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Queer and Straight*

Abstract: Recent philosophical work on sexuality has focused primarily on sexual *orientation*. Yet, there's another normatively significant phenomenon in the neighborhood: sexual *identity*. Here, I develop a cultural theory of queer and straight sexual identity. In particular, I argue that sexual identity is a matter of inclusion/exclusion in relation to queer and straight cultures, which are differentiated in terms of characteristic practices involving kinship and political resistance.

> Using 'queer' is a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world […] And when spoken to other gays and lesbians it's a way of suggesting we close ranks, and forget (temporarily) our individual differences because we face a more insidious common enemy.
>
> –AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, "Queers Read This"

Recent literature on the metaphysics of sexuality has primarily focused on sexual *orientation*. Yet, there's another philosophically significant phenomenon in the neighborhood: sexual *identity*. In this chapter, I develop a theory of queer and straight sexual identity. Broadly, I argue that sexual identity is a matter of inclusion/exclusion in relation to sexuality cultures.

Here's the plan. In (§1), I describe the phenomenon of sexual identity. In (§2) and (§3), I critique orientation-based as well as social position and conferralist theories of sexual identity. Next, in (§4) and (§5), I argue in favor of the cultural theory of sexual identity. More specifically, I argue that the cultural theory of sexual identity is especially conducive to explaining LGBTQIA+ oppression and resistance.

1. What is Sexual Identity?

The epigraph quotes an infamous political pamphlet (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, 1990) distributed at NYC Pride in 1990. Among many other calls to action, the document argues in favor of reappropriating the term 'queer' – claiming that the "rough word" is "also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe's hands and use against him" (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, 1990: 7). In this way, the reappropriated version of the term 'queer' tracks an element of the social world, which can subsume specific sexual identity categories such as *lesbian*, *gay*, *butch*, and *bear*.

Very generally, sexual identity is a *social identity*. As Ásta (2018: 118) explains, a social identity is "a place in a system of social relations." For example, consider the social identity of being a sophomore-level student. An individual is a sophomore-level student in virtue of occupying a certain place in a social structure (for example, a college or university) in relation to faculty, administrators, and other students.

Notice that as an individual might be mistaken about whether they're a sophomore-level student, say on account of miscounting credit hours. Likewise, it's also possible for an individual to be mistaken about other social identities, including their sexual identity. The issue, indeed, is especially severe in the case of sexual identity inasmuch as *heteronormative ideology* disposes individuals to perceive straight identity as normal and natural. For example, while lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals "come out" as queer, straight individuals don't typically "come out" as straight. That difference with respect to coming out practices only makes sense in heteronormative ideological contexts in which straight identity is represented as standard, inevitable, or universal. Indeed, on account of heteronormative ideology, many proud queer people once believed that they were straight. Attending to the significance of heteronormative ideology, then, provides reason to reject the following theories:

> *Self-Ascription Theory of Queer Sexual Identity*: An individual has a queer sexual identity in virtue of sincerely believing that they're queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or asexual.

> *Self-Ascription Theory of Straight Sexual Identity*: An individual has a straight sexual identity in virtue of sincerely believing that they're straight.

Contra the self-ascription theory of queer sexual identity, I hold that an individual is queer (or straight) in virtue of occupying a certain place in a social structure. Of course, there are lots of social positions related to sexuality. And so, a theory of sexual identity needs to pinpoint the relevant – that is, explanatorily significant – social positions related to sexuality. That's the task of the remaining sections of this chapter.

2. Critique of Orientation-Based Theories of Sexual Identity

If we have reason to reject self-ascription theories of sexual identity, as I've argued, what alternative theories might we consider? That is, what makes it the case that an individual is queer or straight? Here's a deceptively simple answer:

> *Orientation-Based Theory of Queer Sexual Identity*: An individual has a queer sexual identity in virtue of being non-heterosexual.

> *Orientation-Based Theory of Straight Sexual Identity*: An individual has a straight sexual identity in virtue of being heterosexual.

The orientation-based theory of sexual identity, I argue, is mistaken. More specifically, in this section, I argue that an individual's sexual *orientation* doesn't ground their sexual *identity*. At this point, I expect that some readers will find unintuitive the very distinction between sexual orientation and identity. If that's you, stay tuned: the following discussion will serve to highlight the difference!

2.1 Terminology: 'Straight' ≠ 'Heterosexual' and 'Queer' ≠ 'Non-heterosexual'

There are many legitimate ways to use the term 'queer'. In the context of this chapter, however, I use the term 'queer' – and other related terms such as 'straight', 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bi', and 'ace' –

to refer to sexual *identities*. And I use terms such as 'homosexual', 'heterosexual', 'bisexual', and 'asexual' to refer to sexual *orientations*. This difference in terms, of course, doesn't itself amount to a difference between sexual identity and sexual orientation.[1] Instead, my aim is to theorize an element of the social world, which I refer to with the term 'queer'.

2.2 Sexual Orientation

For the purposes of this chapter, let's say that an individual has a particular sexual orientation (e.g., homosexual) in virtue of being disposed to experience certain sexual desires and/or engage in certain sexual behaviors (especially with respect to sex and/or gender features).[2] As Esa Díaz-Léon (this volume) argues, sexual orientations are grounded in sexual *dispositions* as opposed to actual sexual desires and/or behaviors. In other words, as opposed to actual sexual desires and/or behaviors, sexual orientations are grounded in sexual dispositions (or, that is, inclinations to sexual desires and/or behaviors). Here again it's important to attend to heteronormative ideology. As Robin Dembroff (2016: 12) explains, "under extreme social pressure," heteronormative ideology compels many homosexual and bisexual individuals, "[to] enter so-called 'straight' relationships and so behaviorally (if not also psychologically) repress their sexual desires." Moreover, as Lisa Diamond (this volume) explains, complex interactions among various factors, ranging from hormones to cultural norms, have the potential to cause changes in patterns of sexual behavior and/or desire over time.

As an example, consider Carson, a man who exclusively sexually engages with women. Now, suppose that Carson exclusively sexually engages with women on account of the fact that he lives

in a society with strict prohibitions against homosexuality and fears social repercussions if he were to engage in sexual activity with men. Furthermore, suppose that Carson would exclusively sexually engage with men in a just society. In this case, it seems right to say that, notwithstanding Carson's actual sexual behaviors (which are due to unjust social factors), Carson isn't heterosexual.

Because, along the lines of this example, heteronormative ideology can impact sexual behaviors (as well as, arguably, sexual desires), a dispositional theory of sexual orientation is needed in order appropriately to categorize socially repressed homosexual individuals as homosexual. Accordingly, sexual orientations are grounded in sexual dispositions.

2.3 Sexual Identity Isn't Grounded in Sexual Orientation

At this point, with some traction on the phenomenon of sexual orientation, it'll be interesting to consider the ways in which sexual orientation and sexual identity are distinct. Here, I develop the following argument in favor of the claim that sexual identity isn't grounded in sexual orientation:

(1) If sexual identity were grounded in sexual orientation, then individuals identical with respect to sexual orientation couldn't differ with respect to sexual identity.
(2) Individuals identical with respect to sexual orientation can differ with respect to sexual identity.
(3) Therefore, sexual identity isn't grounded in sexual orientation.

Claim (1) is an application of the thesis of grounding necessitation. The thesis of grounding necessitation holds that if F grounds G, then F metaphysically necessitates G. For example, suppose that some feature, such as the feature of being pious, were grounded in another feature, such as the feature of being loved by the gods. In that case, it wouldn't be possible to be loved by the gods without being pious. Applied to the case of sexuality, if being queer were grounded in being non-heterosexual, for example, then an individual couldn't be non-heterosexual without being queer. The controversial claim is (2), which I defend across the next two sub-sections. Note that the success of either sub-section is independently sufficient to establish that individuals identical with respect to sexual orientation can differ with respect to sexual identity.

2.3.1 Str8 Dudes

Here's a sociological account of self-described "str8 dudes" from a widely-cited study conducted by Jane Ward (2008: 420-421):

> Str8 dudes often describe sex between dudes as a less desirable, but 'easy', alternative to sex with women, or suggest that dude-sex is a means of getting the kind of sex that all straight men want from women, but can only get from men – uncomplicated, emotionless, and guaranteed. Str8 dudes get drunk, watch heterosexual porn […] and maintain a clear emotional boundary between each other […] References to being 'chill bros' and 'male bonding' help to reframe dude-sex as a kind of sex that bolsters, rather than threatens, the heterosexual masculinity of the participants. Only those who are 'man enough' and 'chill enough' will want dude-sex or be able to handle it.

Str8 dudes have sexual dispositions towards other men. Accordingly, str8 dudes are not (at least exclusively) heterosexual.[3] The non-heterosexuality of str8 dudes notwithstanding, Ward (2018: 415) argues that str8 dudes are straight on account of their "disavowal of gay identity and culture." For the sake of argument, let's assume that Ward's assessment is correct, such that it's possible to be non-heterosexual and straight. In that case, given that many non-heterosexual individuals are queer, individuals who are identical (or, at least, substantively similar) with respect to sexual orientation can differ with respect to sexual identity. Along these lines, as I further explore in the following-sub section via the example of gay identity, sexual identity isn't grounded in sexual orientation.

2.3.2 Gay Identity

Gay identities, in contrast to non-heterosexual sexual dispositions, are relatively new phenomena. On this point, John D'Emilio (1993: 468) argues that "gay men and lesbians have *not* always existed," instead, they "have come into existence in a specific historical era […] that has allowed large numbers of men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity." Embedded here is the idea that gay identity requires certain cultural and political elements. More specifically, D'Emilio (1993: 470) suggests that gay identity can only exist as part of a historically-specific "way of life" that started to form as non-heterosexual men began to seek out same-sex/gender sexuality and love in critical mass. In that case, it would only

be possible for homosexual men to have gay identities in recent historical contexts, such that individuals identical with respect to sexual orientation can differ with respect to sexual identity.

In the course of this chapter, in detail, I'll discuss various queer ways of life – distinctively valuable constructs that deserve recognition, respect, and protection alongside non-heterosexual sexual orientations. To begin, here's an example adapted from a recent (very gay) experience.

> Mark, a thirty-year-old academic, was riding his bike downtown when he noticed a storefront adorned with rainbow flags. Mark jumped off his bike to check out the shop, meeting and eventually becoming close friends with the owners of the shop, Keith and Roy, who have been married since 2015. Keith is a fifty-year-old sculptor who produces much of the artwork sold in the shop, and Roy is a sixty-year-old community organizer who manages operations. Mark, Roy, and Keith's friendship is set against a collection of shared experiences. For example, Mark, Roy, and Keith each know what it's like to experience homophobia, lose a friend to HIV/AIDS, come out of the closet, visit a gay club for the first time, etc. etc. Regarding the aforementioned collection of shared experiences, Roy and Keith are often playfully distraught when Mark confesses to being unfamiliar with certain cultural items, e.g., *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, such that Roy and Keith have taken on the project of introducing Mark to various films in (what they call) the gay cannon.[4]

The crucial idea here is that Mark, Roy, and Keith participate in a shared way of life. On this point, note that intergenerational friendships can be difficult to sustain in many heteronormative milieus

on account of an ideological belief that cross-generational relationships are not of value "outside their normative and legal framing as family members and recipients of care" (O'Dare, Timonen, and Conlon, 2017: 13). Yet, similar beliefs are not generally found among individuals who participate in the way of life shared among Mark, Roy, Keith, along with many other gay men. And that's the case for an interesting practical reason: intergenerational gay friendships build political solidarity as well as distribute wellbeing-promoting knowledge in contexts of oppression and stigmatization (see Andler, forthcoming).

At this point, note that Mark, Roy, and Keith need not have the same sexual orientation in order to participate in the aforementioned way of life. To be clear, sexual orientation isn't irrelevant to sexual identity. For example, if Mark were exclusively attracted to women, then it's unlikely that Mark would have so many shared experiences (e.g., coming out the closet) with Roy and Keith. And without a collection of shared experiences, Mark, Roy, and Keith wouldn't be able meaningfully to participate in the same way of life. Nevertheless, under some descriptions, Mark, Roy, and Keith each have a different sexual orientation. More specifically, Mark, Roy, and Keith are (in no particular order) sexually attracted to (i) men, (ii) men and women, and (iii) men and nonbinary individuals. These differences with respect to sexual orientation, however, are compatible with Mark, Roy, and Keith participating in the same way of life. In short, while there's an interesting relation between sexual orientation and sexual identity, that relation is not the relation of grounding.

3. Critique of Conferralist and Hierarchical Social Position Theories of Sexual Identity

At this point, before developing the cultural theory of sexual identity in (§4), it'll be instructive to consider the application of some prominent frameworks in social metaphysics to the phenomenon of sexual identity. More specifically, in (§3.1) and (§3.2), I outline the conferralist theory of sexual identity as well as the hierarchical social position theory of sexual identity. Then, in (§3.3), I argue against the aforementioned theories with an argument involving the extensions of sexual identity concepts (that is, an argument involving the proper application of sexual identity concepts). In particular, I argue that neither conferralist nor hierarchical social position theories of sexual identity generate the correct result that closeted individuals can be queer.

3.1 Conferralist Theories of Sexual Identity

In the sparse philosophical literature on the topic, sexual identity is often treated as a *conferred property* (see Ásta, 2018: 88-89). Now, the conferralist framework is due to Ásta, who provides the following conferralist theory of the property *being cool* (Ásta, 2018: 22-23).

> **Conferred property:** being cool
>
> **Who:** the people in the context, collectively
>
> **What:** their judging the person to have the base property or properties [described below]
>
> **When:** in a particular context the person travels in, for example, one context can be at Mission High School in San Francisco, another the skate park in the Sunset District of San Francisco; someone can be cool at Mission High, but not at the skate park

> **Base property:** the property or properties the conferrers are attempting to track in their conferral in each contexts; for example, having blue hair may be a base property for being cool at Mission High; having a tattoo at the skate park

On the conferralist framework, an individual instantiates the property *being cool* in virtue of the actions of other social agents. More specifically, on the conferralist framework, an individual instantiates the property *being cool* in virtue of other social agents conferring certain social constraints and enablements on the individual on account of taking the individual to have the relevant (context-specific) base property or properties. For example, at Mission High, an individual would be cool in virtue of other social agents conferring certain social constraints and enablements on the individual on account of taking the individual to have blue hair. On Ásta's account, then, it's possible that an individual instantiates the property *being cool* without actually having blue hair – perhaps as a result of a special Instagram filter or temporary (as opposed to semi-permanent) hair dye. More generally, in order for an individual to instantiate a conferred property, it's not necessary that they instantiate the correlated base property. What matters is that the individual is subject to certain social constraints and enablements on account of being taken to have the base property.

Now, in previous work, I've applied Ásta's conferralist framework to the case of queer sexual identity. In particular, without ultimately endorsing such an account, I argued that the conferralist framework could be applied to the case of sexual identity as follows: "an individual instantiates the sexual identity property *being queer* in virtue of instantiating conferred properties in which the base property is *being non-heterosexual*" (Andler, 2021: 266). To put the point a bit differently:

> *Conferralist Theory of Queer Sexual Identity*: An individual has a queer sexual identity in virtue of other social agents (accurately or inaccurately) taking the individual to be non-heterosexual in contexts in which being taken to be non-heterosexual is socially significant.

> *Conferralist Theory of Straight Sexual Identity*: An individual has a straight sexual identity in virtue of other social agents (accurately or inaccurately) taking the individual to be heterosexual in contexts in which being taken to be heterosexual is socially significant.

Importantly, on the conferralist theory of sexual identity, an individual need not be heterosexual in order to be straight. What matters is the perception of other social agents.

3.2 Hierarchical Social Position Theories of Sexual Identity

Another especially influential framework in social metaphysics is the hierarchical social position theory from Sally Haslanger (2012: 227-328), which can be applied to the case of sexual identity as follows.

> *Hierarchical Social Position Theory of Queer Sexual Identity*: An individual has a queer sexual identity in virtue of other social agents taking the individual to be non-heterosexual in ideological contexts in which individuals are subordinated on the basis of being taken to be non-heterosexual.

> *Hierarchical Social Position Theory of Straight Sexual Identity*: An individual has a straight sexual identity in virtue of other social agents taking the individual to be heterosexual in ideological contexts in which individuals are privileged on the basis of being taken to be heterosexual.

In order to gain some traction on the hierarchical social position theory of queer sexual identity, note that hierarchical social position theories (along with conferralist theories) stand in contrast to self-ascription and orientation-based theories in the following way. While self-ascription and orientation-based theories hold that having a queer sexual identity is grounded in features internal to the individual, hierarchical social position theories (along with conferralist theories) hold that having a queer sexual identity is grounded in features external to the individual. Furthermore, in contrast to conferralist theories, hierarchical social position theories hold that only external features specifically related to oppression and privilege ground sexual identity. As discussed in (§1), heteronormative ideology is especially harmful to lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. The hierarchical social position theory of sexual identity holds that what it is to have a queer sexual identity is systematically to experience that very ideologically-based oppression.

3.3 Critique of Conferralist and Hierarchical Social Position Theories of Sexual Identity

Here, I argue that we ought to reject conferralist and hierarchical social position theories of sexual identity; in particular, I argue that the aforementioned theories incorrectly categorize many closeted individuals as straight. For example, consider Mary, a high school student living in Emerald City, which is presently governed the Wizard. Mary is attracted to genderqueer

individuals and women, but she's closeted on account of the severe anti-queer prejudice and homophobia in Emerald City. Eventually, Mary will move to Gillikin Country, join an indie rock band, and work with an LGBTQIA+ activist organization to resist the heteronormative policies of the Wizard. But not yet. Right now, as a closeted high school student, Mary is taken to be straight. But it doesn't seem correct to say that Mary is straight. Instead, Mary is passing as straight.

Perhaps that's too quick. Why not revise our concept of sexual identity in light of the conferralist or hierarchical social position theories? For example, why don't we revise our concept of queer sexual identity such that being queer would require being taken to be non-heterosexual? Indeed, we often update concepts on account of observation or analysis. For example, fungi aren't in the extension of the category *plant*, and Pluto isn't in the extension of the category *planet*. That is, we revised our concept of what it is to be a planet, such that we now recognize that Pluto isn't a planet. And we revised our concept of what it is to be a plant, such that we now recognize that fungi aren't plants. Likewise, it seems possible to revise our concept of queer sexual identity, such that we could come to recognize that closeted individuals cannot be queer.

Yet, I reject such a revisionary strategy in the case of sexual identity. In particular, as I highlight in (§5), the concept of queer sexual identity plays a crucial theoretical role in the explanation of LGBTQIA+ oppression and resistance. Yet, neither conferralist nor hierarchical social position theories of sexual identity are conducive to the explanation of a central aspect of LGBTQIA+ oppression, namely, the closet.

In addition to sexual identity concepts, sexual orientation concepts are important to explaining the oppression of the closet; in particular, non-heterosexual individuals are unjustly coerced into sexual secrecy. But that's not the entire explanation of the normatively significant social phenomenon. Many closeted individuals are also unjustly denied access to queer culture, which – and straight people might be excused for not knowing this! – is extremely important to the well-being of many queer individuals. For example, here's Jelani from the House of Mizrahi (My House, 2018) on the significance of vogue dance, a queer cultural artform with origins in Harlem, NYC: "Voguing is a form of self-expression. It's like a way for gay people to overcome the oppression that they go through on a daily basis – and express it."

Jelani has a special right to participate in queer culture. But the fact that Jelani has a special right to participate in queer culture isn't fully explained by facts about Jelani's sexual dispositions. Instead, on my view, Jelani has a special right to participate in queer cultural practices on account of facts about Jelani's sexual identity; indeed, as I discuss in (§4), being queer involves participating in cultural practices related to resisting heteronormative ideology.

In sum, conferralist and social position accounts of sexual identity generate the result that closeted individuals cannot be queer. Yet, a theory of sexual identity ought to have the conceptual resources to express the normative fact that many closeted individuals have a special right to participate in queer culture. This is motivation for the cultural theory of queer sexual identity, which I outline and defend in what follows.

4. The Cultural Theory of Sexual Identity

I endorse the following theory of sexual identity:

> *Cultural Theory of Queer Sexual Identity*: An individual has a queer sexual identity in virtue of (i) being excluded from straight culture and (ii) being such that according to the constitutive norms of queer culture the individual ought to be included in queer culture.

> *Cultural Theory of Straight Sexual Identity*: An individual has a straight sexual identity in virtue of failing to satisfy conditions (i) and/or (ii).

There's a lot to be unpacked. To begin, note that an upshot of my cultural theory of sexual identity is that queer sexual identity maintains conceptual primacy over straight sexual identity (in the sense that the membership conditions of being straight are derived from the membership conditions of being queer). Additionally, while I hold that *queer* and *straight* are mutually exclusive categories, I also think that it's possible for individuals partially to enact queer and/or straight sexual identities. More specifically, an individual's sexual identity is vague (at least) to the extent that cultural inclusion and exclusion are vague phenomena. In other words, there's not always a clean-cut answer to the question of whether an individual is queer or straight. This vagueness makes sexual identity no less philosophically significant.[5]

4.1 Sexuality Cultures

Straight culture is a dominant culture. Queer cultures develop in response to the dominance of straight culture. I hope that the distinction between queer and straight cultures is apparent. If not, I'd suggest strapping on some boots and heading to the nearest LGBTQIA+ establishment.

In any case, it'll be useful to describe some characteristic features of queer and straight cultures. To get started, I appeal to Sally Haslanger's work on the metaphysics of culture; in particular, Haslanger (2017: 155) claims: "culture is a network of social meanings, tools, scripts, schemas, heuristics, principles, and the like, which we draw on in action, and which gives shape to our [social] practices." And Haslanger (2016: 126) explains that social meanings "consist in clusters of culturally shared concepts, beliefs, and other attitudes that enable us to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect." Social meanings include "informational content" about how to evaluate and interact with material objects (ranging from artifacts to bodies), mental states, and other persons (Haslanger, 2018: 239).

To gain some traction here, consider how social meanings figure into the practice of cooking (see Haslanger, 2018: 239). For example, suppose that there are some hibiscus plants growing nearby. Why doesn't Sage eat their edible and nutritious flowers? An informative answer to this question appeals to the social meaning of hibiscus flowers. In Sage's cultural milieu, hibiscus flowers aren't culturally coded as food (with a few exceptions such as teas and specialty cakes). If hibiscus flowers were culturally coded as food, Sage would be more likely to eat them.

Crucially, social meanings are linked to social practices, which Haslanger (2018: 239) defines as follows: "[s]ocial practices are patterns of learned behavior that enable us (in the primary

instances) to coordinate as members of a group in creating, distributing, managing, maintaining, and eliminating a resource (or multiple resources), due to mutual responsiveness to each other's behavior and the resource(s) in question, as interpreted through shared meanings."[6] For example, via social meanings, we've learned how to engage in social practices that involve "the timing of meals, the cuisine, the ways of gathering and preparing to eat, the method of getting food from plate (or bowl, or banana leaf) to mouth" (Haslanger, 2018: 232). Individuals tend to conform to the dominant social practices of their milieus, but resistance is possible (see Haslanger, 2018: 241-243).

Queer cultures sustain social meanings and practices, which tend to stand in contrast with analogous aspects of straight culture. For example, consider the following queer cultural social meanings of the body: for women, unshaven legs are culturally coded as clean; for women, muscular bodies (among other forms) are coded as attractive; for men, painted fingernails are culturally coded as fashionable. And there are many other queer cultural social meanings. For example, close intergenerational friendships and voluntary childlessness are culturally coded as valuable. These social meanings, of course, aren't universal across queer cultures. However, in any particular context, queer and straight social meanings tend to be distinct.

Queer cultural social meanings are linked to queer cultural social practices, and queer cultural social practices curate (i.e., create, distribute, manage, and maintain) normatively important resources. For example, queer cultures curate the resource of sexual wellbeing. On this point, queer cultures code various body "types" as attractive in ways that proliferate sexual experience (see Suresha, 2018: 13-14). Now, given the ongoing historical exclusion of queer individuals from

straight culture (to be discussed in the next sub-section), many queer cultural practices relate to sexual well-being. But queer culture isn't all about sex. Queer cultural practices mitigate stigmatization (e.g., via vogue dance), preserve important historical and practical knowledge (e.g., via intergenerational friendships), and explore gender identity and expression (e.g., via drag performance).

Again, here's Jelani from the House of Mizrahi: "Realness [an aspect of vogue competition] is basically where I just display how I blend in with other heterosexual people […] I just try to be real, try to avoid it […] I don't want to be getting clocked all the time, getting glass bottles thrown at me […] You can do that, you real" (My House, 2018). The ability to pass as straight is often crucial to the safety of queer individuals who experience intersectional oppression, e.g., as Black gay men. On this point, Marlon Bailey (2011: 380) explains that vogue dancers "understand that they are seen through a racist and homophobic lens propagated and internalized by various sectors of society. Therefore, members seek greater agency in shaping how they are viewed by altering and performing their bodies in ways that disguise their gender and sexual nonconformity." In this way, vogue dance provides an education in passing. Now, that's a bit of cultural anthropology. Here's the philosophical takeaway: *queer cultural practices matter to the well-being of queer individuals*.

4.2 Queer Exclusion from Straight Culture

Straight culture can be difficult to notice on account of its pervasiveness. Nonetheless, straight culture is organized in accordance with distinctive social meanings and practices. For example,

consider the following straight cultural social meanings of the body (which tend to stand in contrast with analogous queer cultural social meanings): for women, unshaven legs are culturally coded as unhygienic; for women, muscular bodies are coded as unattractive; for men, painted fingernails are coded as unprofessional. And there are many other straight cultural social meanings. Voluntary childlessness, for example, is often stigmatized in straight cultural contexts.

Indeed, straight cultural social meanings are paradigmatically linked to straight cultural social practices that involve childcare and children. Cheshire Calhoun, for example, theorizes that the "displacement" of queer individuals from straight cultural kinship practices is a characteristic feature of lesbian and gay oppression; in particular, Calhoun (2000: 160) argues: "[A]n important aspect of the construction of lesbians and gays as outlaws to the family is the idea that lesbians and gay men are bad for children," such that *according to heteronormative ideology*, lesbians and gay men, "are incapable of socializing children into proper gender roles and a heterosexual orientation; they cannot be trusted not to molest or seduce the young; and they cannot offer children more than a pretended family relationship. Along these lines, queer individuals are excluded from straight culture.

4.3 Queer Inclusion in Queer Culture

Having a queer sexual identity, to be clear, isn't only a matter of being excluded from straight culture. Instead, I argue that queer sexual identity involves standing in a certain relation to queer culture. That relation, however, isn't the relation of actual inclusion, as some queer individuals are unjustly excluded from queer culture, e.g., along the axis of transgender gender identity. A cultural

theory of sexual identity, then, ought to appeal to some counterfactual relation of inclusion. And so, I propose that the inclusion relation that matters to queer sexual identity involves the inclusion that would obtain *if queer cultures abided by their own constitutive norms.*

Here's the idea. A constitutive norm of Go is that the game is played with black and white stones. Another constitutive norm is that the game is played on a square grid. On a strict conception, it's impossible to play Go with metal coins. On a somewhat more flexible conception, it's possible to play Go with copper coins, but it's impossible to play the game on anything but a square grid. Different conceptions of the constitutive norms of Go are apt for different purposes. For example, a strict conception seems apt for a world championship, but it seems inapt for a casual game among friends: "Sure, we played with metal coins, but you still owe me a coffee!" Now, there's a distinctively constitutive sense of 'ought' according to which the game of Go *ought* to be played with black and white stones on a square grid. That's not a moral decree. It's an expression of the constitutive norms of the game of Go (see Thomasson, 2007: 138-40; Haslanger, 2018: 237-240).

The constitutive norms of Go are social meanings that are linked to the practice of playing the game of Go. Similarly, the constitutive norms of queer culture are social meanings that are linked to the enactment of queer cultural practices. For example, consider the following constitutive norms:

> *The Norm of Solidarity*: If an individual is excluded from straight culture on the basis of their sexual orientation, then – according to the norm of solidarity – the individual ought

to have special access to queer cultural practices that curate normatively important resources.

The Norm of Self-Constitution: If the inclusion of an individual in queer culture would sustain queer culture against the dominance of straight culture, then – according to the norm of self-constitution – the individual ought to have special access to queer cultural practices that curate normatively important resources.

For example, according to the aforementioned constitutive norms, individuals such as Jelani ought to have special access to queer cultural practices such as vogue dance. At this point, I should add that straight individuals can (while retaining straight identities) participate in queer cultural practices; indeed, this seems to be increasingly common as, for example, aspects of the artform of drag gain mainstream uptake. Likewise, queer individuals can (while retaining queer identities) engage in straight cultural practices such as raising children within the context of dyadic monogamous relationships. On this point, I stress that queer sexual identity isn't primarily a matter of actually engaging in queer cultural practices; instead, queer sexual identity essentially involves having a special right to participate in queer culture (whether or not that special right is exercised). The constitutive norms of solidarity and self-constitution, which generate the aforementioned special right, are crucial if queer cultures are effectively to resist the dominance of straight culture.

5. Why We Ought to Endorse the Cultural Theory of Sexual Identity

Here, I argue that the cultural theory of sexual identity is especially conducive to explaining LGBTQIA+ oppression and resistance. In respective sub-sections, I consider the oppression of the closet, intersectional identity, linguistic directives such as "stop flaunting it," and the gentrification of historical queer neighborhoods.

5.1 The Oppression of the Closet

In (§3.3), I argued that conferralist and hierarchical social position theories of sexual identity incorrectly categorize many closeted individuals as straight. Here, I argue that the cultural theory of queer sexual identity avoids this result.

On this point, recall Mary, a closeted high school student from Emerald City. Now, for example, suppose that operative in Emerald City is a social meaning according to which all and only heterosexual individuals ought to wear emerald jewelry. Further suppose that in response to the aforementioned social meaning, many out and proud patrons of Emerald City's only gay bar – "The Stonewall" – embellish their clothing with amethysts. Yet, Mary wears emeralds. The fact that Mary wears emeralds, however, doesn't amount to Mary being included in straight culture. While heterosexual individuals who wear emeralds act *in conformity with* the dominant social meanings of Emerald City, Mary wears emeralds *in spite of* the aforementioned social meanings.

In short, passing as heterosexual doesn't amount to inclusion in straight culture. Cultures are, in part, constituted by social meanings. And Emerald City's dominant social meanings hold that Mary – along with other homosexual, bisexual, and asexual individuals – ought not to wear emeralds. In

this way, Mary is excluded from straight culture, and the cultural theory of sexual identity generates the result that Mary is queer. That result is conducive to expressing and explaining the fact that Mary has a special right to participate in queer cultural practices.

5.2 Intersectional Identity

Intersectional experience, in some social contexts, incentivizes individuals to highlight certain dimensions of their identity while downplaying others. Jovan Bridges (Untucked, 2019) speaks to this point with respect to Black and gay identities, claiming: "It's how if I didn't read as gay before I read as black, people would be like, 'Oh, my God. Let's cross the street. Let's lock the door.' And I made the visual choice to be like, 'I'm a homosexual.' I'd rather be flamboyant than a skin color."[7] Here, Bridges explains an aspect of *Black gay* intersectional experience in which presenting as gay can mitigate – if only to a limited extent – the severe threat of anti-Black racism. The cultural theory of sexual identity, I think, is conducive to explaining the aforementioned aspect of *Black gay* intersectional experience. For example, Bridges renders their sexual identity especially salient via the enactment of so-called "flamboyant" presentations, which – as I discuss in the following sub-section – are unified in virtue of their relation to queer cultural practices.

5.3 Linguistic Directives

Consider linguistic directives such as "tone it down" and "stop flaunting it." For example, Cathy, who works in academic administration, explains: "I don't have to be in the closet. It's unspoken and unwritten – but there's no flaunting it" (Williams, Giuffre, Dellinger, 2015: 315). The climate

of Cathy's workplace, unfortunately, isn't unique in this respect. For example, Steven claims: "I work out, I work on my truck, I like sports […] There were some [gay men that my boss] couldn't deal with because they were just too out there" (Williams, Giuffre, Dellinger, 2015: 315). And here's Adam Rippon on part of his social experience at the 2018 Winter Olympics: "I've heard a lot of people say, 'Adam Rippon should tone it down'" (PinkNews, 2018).

What is Rippon being directed to "tone down"? It seems that Rippon is being targeted on the basis of "flamboyant" traits in a cluster of mannerisms, aesthetic presentations, and speech characteristics (involving the pronunciations of sibilant consonants). Now, what unifies that cluster of traits? I doubt that the traits are unified on account of naturally co-occurring with homosexuality, and it's not (at least, as a complete explanation) that the traits are unified on account of being gender deviant when exemplified by men.[8] Instead, on my view, the cluster of traits is culturally unified. The aforementioned mannerisms, aesthetic presentations, and speech characteristics are normalized and/or idealized in many queer cultures.

Now, directives such as "tone it down" and "stop flaunting it" might be uttered naïvely. That is, individuals who utter "tone it down" might falsely believe that they're directly targeting unprofessional features (as opposed to features related to queer culture). This notwithstanding, with Kate Manne (2017: 59), I agree that we ought not to get lost in discussion about the mental states of individuals who are perpetuating injustice and oppression, at least not at the expense of understanding the experiences of marginalized individuals. In sum, directives such as "tone it down" and "stop flaunting it" disincentivize queer individuals from participating in queer culture, and the cultural theory of sexual identity provides conceptual resources important to expressing

the fact that the aforementioned directives wrongfully target individuals on the basis of sexual identity.

5.4 Queer Spaces

Historical queer neighborhoods are disappearing. Indeed, in previous work, I've explored various normative implications of geographical trends along the lines of the following report from Amin Ghaziani (2017: 40): "[u]nique commercial spaces such as bars and bookstores are closing, more straight people are moving in [to gayborhoods], and gays and lesbians are choosing to live in other parts of the city. Demographers […] have analyzed the US census and have confirmed that zip codes associated with traditional gay neighborhoods are thinning out." This geographical phenomenon is often portrayed as a regrettable yet necessary part of moral progress. But that's not the right story. Queer spaces are confronted by gentrification – driven by "economically motivated straights who have transformed gayborhoods into 'visible niche markets for retail commerce and realty speculation'" – which threatens the existence of various queer ways of life (Ghaziani, 2017: 40; see Andler, 2021: 266-268).

Historical queer spaces sustain the material conditions required to enact a variety of queer cultural practices such as vogue dance that are important to the wellbeing of queer individuals. More formally, I hold that the *metaphysical fact* that an individual has a queer sexual identity partly explains the *normative fact* that that individual (as opposed to their straight counterpart) is oppressed by the gentrification of historical queer neighborhoods. Along these lines, the cultural

theory of sexual identity is conducive to explaining the normative significance of spaces that house queer ways of life.

6. Conclusion: LGBTQIA+ Philosophy

This chapter is an early contribution to an exceptionally – and, I'd argue, unjustly – sparse literature in LGBTQIA+ philosophy. A central task of the field of LGBTQIA+ philosophy is to theorize phenomena that matter to LGBTQIA+ people. With that in mind, I aim to have made some progress in understanding what it means to shout, "We're here! And we're queer!"

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[1] Moreover, I stress that I don't aim to provide a semantics of the term 'queer'. For discussion of the distinction between the semantics of socially significant terms such as 'queer' or 'woman' and the metaphysics of social properties such as *queer* or *woman*, see Barnes (2020: 8-10) and Dembroff (2021: 990-994).

[2] In the context of this chapter, I use terms such as 'female', 'intersex', and 'male' to refer to anatomical, hormonal, and/or chromosomal features. And I use terms such as 'genderqueer', 'woman', and 'man' to refer to features involving self-identity and/or social situatedness. In this minimal way, I appeal to the sex/gender distinction. Still, I stress that neither sex nor gender are binary. That is, in addition to *female* and *male*, sex may include categories such as *intersex* (although note that some intersex advocacy organizations reject the idea that intersex individuals ought to be treated as members of a distinct sex category, see Carpenter (2018)). Likewise, in addition to *woman* and *man*, gender includes categories such as *non-binary*. For an argument in favor of appealing to the sex/gender distinction in the context of sexual orientation ascriptions, see Dembroff (2016: 9-12).

[3] This ascription of non-heterosexuality assumes *ordinary dispositionalism* about sexual orientation. Ordinary dispositionalism holds that an individual's orientation is grounded in the sexual behaviors and/or desires that the individual would manifest in cases in which the individual has "a reasonable diversity of potential sexual partners," see Dembroff (2016: 17). Ordinary dispositionalism stands in contrast with *ideal dispositionalism*, which holds that an individual's orientation is grounded in the sexual behaviors and/or desires that the individual would manifest in ideal contexts, see Stein (1999: 45).

[4] Contemporary films in the gay cannon tend to include representations of queer characters, while classic films in the gay cannon often include representations of strong female characters overcoming adversity that tended to resonate with gay men who were otherwise erased from public discourse. For discussion, see Halperin (2012).

[5] On the metaphysical significance of vague social properties, see Barnes (2016: 45).

[6] Note the technical usage of the concept of resources provided by Haslanger (2018: 243): "Something becomes a resource when its [positive or negative] value, whether economic, aesthetic, moral, prudential, spiritual, is recognized."

[7] Bridges' testimony tracks a broader pattern of intersectional experience; in particular: "robust evidence [indicates] that people stereotype gay men, compared with men whose orientation is unmentioned, in ways that are de-racialized," Petsko and Bodenhausen (2019: 51).

[8] On the latter point, there's evidence that "GLB speech variants are not imitations of the speech patterns of the opposite sex, but are likely to be learned, culturally specific ways of speaking, much like other aspects of sociolinguistic variation," see Munson and Babel (2007: 443).