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The Sexual Orientation/Identity Distinction

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Abstract
In this article I explicate the sexual orientation/identity distinction: sexual orientation is "natural," involving dispositions to sexual behavior, while sexual identity is the "social meaning" of sexual orientation, and argue that the sexual orientation/identity distinction is indispensable to normative explanations regarding LGBTQIA+ oppression and resistance.

The sex/gender distinction is a staple of feminist philosophy. In slogan form: sex is "natural," while gender is the "social meaning" of sex. Considering the importance of the sex/gender distinction—which, here, I neither endorse nor reject—it's interesting to ask whether philosophers working on the metaphysics of sexuality might make use of an analogous distinction. In this article, I argue that we ought to endorse the sexual orientation/identity distinction.

In the first section of this article, I explicate the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity by considering the slogan: sexual orientation is "natural," while sexual identity is the "social meaning" of sexual orientation. In the second section, I argue that we ought to endorse the sexual orientation/identity distinction because the concepts of sexual identity and sexual orientation play distinct theoretical roles in the explanation of LGBTQIA+ oppression. As a case study, I consider the oppression involved in the gentrification of queer spaces.

I. Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity

With the above slogan as a starting point, in this section, I'll explicate the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity.

To begin, a few terminological notes. Here, I'll use terms such as *homosexual* and *heterosexual* to refer to sexual orientations, and I'll use terms such as *lesbian*, *gay*, and *straight* to pick out sexual identities. Unfortunately, the natural language terms *bisexual* and *asexual* are somewhat ambiguous with respect to orientation and identity. So, a bit of stipulation will be useful. I'll reserve the terms *bisexual* and *asexual* to pick out sexual orientations, as terms such as *bi* and *ace* seem well-suited to refer to sexual identities.

Additionally, there are many ways to use the term *queer*. On my understanding, *queer* is an umbrella term that can be used to refer to a variety of (often interrelated)

phenomena. Gender identity and expression can be queer (see, especially, Dembroff 2020). More generally, an individual might—as the term is often used in the field of queer theory—have a queer way of existing relative to dominant social phenomena (Nelson 2015, 28–30). These are compelling varieties of queerness, but they're not my focus here. Accordingly, unless noted otherwise, in the context of this article, I'll use the term *queer* to refer to any non-straight sexual identity.

Sexual Orientation is "Natural"

In this subsection, I'll explicate a non-constructionist analysis of sexual orientation. To be clear, this is primarily for dialectical purposes. Just as many of us initially made sense of the sex/gender distinction with the slogan that sex is natural, while gender is the social meaning of sex, I'm curious whether we can likewise gain traction on the orientation/identity distinction.

Before proceeding, however, it's important to provide a few other disclaimers. In what follows, I'll model the non-constructionist analysis of sexual orientation on Anne Fausto-Sterling's non-constructionist analysis of sex. This notwithstanding, here I remain agnostic about whether sex is natural or socially constructed. Additionally, it's imperative to be sensitive to the role that certain naturalistic theories of sex have played in gender oppression. Accordingly, I stress that we ought to reject accounts—unlike that defended by Fausto-Sterling—that hold that sex is binary (that is, either *female* or *male*) as well as accounts that hold that gender is determined by sexual characteristics (such that women are necessarily female).

Also, unless noted otherwise, I'll use the phrase "social construction" to refer to *constitutive* social construction, as opposed to *causal* social construction. The distinction between constitutive and causal construction is due to Sally Haslanger, who claims that "[s]omething is causally constructed iff social factors play a causal role in bringing it into existence or, to some substantial extent, in its being the way it is" (Haslanger 2012a, 87). Paradigmatically, entities are causally constructed. Next, Haslanger claims that "[s]omething is constitutively constructed iff in defining it we must make reference to social factors" (87). Paradigmatically, properties are constitutively constructed. For example, naturally occurring chemical elements are neither causally nor constitutively constructed. In contrast, synthetic chemical elements are causally but not constitutively constructed. That is, although social practices are responsible for the existence of synthetic chemical elements, we don't need to refer to social phenomena in order to analyze the property of being gold. Next, printed dollars are both causally and constitutively constructed. In contrast, cowry-shell money is constitutively but not causally constructed. That is, although cowry shells can only instantiate the property of being money in virtue their relation to certain social practices, they occur naturally.

With these disclaimers out of the way, I'll move to outline Fausto-Sterling's *moderate non-constructionist analysis* of sex. Although Fausto-Sterling denies that sex is a constitutive construction, her account is moderate in that it makes plenty of space for causal construction. In particular, she holds that we're shaped—from our skin to our brains—by interrelated biological processes and cultural practices (Fausto-Sterling 2017, 65). For example, social norms of attractiveness promote gendered exercise and dietary practices that amplify sex differences in the distribution of adipose and muscle tissue, many medical institutions promote "genital normalizing" surgeries that reduce the incidence of some intersex conditions, and transgender access to gender-affirming hormones and procedures is politically mediated.

With that in mind, here's a crucial passage from Fausto-Sterling's widely cited "The Five Sexes, Revisited."

> [M]ale and female, masculine and feminine, cannot be parsed as some kind of continuum. Rather, sex and gender are best conceptualized as points in a multi-dimensional space. For some time, experts on gender development have distinguished between sex at the genetic level and at the cellular level (sex-specific gene expression, X and Y chromosomes); at the hormonal level (in the fetus, during childhood and after puberty); and at the anatomical level (genitals and secondary sexual characteristics). . . . What has become increasingly clear is that one can find levels of masculinity and femininity in almost every possible permutation. . . . The medical and scientific communities have yet to adopt a language that is capable of describing such diversity. (Fausto-Sterling 2000, 22)

With this material at hand, I'll explicate four central elements of Fausto-Sterling's account of sex. As Fausto-Sterling notes that the relevant authorities haven't yet accurately described the sexual features of human bodies, we can infer that on her account (i) there are mind-independent facts about sex. Next, Fausto-Sterling holds that (ii) an individual's sex is determined by their intrinsic features, including genetic, hormonal, and anatomical features. That said, as noted above, Fausto-Sterling stresses that (iii) these intrinsic features are shaped by interrelated biological processes and cultural practices. Additionally, Fausto-Sterling's account (iv) calls into question the dominant scheme of sex categories. I'll return to this thread below.

At this point, note that Fausto-Sterling's account of sex can be used to model a moderate non-constructionist analysis of sexual orientation. To begin, (i) there are mind-independent facts about sexual orientation, which can be accurately or inaccurately represented. For example, the gender inversion theory of homosexuality misrepresents the facts. Contrary to the leading psychiatric theories of the nineteenth century, homosexual individuals aren't psychological females/males occupying male/female bodies (Halperin 2000, 102–9).

Next, (ii) an individual's sexual orientation is determined by their intrinsic features. Plausibly, these intrinsic features include dispositions to sexual behavior, desire, arousal, and/or fantasy. We can add further detail to an account of the membership conditions of orientation categories by considering the range of stimulus conditions under which sexual dispositions might manifest (see especially Dembroff 2016; Díaz-León forthcoming).

Continuing the parallel with Fausto-Sterling's account of sex, (iii) the aforementioned intrinsic features are shaped by interrelated biological processes and cultural practices. Indeed, she speaks to this point directly, claiming that individuals have "diverse capacities for sexual desire and expression," such that the presence/absence of certain desires is due to a "developmental dynamic that allows a set of feelings and desires to stabilize under a certain set of conditions" (Fausto-Sterling 2012, 95). Although this developmental dynamic centrally includes "a neurophysiological component," Fausto-Sterling emphasizes that "physiology develops over time . . . in response to specific experiences" (93). These experiences include "situations and relationships that might mediate erotic feelings" as well as the "training of our bodies" (presumably, in heteropatriarchal milieus, to react positively/negatively to heterosexuality/homosexuality) (93–98). To the extent that these experiences are socially influenced, the intrinsic features that determine sexual orientation are causally constructed.

Next, (iv) the aforementioned points call into question the dominant scheme of sexual orientation categories, which includes the categories *homosexual* and *heterosexual* as well as—in more progressive contexts—*bisexual* and *asexual*. Here, let's briefly return to the analogy with sex. Ought the scheme of sex categories exhaustively include the categories *female*, *male*, and *intersex*? Or should we endorse a multidimensional scheme that includes categories such as—and maybe even finer-grained than—*genetically female*, *genetically male*, *genetically intersex*, *hormonally intersex*, and *anatomically female*? Here, I won't rule on the question, except to note that a multidimensional scheme of sex categories is a plausible theoretical option. In part, a multidimensional scheme is attractive because there might not be a "translation key" by which we can accurately redescribe an individual's genetic sexual features, hormonal sexual features, and anatomical sexual features as points on a unidimensional scale that ranges from female to male. In order to draw this out, consider the following questions. Where on the aforementioned unidimensional scale should we represent the sexual biology of an individual with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), such that they have XX chromosomes, high levels of "virilizing" hormones (specifically, an androgen precursor), female internal reproductive anatomy, and masculine anatomical features? (ISNA 2008a). Relative to the aforementioned individual, where on the unidimensional scale should we represent the sexual biology of an individual with ambiguous external genitalia, as well as both ovarian and testicular tissue? (ISNA 2008b). These questions at least suggest that we cannot accurately represent sexual biology on a unidimensional scale. Arguably, the same might hold in the case of sexual orientation. That's because it's plausible that there's no "translation key" by which an individual's dispositions to sexual desire, arousal, behavior, and/or fantasy can be represented as a point on a unidimensional axis ranging from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality. In that case, we would have reason to reimagine the dominant scheme of sexual orientation categories.

In sum, a moderate non-constructionist analysis of sexual orientation respects the empirical fact that sexual behaviors, desires, and fantasies are socially influenced. More controversially, it also holds that an individual's orientation is determined by their intrinsic features. At this point, I turn to the other half of the slogan.

Sexual Identity is the Social Meaning of Sexual Orientation

Here, I'll explicate the phenomenon of sexual *self*-identity as well as provide a general gloss of the idea that sexual identity is the social meaning of sexual orientation. And while defending a particular analysis of sexual identity is beyond the scope of this article, I'll outline a conferralist-style analysis of sexual identity.

Sexual Self-Identity

This article is primarily interested in the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity, as opposed to sexual self-identity. Notably, there's been some philosophical discussion of (what I'm calling) sexual self-identity under the label of "sexual identity." For example, consider the following material from Robin Dembroff:

> [Sexual identity refers] to an individual's self-identification with regard to sexual orientation. Because sexual identity concerns sexual orientation in this way, the concept of sexual identity is sensitive to the concept of sexual orientation. But we also acknowledge that someone can be self-deceived or in denial about their sexual orientation (or even lack the concepts necessary for self-identification),

while still being truly said to have the sexual orientation that they fail to recognize. (Dembroff 2016, 6)

And here's a passage from William S. Wilkerson:

> [Sexual orientation] is an enduring, fairly stable desire oriented toward a particular gender. . . . The identity, meanwhile, is a self-consciously directed project that a person develops around this orientation. . . . This distinction between identity and desire surfaces when people say things like, "He's gay, but he doesn't know it yet." This statement typically means that somebody has a particular sexual orientation, an enduring desire for sex with another man, but that he has not accepted this fact about himself, called himself "gay," self-consciously sought such sex, and understood himself as a person who does seek such sex. He has a sexual orientation but not yet the identity. (Wilkerson 2009, 97)

These passages independently highlight that we need a concept of (what I'm calling) sexual self-identity in order to make sense of the fact that an individual can be mistaken about their sexual orientation. An individual's sexual self-identity, then, is a matter of their own beliefs about their own sexual orientation.

But that's not quite what I aim to capture with the label "sexual identity." On my usage, an individual's sexual identity is—very roughly, for the purposes of contrast—a matter of the beliefs of other social agents about the individual's sexual orientation. At this point, I turn more directly to explicate the phenomenon of sexual identity.

Sexual Identity and Social Meaning

Appealing to Haslanger's work on the topic, 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" (Haslanger 2016, 126). For example, consider the action of giving a "thumbs-up." Here, the representational schema *gesture = approval* is shared among individuals who participate in social practices involving the gesture. We can express this point by noting that approval is the social meaning of the hand gesture.

Now, in virtue of their social meanings, certain properties are *socially significant*. For example, compare the property of being tan to the property of being non-heterosexual. The property of being tan has social meaning. For example, being tan might be fashionable or passé. Still, tan individuals aren't systematically treated as members of an associated category of persons. In contrast, the property of being non-heterosexual is socially significant in that non-heterosexual individuals are systematically treated as members of an associated category of persons. In order to capture this difference with respect to social significance, I find instructive Ron Mallon's idea of collective representations involving "category-typical features" (Mallon 2016, 59). Unlike tan individuals, non-heterosexual individuals are systematically represented in category-typical ways. These representations range from the somewhat innocuous, for example, "people like that are fantastic interior decorators," to the pernicious, for example, "people like that can't control themselves."

Quite generally, then: an individual's sexual identity is determined by their relation to category-typical representations of individuals with certain sexual orientations. What relation, precisely? That's a question to be answered in future research. Still, I'll outline an option in the following subsection.[1]

Conferralist-Style Analysis of Sexual Identity

While I'm not prepared to endorse a conferralist-style analysis of sexual identity, the conferralist framework—developed and defended by Ásta—provides an especially lucid way to capture the idea that sexual identity is the social meaning of sexual orientation. So here I'll outline a conferralist-style analysis of sexual identity.

Here's Ásta's conferralist framework:[2]

> *Conferred property:* P
> *Who:* a person or entity or group with standing
> *What:* their conferral, explicit or implicit, by means of attitudes and behavior
> *When:* in a particular context
> *Base property:* the property or properties the authorities are attempting to track in the conferral, consciously or unconsciously (Ásta 2018, 22)

For example, Ásta provides the following conferralist analysis of the property *being cool*:

> *Conferred property:* being cool
> *Who:* the people in the context, collectively
> *What:* their judging the person to have the base property or properties
> *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 context; for example, having blue hair may be a base property for being cool at Mission High; having a tattoo at the skate park (22–23)

Here's the idea. An individual instantiates a conferred property—to which we can refer using the term *cool*—in virtue of the activity of other social agents. More specifically, an individual instantiates a conferred property *being cool* in virtue of certain social agents accurately or inaccurately judging the individual to instantiate certain base properties.

Importantly, on the conferralist framework, conferred properties don't persist across changes in context (23, 127–28). That is, on the conferralist framework, there isn't—strictly speaking—a single property *being cool* that's instantiated by individuals at Mission High and at the skate park. Along these lines, the base properties of conferred properties picked out by the term *cool* might radically differ across contexts. For example, at Mission High, an individual might instantiate a conferred property *being cool* in virtue of certain social agents accurately or inaccurately judging the individual to have blue hair. Yet, at the skate park, another property *being cool* might be conferred on an individual in virtue of certain social agents accurately or inaccurately judging the individual to have a tattoo.

Individuals who instantiate a conferred property are subject to certain social constraints and enablements (29–30, 47–48). For example, an individual who instantiates a conferred property *being cool* might be enabled to sit at a certain table in the cafeteria (say, without protest). The individual might even have the power to confer a property *being cool* on other individuals. Still, cool kids are also subject to certain social constraints. For example, it might be difficult for an individual who instantiates a conferred property *being cool* to hang out with an individual who instantiates a conferred property *being a theater nerd*.

On the conferralist framework, then, here's what it is for a property to have social meaning in a context: "the presence of the conferred property, not the base property, is what explains the social constraints and enablements the person is subject to in a context" (46). For example, consider again the property of having blue hair. Independently, the fact that an individual has blue hair doesn't explain why they're enabled to eat lunch at a certain table in the cafeteria at Mission High. Instead, that's explained by the fact that the individual instantiates a conferred property *being cool.*

At this point, I turn to consider how the conferralist framework might be used to make sense of the idea that sexual identity is the social meaning of sexual orientation. It's clear that the property *being non-heterosexual* is socially significant. Individuals who are accurately or inaccurately judged to be non-heterosexual—and so, conferred a property *being queer*—are subject to certain contextually variable constraints and enablements. On this point, Ásta claims:

> The constraints and enablements vary with contexts. [If you're conferred a property *being queer* in] the context of a postsurgery hospital room in North Carolina, you can be neglected as a patient, the nurse can "forget" to call in a time-sensitive prescription, and treat you as if you have a highly contagious moral disease. And there can be enablements: persons who have suffered discrimination and mistreatment on the basis of some other features they are taken to have might be more open to you and what you have to say on the matter because they assume you are an ally and "get" what is at issue. (89)

Here, it's clear that the constraints generated by the conferral of a property *being queer* are often oppressive. Yet, the conferral of a property *being queer* might also enable individuals to participate in LGBTQIA+ cultural practices.

Additionally, Ásta argues that there's significant contextual variation with respect to the base properties of conferred LGBTQIA+ statues. On this point, she claims:

> The communal property of being a lesbian, for example, is deeply context dependent, with many possible base properties: having a sexual desire for another woman, having fallen in love with another woman, having acted on desires for another woman, having acted on the love for another woman, living with another woman as a partner, living openly with another as a partner, affiliating oneself with the lesbian movement, considering oneself as a lesbian, and so on. (89)

I agree with Ásta that there are a variety of context-dependent conferred properties associated with socially deviant sexual and romantic practices. Indeed, perhaps it's the case that all of these conferred properties deserve the label "queer." Still, a metaphysical question remains. Given all this contextual variation, what are the individuation conditions of the sexual identity property *being queer*? As noted above, conferred properties don't persist across changes in context. In this way, there isn't—strictly speaking—a single conferred property *being queer* shared by Janelle Monáe, James Baldwin, and many of my favorite contemporary philosophers. And so, it's at this point in sketching an account of sexual identity that I'll need to introduce some metaphysical machinery not included in the conferralist picture. What's needed is a way of *unifying* lots and lots of conferred properties related to sexual orientation.[3]

Here's my proposal. An individual instantiates the sexual identity property *being queer* to the extent that they instantiate conferred properties in which the base property

is *being non-heterosexual*. That is, take the set of properties that are conferred when individuals are judged to be non-heterosexual. It's in virtue of the conferred properties in this set that sexual orientation has social meaning. Accordingly, in order to provide a working account of sexual identity, let's say that an individual instantiates the sexual identity property *being queer* in virtue of instantiating conferred properties in which the base property is *being non-heterosexual*. Similarly, let's say that an individual instantiates the sexual identity property *being a lesbian* in virtue of instantiating conferred properties in which the base property is *being a non-heterosexual woman*. And likewise, let's say that an individual instantiates the sexual identity property *being gay* in virtue of instantiating conferred properties in which the base property is *being a non-heterosexual man*. Given their sociological complexity, it's predictably difficult to specify the relevant base properties for sexual identity properties such as *being butch*, *being a bear*, and *being a twink* (see especially Ásta 2018, 50). Still, it's possible to gain some traction here. For example, perhaps *being a masculine non-heterosexual woman or non-binary individual* is the base property for the sexual identity property *being butch*.

II. The Distinct Theoretical Roles of Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity: Explaining LGBTQIA+ Oppression

Since the mid-to-late 1990s, neighborhoods across the United States have become less sexually segregated, and the number of LGBTQIA+ establishments has diminished. On this point, Amin Ghaziani, a renowned sociologist of sexuality and urban culture, reports, "[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" (Ghaziani 2017, 40).

These facts are more than apparent to many LGBTQIA+ individuals. For example, Charlie Brown, a fixture of drag culture in the American South, responded to these trends by launching a performance at Atlanta Pride in the late 2000s by shouting to a crowd of a few thousand: "Keep *them* out of Midtown!" Midtown is Atlanta's historically queer neighborhood, and it's not uncommon for the area's LGBTQIA+ residents to express similar ideas. Straight people often find these expressions surprising, even offensive or harmful. In this section, I aim to make sense of these separatist sentiments by explicating the normative significance of queer spaces. In particular, I argue that we need to appeal to sexual orientation as well as sexual identity in order to explain the oppression involved in the gentrification of queer spaces. Queer spaces include queer neighborhoods as well as LGBTQIA+ bars, bookstores, and community centers. And the gentrification of queer spaces involves policies and practices that contribute to the dissolution of extant queer spaces, or make implausible the formation of new queer spaces.

Here it's important to note that different forms of gentrification plausibly demand different normative assessments. So before explicating the distinct theoretical roles of the concepts of sexual orientation and sexual identity, I'll consider the ways in which (1) moral panic, (2) moral indifference, and (3) moral progress contribute to the gentrification of queer neighborhoods.

To begin, queer spaces are sanctioned against on account of moral panic. These moralistic sanctions paradigmatically include police raids as well as—somewhat more covertly—zoning laws that have disproportionate, negative impacts on queer

establishments.[4] Obviously, police raids and discriminatory zoning laws are oppressive. Largely on account of LGBTQIA+ activism, however, these sorts of moralistic sanctions have become less and less common.

Still, the gentrification of queer spaces isn't caused exclusively by moral panic. Increasingly, gentrification is the result of moral indifference. For example, consider Seattle's Capitol Hill. Across its history, the queer neighborhood has housed gay and lesbian bars, queer youth centers, health-promotion and activist organizations, as well as generally provided a safer space for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Recently, however, affluent workers have taken an interest in the area, such that rapidly increasing housing costs have forced many queer individuals out of the neighborhood. Along these lines, many of Capitol Hill's queer residents resist the cultural changes that have accompanied the aforementioned demographic shift. For example, a local queer artist, John Criscitello, has posted graffiti around the neighborhood with taglines such as: "Don't worry they're building you a Whole Foods" and "We came here to get away from you" (see Jay 2014; James 2017). Furthermore, many of Capitol Hill's queer residents don't feel particularly safe in the increasingly heteronormative culture. For example, here's a report from Adé Cônnére, a drag performer who was attacked in 2014: "[t]here are certain areas that I have started to avoid . . . I can deal with crackheads, but some of these frat boys that come into town . . . they behave so badly" (Romano 2015).

The morally indifferent gentrification of queer spaces is causally and constitutively linked to displacement, culture loss, and violence, so it's oppressive. Here, however, it's important to ask precisely who or what ought to be morally criticized. Some straight residents seem to be largely unaware of Capitol Hill's queer history, while others naively take a voyeuristic interest in the enduring aspects of queer culture (Romano 2015). Of course, it's permissible for straight individuals to live in queer neighborhoods. And surely, some residents of Capitol Hill are gracious, well-informed allies to the LGBTQIA+ community. Still, I expect that at least some of Capitol Hill's straight residents ought to be criticized for moving into the area without properly attending to its queer history and significance. This notwithstanding, I find it more productive to focus on the structural aspects of the oppression involved in the gentrification of queer neighborhoods. Drawing from Haslanger's account, structural oppression "is not an individual wrong but a social/political wrong; that is, it is a problem lying in our collective arrangements . . . our institutions, policies, and practices" (Haslanger 2012e, 314). Along these lines, the oppressive gentrification of queer neighborhoods involves a lack of policies and social norms—such as rent control and social norms of respect toward subordinated cultures—that might sustain queer life in Capitol Hill. In sum, whether indifferent individuals and/or indifferent structures ought to be criticized, the resulting gentrification of queer spaces is oppressive.

Next are cases of gentrification that have origins in moral progress. Many queer individuals now have the opportunity to flourish in mainstream spaces (Ghaziani 2017, 40–50). This opportunity ought to be celebrated. And that's the case even if it means that some queer individuals voluntarily move away from queer neighborhoods. Here, the normative issues are remarkably subtle. The isolation and stigmatization characteristic of the pre-Stonewall era gave rise to distinctively valuable queer cultural practices. Although I'm certain that we ought not strive to return to such a form of social organization, I also doubt that integration is the only path of progress. For present purposes, however, I'll skip over this thorny topic. That's because the ongoing historical gentrification of queer neighborhoods isn't exclusively the result of moral progress. Instead, at least to a significant extent, gentrification stems from a sort of neoliberal moral

indifference that capitalizes on moral progress. On this point, Ghaziani notes that the gentrification of queer neighborhoods is partly due to "economically motivated straights who have transformed gayborhoods into 'visible niche markets for retail commerce and realty speculation' [such that some] gays and lesbians perceive the sexual integration that results from [gentrification] as 'the pillaging of gay culture' by economically motivated straights who have no commitments to their community" (47). For example, consider municipal advertising that promotes queer neighborhoods to urban tourists. While the existence of this sort of advertising is linked to a morally progressive change in the public perception of LGBTQIA+ individuals, it has gentrifying effects—after all, it's difficult for a space to remain queer with an influx of straight individuals (see especially Ghaziani 2014, 25–26). Progress sets the sociological stage for morally indifferent economic exploitation, but the resulting gentrification of queer spaces is an instance of LGBTQIA+ oppression. With this in mind, I turn to explicate the distinct theoretical roles that the concepts of sexual orientation and sexual identity play in the explanation of the oppression involved in gentrification.

Queer Spaces and Sexual Orientation

In this subsection, I'll demonstrate an important theoretical role that the concept of sexual orientation plays in the explanation of LGBTQIA+ oppression. In particular, I'll consider how the gentrification of queer spaces oppressively denies individuals access to environments in which it's possible freely to express non-heterosexual sexuality. While it's probably evident that we need to appeal to sexual orientation in order to explain LGBTQIA+ oppression, the following discussion will provide an instrumental contrast for the next subsection's argument about the distinct theoretical role of the concept of sexual identity.

To begin, consider Ghaziani's description of the lives of sexual minorities in what he calls the "closet era," which lasted from the medicalization of homosexuality in the mid-to-late nineteenth century until queer neighborhoods began to develop during the Second World War:

> The heyday of the closet . . . was characterized by concealment (you cloaked who you were from your family and friends), isolation (you felt disconnected from networks of other gays and lesbians), feelings of shame, guilt, and fear (which you endured because you internalized negative societal views about homosexuality), and duplicity (you lived a double life). Gayborhoods, as we think of them today, did not exist at this time. People who desired others of their own sex found each other in places that were scattered across the city: a bar here or there, a cabaret, a public park, a restroom. (Ghaziani 2014, 8)

Notwithstanding the significant political gains made since the closet era, approximately a quarter of the current population of the United States believes that "homosexuality should be discouraged by society" (Pew Research Center 2017, 41). And on account of the continued stigmatization of non-heterosexuality, sexual minorities often experience a measure of the aforementioned isolation, shame, guilt, and fear.

Of course, we should strive to realize a society that doesn't stigmatize non-heterosexual orientations. In the meantime, at least, queer spaces are important to the well-being of sexual minorities. For example, consider sexual expression at the beginning of what Ghaziani calls the "coming out era," which lasted from World

War II until the (previously described) wave of gentrification and "straightification" in the mid-to-late 1990s:

> As gays and lesbians fled to gayborhoods across the country, they discovered a treasure trove of . . . possibilities. Sex and love were perhaps the most immediate . . . [For example, a resident of Greenwich Village reminisced that gay men] "carried the sidewalks as late as 1990, turning the street into a genuine carnival day and night. The waterfront, once a desolate truck yard, was a 24-hour playground of sexual trysts and flamboyant acts. By day, nude sunbathers staked out an urban beach on disfigured docks." Gay men have often depended on gayborhoods for such carnal pleasures—absent moralizing straight surveillance. (Ghaziani 2014, 20)

Perhaps these stories are exaggerated, but they're not mere apocrypha. Moreover, it's not only sex that's important. Queer spaces facilitate simple, human acts of intimacy. For example, in a recently conducted interview, Carolyn, a pseudonymous lesbian in her thirties, describes a geographical aspect of holding hands with her partner:

> There's always a constant worry in the back of our minds when we're not in a gay neighborhood. . . . If I'm holding Katie's hand [a pseudonym], is there going to be a comment? Is there going to be a look? In gay neighborhoods, I don't even think about that. So many little things like that. When we're not in Andersonville [the Chicago gayborhood where Carolyn and Katie reside], Katie and I don't hold hands. We're very conscious of it. I think it's so important to have these places where we can peel off that armor for a little bit and just relax and just be. (185–86)

Of course, hand-holding among heterosexual individuals isn't limited by comparable geographic constraints. In the context of an ongoing history of stigmatization, queer spaces facilitate non-heterosexual intimacy, such as holding hands with a loved one.

At this point, I aim to have demonstrated that the concept of sexual *orientation* plays an important theoretical role in the explanation of LGBTQIA+ oppression. Non-heterosexual individuals have a normatively significant interest in freely expressing non-heterosexual sexual and romantic desires. And the gentrification of queer spaces unduly frustrates that interest.

Queer Spaces and Sexual Identity

Although access to milieus in which non-heterosexual desires can be freely expressed is crucial to the well-being of sexual minorities, there's more to the normative story. Here I consider an important theoretical role that the concept of sexual *identity* plays in the explanation of LGBTQIA+ oppression. In particular, the gentrification of queer spaces is oppressive for the following reasons (among others):

(1) The constraints and enablements generated by the instantiation of sexual identity properties such as *being lesbian* and *being gay* significantly differ across queer and mainstream spaces, and it's normatively important that sexual minorities have access to the social constraints and enablements that are generated in queer spaces.

(2) Queer spaces create and maintain distinctive subcultural sexual identities, such as *butch*, *bear*, and *twink*, and it's normatively important that sexual minorities

have access to the social constraints and enablements that are generated by these subcultural sexual identities.

Regarding (1), in mainstream spaces, non-heterosexual women are systematically represented as having the category-typical feature of gender inversion: "People like that aren't real women. They're kind of like men, which explains why they're attracted to members of the same sex." That is, in mainstream milieus, lacking femininity is part of the social meaning of being a non-heterosexual woman (see especially Calhoun 2000, 29–39, 63–72). In this way, the mainstream constraints and enablements associated with lesbian and gay identity are often normatively problematic.

Crucially, queer spaces sustain milieus with normatively preferable constraints and enablements. For example, the constraints and enablements in many queer spaces allow non-heterosexual women to explore their sexuality without being typecast as masculine. To be clear, it's not the case that queer spaces sustain milieus in which instantiating the sexual identity property *being lesbian* doesn't generate any constraints related to gender expression. This notwithstanding, the constraints and enablements generated in queer spaces are normatively preferable to those in mainstream spaces.

Admittedly, the above description of the gendered dimensions of queer cultural constraints and enablements is a bit rough. What's needed is an example of the normative significance of queer subcultural identities. Here we arrive at (2). As an example, I'll consider the subcultural sexual identity *bear*. Specifically, I'll argue that sexual minorities ought to have access to bear identity because the constraints and enablements generated by the instantiation of the subcultural sexual identity property *being a bear* are (a) flexible, (b) politically resistant, and (c) instrumental to the well-being of bears.

Above, I critiqued mainstream social meanings that systematically represent non-heterosexual individuals through the frame of gender inversion. But let me be clear. I love seeing butches and femmes strutting down the streets of queer neighborhoods. What I think is normatively problematic is that mainstream social meanings typecast non-heterosexual women as masculine and non-heterosexual men as feminine. Furthermore, it's not the case that queer cultural social meanings are immune from normative critique. For example, in some queer spaces, acting in accordance with the constraints and enablements associated with gay identity requires conforming to a rigid archetype.

The constraints and enablements associated with bear identity, however, are comparatively flexible. For example, consider the following description of *bear-gender* from the LGBTQIA+ activist Eric Rhofes:

> One feature that distinguishes Bears from other self-reflective subcultures is that the Bear is a counter-image to the dominant mainstream gay image. . . . Bears as a group are simultaneously both gender-conforming and gender-nonconforming, or gender radicals. At any big gathering of Bears, there are men who are very comfortable looking like big gruff hairy bearded lumberjacks, all while being total queens. (Suresha 2018, 23)

Although the constraints and enablements generated by the instantiation of the sexual identity property *being a bear* aren't infinitely flexible, the identity can be enacted by individuals with a broad range of gender identities, gender embodiments, and gender expressions.

Crucially, the flexibility of bear identity is especially conducive to *political resistance*. Specifically, the constraints and enablements associated with bear identity allow for the enactment of a range of gender identities, gender embodiments, and gender expressions that challenge mainstream ideals of masculinity. In this way, bear-gender is a politically resistant reinterpretation and reimagination of masculinity. On this point, Rhofes observes that "[b]ears defy traditional gender norms even as they affirm aspects of traditional masculinities. We are nurturing and macho at the same time. This is what I find to be the radical potential of the bear movement" (16). Rhofes continues: "[Bear subculture] does such interesting, subversive things with masculinity. There's a combination of traditional macho images that are subverted into gentleness, kindness, camaraderie, and loving brotherhood" (23). From the outside, it's easy to project onto bears the desire to establish themselves as traditionally masculine—even hypermasculine—in reaction to the emasculating mainstream social meanings of homosexuality in men. But that projection is a distortion. Bear-gender isn't a mere replication of mainstream masculinity. More poetically: "[w]e do homo-gender even when we pretend to do hetero-gender (23).

Finally, having access to bear-gender, via the constraints and enablements associated with bear identity, *contributes to the well-being of bears*. That is, the value of the sexual identity *bear* exceeds its political potential. It's personally significant: "Bear subculture presents masculinities very differently. We twist gender in new ways, which create men's social worlds that are fulfilling, loving, sexy, and fun" (24). Bear identity can be "life affirming" inasmuch as it creates opportunities in which men can experience the values of intimacy, emotion, and friendship—opportunities that aren't straightforwardly available to individuals who enact mainstream masculinity (21).[5]

In sum, the oppression involved in the gentrification of queer spaces isn't limited to the suppression of non-heterosexual sexual desires and behaviors. Neither is it limited to the denial of social and epistemic resources that would facilitate the development of veridical sexual self-identities among sexual minorities. As discussed above, compared to the mainstream constraints and enablements generated by the instantiation of sexual identity properties such as *being lesbian* or *being gay*, the constraints and enablements generated in queer spaces are normatively preferable with respect to gender expression. Furthermore, queer spaces create and sustain normatively important sexual identities such as *bear*. That is, the gentrification of queer spaces oppressively impacts the nature and availability of queer sexual identities. In order to explain LGBTQIA+ oppression, then, we need a concept of sexual identity.

Objection and Reply: Why Not a General Concept of Sexuality?

At this point, I've argued that we ought to endorse the orientation/identity distinction because the concepts of sexual identity and sexual orientation are individually indispensable to explaining LGBTQIA+ oppression. Yet here's an objection: LGBTQIA+ oppression could be explained with a more general concept of sexuality, namely, a concept that tracks features related to dispositions to sexual desire and behavior as well as features related to social constraints and enablements. So, the objection continues, it's not the case that the explanation of LGBTQIA+ oppression demands separate concepts of sexual orientation and sexual identity; instead, what's required is a general concept of sexuality. In response to this objection, I argue that a general concept of sexuality isn't sufficiently fine-grained to capture some normatively significant facts about LGBTQIA+ social experiences.

To introduce some new terminology, I hold that the gentrification of queer neighborhoods constitutes *orientation-based sexuality oppression* as well as *identity-based sexuality oppression*. Let's say that an individual experiences orientation-based oppression in virtue of being oppressed in their capacity as a non-heterosexual individual, namely, with respect to their interests involving dispositions to sexual desire and behavior. For example, as discussed above, an individual who is wrongfully denied the opportunity freely to express same-sex sexual desires is subject to orientation-based sexuality oppression. In contrast, an individual experiences identity-based sexuality oppression in virtue of being oppressed in their capacity as a non-straight individual, namely, with respect to their interests involving access to certain social constraints and enablements. As discussed above, an individual who is wrongfully denied access to queer cultural constraints and enablements experiences identity-based sexuality oppression. Now, I think that the general concept of sexuality isn't fine-grained enough to capture the distinct orientation-based and identity-based ways in which the gentrification of queer spaces oppresses sexual minorities.[6]

To illustrate the point, it'll be useful to consider another normative explanation involving sexual identity. Looking through the initial issue of *Butch is Not a Dirty Word*, for example, it's evident that LGBTQIA+ cultures vary with respect to the constraints and enablements conferred on butch individuals. For example, the magazine's editor, Esther Godoy, describes her experience as a butch individual across queer cultures:

> I didn't know what I was looking for until I found it overseas. In travelling to the USA I stumbled into a land where the butch aesthetic was met with desire, not with repulsion. A place where I found my own masculinity and could name it, or rather, it found me. . . . I assumed I could take this feeling back home and fit it into my life in Australia, but it didn't work that way. . . . I was "too dykey" or "too queer looking." After all, if those femme women wanted to "date a guy," then they would. In Australia, at that time, my masculinity automatically made me feel unattractive and less than. (Godoy 2017, 2)

Likewise, here's Natalie Browne, a femme lesbian, criticizing the devaluation of butch identity in her local queer culture:

> And from all people, you? Our community? My community? My family? How is it that you do not know our history? . . . How is it that butches are feeling unloved, unlovable? I believe, I feel, I know, that butches are crystals under the earth, waiting to be found. I adore you. I worship you. And you worship me. Thank goddess we have each other. But we need the rest of our community too. (Browne 2017, 13)

Here, Godoy and Browne highlight the following normatively significant fact: Queer cultures differ with respect to the constraints and enablements conferred on individuals who instantiate the sexual identity property *being butch*.

In order to capture this normatively significant fact, we need a concept that tracks individuals who are members of the sexual identity category *butch*. Here, I think, is reason to endorse the orientation/identity distinction. To begin, note that there isn't an orientation concept that accurately tracks individuals who are members of the sexual identity category *butch*. After all, the property *being butch* isn't coextensive with the property *being non-heterosexual*. Neither is the property *being butch* coextensive with a property such as *being a masculine non-heterosexual woman or nonbinary individual*.

On this point, let's suppose that the property *being a masculine non-heterosexual woman or nonbinary individual* is the base property of butch sexual identity. In that case, butch sexual identity would be the social meaning of being a masculine non-heterosexual woman or nonbinary individual. Still, in that case, the sexual identity property *being butch* isn't coextensive with the property *being a masculine non-heterosexual woman or nonbinary individual*. That's because—at least on the conferralist-style theory of sexual identity—butch individuals need not actually instantiate the property *being a masculine non-heterosexual woman or nonbinary individual*. On this aspect of conferralism, Ásta claims: "a person can have the conferred property, yet not have the base property itself. But this is how it should be. The presence of the conferred property, not the base property, is what explains the social constraints and enablements the person is subject to in a context" (Ásta 2018, 46).

At this point, I aim to have demonstrated that the concept of non-heterosexuality isn't apt to capture the fact that queer cultures differ with respect to the constraints and enablements conferred on individuals who instantiate the sexual identity property *being butch*. In that case, however, notice that the general concept of sexuality is too coarse-grained to capture the aforementioned normatively significant fact. Here we need a concept that exclusively tracks individuals who instantiate a certain conferred property in virtue of being perceived, say, to be masculine non-heterosexual women or nonbinary individuals. That is, we need a concept of butch sexual identity.

III. Call For Philosophical Research

Explaining LGBTQIA+ oppression requires distinguishing between sexual orientation and sexual identity. Non-heterosexual individuals are oppressed on the basis of their dispositions to sexual desire and behavior. Yet that's not the extent of the normative story. It's also oppressive to deny individuals access to the social constraints and enablements associated with queer cultural sexual identities. Accordingly, I hold that we ought to endorse the orientation/identity distinction, and I recommend future philosophical research on the normative significance and metaphysics of sexual identity.

Notes

1 Defending a particular theory of sexual identity is beyond the scope of this article, but I think that social position, entrenched social role, and critical kind analyses are serious contenders for a theory of sexual identity, and I recommend that future work on the social ontology of sexuality also consider these frameworks (see Haslanger 2012b; 2012c; 2012d; Mallon 2016; Dembroff 2020).

2 Note that Ásta distinguishes between conferred properties that are *institutional* (such as the property of being Prime Minister) and *communal* (such as the property of being cool) (Ásta 2018, 16). In what follows, I'll analyze queer sexual identity as related to communal conferred properties.

3 Although Ásta stresses the theoretical and political importance of highlighting similarities across different contextually dependent conferred properties, she rejects the claim proposed in this subsection that various conferred properties are metaphysically unified (Ásta 2018, 128).

4 For example, see the adult-use zoning regulations passed by the Council of the City of New York in 1995, reported in *725 Eatery Corp v. City of New York* (United States District Court 2019). For discussion, see also Berlant and Warner 1998, 551–52.

5 Here, notice that the concept of bear sexual self-identity isn't apt to explain the existence of bear-gender. That's because self-identifying as a bear doesn't generate the social constraints and enablements that give rise to bear-gender.

6 For further discussion on experiencing oppression or discrimination on the basis of a certain feature, see especially Haslanger 2012e, 321–33 as well as Supreme Court 2019.

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