions of sex education for everyone. He advocates the continued availability of public places where all kinds of sexual information is shared without fear of arrest or attack and where people might meet and mingle with those who share their preferences and passions. *THE TROUBLE WITH NORMAL* was, for me, a whole education in sexual freedom and autonomy, showing how the politics of sexual shame and the desire to "fit in" hurts us all. In particular, sexual shame and the push to appear "normal" harms those who are HIV positive or at greater risk for STDs because of the growing paucity of sexual information in the public sphere. ~Joan Mazza, author of *Dream Back Your Life*;

Dreaming Your Real Self; Who's Crazy Anyway; and Exploring Your Sexual Self (a guided journal).

Great

This is the best queer book I have read in years. Those of us who are sick of Andrew Sullivan's politics of assimilation, the sex-phobic (yes, sex-phobic) rantings of Mike Signorile, Larry Kramer and Gabriel Rotello, the vile pop-psychologisms of Beautiful Brad Gooch's inner boyfriend...we don't get a chance to read books like this very often. I am deeply appreciative of Warner's giving voice again to those aspects of queer culture muffled -- temporarily, I think -- by those who have forgotten our history and our capacity to challenge the dominant culture rather than attempt to lap up the benefits of marriage and military service. Kudos, too, to Simon and Schuster for publishing the book.

In this excellent book, Michael Warner explains how gay and lesbian activists are pursuing the wrong goal by advocating and working for the right to be legally married. Warner points out that, instead, the focus ought to be on separating certain legal benefits and perks that are now only available to those in a legal marriage from one's marital status. Such marriage-linked benefits not only discriminate against gays and lesbians, but also heterosexuals in nontraditional relationships, and singles of all categories. I found quite a bit in this book that was relevant and useful to me as a nonmonogamous heterosexual. Highly recommended.

i bought this for a queer theory class and read it and found it interesting. i don't think i would have picked it up just to read, though. it's definitely something that the average jane would need to discuss to get the most out of (at least i did), but as a class text it was good... parts of it were a little over the top for me, but informative and stretched my mind for sure.

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