

PUBLIC HEALTH, POLITICAL SOLIDARITY, AND THE ETHICS OF ORIENTATION ASCRIPTIONS

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How ought we to categorize individuals with respect to sexual orientation? It might be the case, as Esa Díaz-León (2022: 301–305) argues, that we ought to use ordinary categories such as *homosexual*, *heterosexual*, and *bisexual*. Or perhaps, as Robin Dembroff (2016: 22–23) argues, we ought to employ alternative categories such as *female-oriented*, *male-oriented*, *woman-oriented*, and *genderqueer-oriented*.

In this paper, I argue that the normatively important aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements provide reason to endorse a categorization scheme that (i) includes the categories *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, *bisexual*, *asexual*, and *queer*, (ii) distinguishes between attractions to sex features and attractions to gender features, and (iii) allows an element of interpretation, such that individuals have authority over which of their attractions (related to sex and/or gender features) matter to their orientation.

Here's the plan. In the first section, I'll outline the desiderata for a theory of how we ought to categorize individuals with respect to sexual orientation. In the second and third sections, I'll argue against the respective theories of Díaz-León and Dembroff. Then, in the fourth section, I'll explain and defend the aforementioned categorization scheme.

1. Sexual Orientation Categorization Schemes

There are a variety of ways in which a society might categorize individuals with respect to sexuality: queer or straight, polyamorous or monogamous, submissive or dominant. Not all divisions with respect to sexuality, however, are divisions with respect to sexual orientation. For example, there aren't any (present,

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actual) sexual orientations which involve being attracted to persons with red hair, musical talent, or sleekly furnished apartments. Notwithstanding the fact that individuals are sexually attracted to persons with the aforementioned features, individuals aren't "red hair oriented," "musical talent oriented," or "sleek apartment oriented." But there are sexual orientations which involve being attracted to persons with particular sex and/or gender features.¹ Following Dembroff, let's say that—as a contingent matter in contemporary Western societies—being attracted to persons with particular sex and/or gender features involves a sexual *orientation*, while being attracted to persons with red hair involves a sexual *druther*, in which druthers are "specific preferences of sexual partners within potential partners according to one's sexual orientation" (2016: 7).

Relatedly, let's say that an *orientation categorization scheme* marks the primary divisions that a society makes with respect to sexuality. For example, a possible society that primarily divides individuals on the basis of whether or not they're attracted to Madonna has an orientation categorization scheme that exhaustively includes the categories *Madonna-oriented* and *not-Madonna-oriented*. Closer to home, many societies have primarily categorized individuals on the basis of "active" or "passive" sexual role, with interesting cross-cultural variations regarding the interpretations of these notions.² Here it's evident that the divisions we make with respect to sexuality are deeply contingent. And so, our social practices of sexual categorization are open to normative assessment and political revision.

In contemporary Western societies, the *socially dominant orientation categorization scheme* primarily divides individuals on the basis of whether they're attracted to individuals with the same or "opposite" sex and gender features as themselves, and it exhaustively includes the categories *homosexual* and *heterosexual*. Notice that the socially dominant orientation categorization scheme doesn't have a place for individuals who are attracted to both women and men. That is, it contributes to *bisexual erasure*, such that bisexual experience is systematically ignored, denied, or misrepresented. With this example in mind, it's evident that the following question is normatively significant: How ought we to categorize individuals with respect to sexual orientation?

1. Here, I'll use the term 'sex' to refer to certain chromosomal, hormonal, and/or anatomical features (without ruling on the constructed or non-constructed status of these features). And I'll use the term 'gender' to refer to social situatedness and/or self-identity. With the following exceptions, I'll otherwise remain neutral about sex, gender, and the difference (if any) between them. First, sex isn't binary; that is, there are sex categories other than *female* and *male*, such as *intersex*. Second, gender isn't binary; that is, there are gender categories other than *woman* and *man*, such as *genderqueer*. Third, sex doesn't determine gender, such that, e.g., some men have female-coded chromosomal, hormonal, and/or anatomical features.

2. For example, in 15th century Florence, performing oral sex on another male was considered part of the active role, see David M. Halperin (2000: 102–9).

More precisely, what *concepts* of sexual orientation *categories* ought we to use? Following Ásta (2018: 1–2), let’s say that a category is a collection of individuals that instantiate a common property. For example, the category *water* is a collection of individuals that instantiate the property of (let’s say) *being H₂O*. And, following Haslanger (2020: 239), let’s say that concepts are “dispositions to be responsive to differences in a particular region of possible worlds.”³ On this usage, an individual possesses a concept of water just in case they’re disposed differently to interact with members and non-members of the category *water*. For example, individuals who possess a concept of water will generally give thirsty terriers H₂O (as opposed to tuna) and experience surprise upon seeing tuna (as opposed to H₂O) fall from the sky.

Now, there are a variety of categories associated with sexuality. For example, as noted above, there’s a category of individuals who are attracted to Madonna. Yet, there wouldn’t be much of an improvement with respect to coordinated activity if we came to possess a concept such that we were disposed to differentiate between individuals who are attracted to Madonna and individuals who are not. In contrast, it might be useful to have a concept of the category of individuals who are attracted to women, or a concept of the category of women who are attracted to women.

With the relation between concepts and coordinated activity in mind, here I endorse an *ameliorative* approach to concept choice.⁴ In particular, I hold that concepts of sexual orientation categories ought to satisfy the following *ameliorative desiderata*:

- (i) Allow the ascription of sexual orientations to non-cisheterosexual individuals, and
- (ii) Be conducive to the constitutive aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements.⁵

Regarding ameliorative desideratum (i), an individual is cisheterosexual just in case they’re cisgender and more-or-less exclusively attracted to individuals of the “opposite” sex and gender. With Dembroff, let’s say that cisgender individuals are individuals whose “genders are the ones assigned to them at birth on the basis of their anatomy” (2016: 2).⁶ With this background at hand, desideratum (i) amounts to the following: an orientation categorization scheme ought to allow

3. In particular: “[t]o *possess* a concept (and/or to grasp a meaning) is to have some cluster of capacities and mechanisms for using that grid of possibilities at some level of resolution, i.e., for making distinction(s), processing and storing the relevant information, answering questions” (Haslanger 2020: 239).

4. For discussion of ameliorative projects, see esp. Sally Haslanger (2012: 376–79).

5. Dembroff (2016: 5) and Díaz-León (2022: 305–307) endorse similar ameliorative desiderata.

6. For a similar definition, see Bettcher (2016: 408).

the ascription of sexual orientations to non-heterosexual persons, transgender persons, intersex persons, as well as persons who are attracted to transgender or intersex persons.⁷

Next, ameliorative desideratum (ii) holds that an orientation categorization scheme ought to be conducive to the constitutive aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements. Here the idea is that just as universities ought to have certain aims related to research and education in virtue of being universities, so LGBTQIA+ social movements ought to have certain aims (specified below), which I refer to as ‘constitutive aims’. I appeal to constitutive aims—not merely actual aims—on account of the fact that contemporary LGBTQIA+ social movements don’t always live up to the demands of gender and sexuality justice. For example, transgender individuals are still marginalized in contemporary LGBTQIA+ social movements. This is a historical irony, as contemporary LGBTQIA+ social movements have roots in transgender resistance to police brutality (see Stryker & Silverman 2005). Of course, the marginalization of transgender persons in contemporary LGBTQIA+ social movements is morally wrong. But it’s also hypocritical. It violates the following constitutive aim of LGBTQIA+ social movements: promote the well-being of non-cisheterosexual individuals.

Perhaps controversially, I hold that the following is also a constitutive aim of LGBTQIA+ social movements: promote queer culture. For example, consider the queer kinship practice referred to as ‘chosen family’. In lieu of an extended anthropological description, here’s Hector Xtravaganza’s famous description of the governing principle of the queer kinship practice: “Blood does not a family make. Those are relatives. Family are those with whom you share your good, bad, and ugly, and still love one another in the end. Those are the ones you select” (Norman 2019). Because so many LGBTQIA+ individuals are displaced from traditional family structures,⁸ queer kinship practices are especially important to the well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals. The aim of promoting queer culture, however, isn’t merely subsidiary to the aforementioned aim of improving LGBTQIA+ well-being. That’s because straight culture is also harmful to many cisheterosexual individuals, and an especially promising ameliorative strategy is gradually to bring straight cultural practices in

7. Here, I remain neutral about the metaphysics of transgender gender identity and intersex identity.

8. For example, of all youth experiencing homelessness, “20% identify as gay or lesbian, 7% identify as bisexual, and 2% identify as questioning their sexuality [. . .] 2% identify as transgender female, 1% identify as transgender male, and 1% identify as gender queer [. . .] The most prevalent reason for homelessness among LGBTQ youth was being forced out of home or running away from home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression” (Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates 2015: 4–5).

line with the relevant queer cultural phenomena.⁹ Make the world more just by making it queer!

Now, in the service of their constitutive aims, LGBTQIA+ social movements inherit a variety of subsidiary aims. For example, in order to advance the well-being of non-cisheterosexual individuals, LGBTQIA+ social movements take on the subsidiary aim of securing legal protections against sexuality-based and gender-based discrimination. Likewise, LGBTQIA+ social movements take on the subsidiary aim of ensuring that non-cisheterosexual individuals aren't excluded from orientation categorizations.¹⁰ Additionally, in order to promote queer culture, LGBTQIA+ social movements take on the subsidiary aim of creating and maintaining spaces—including neighborhoods, bars, bookstores, and community centers—that are especially conducive to engaging in queer cultural practices (see Andler 2021). With an account of the aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements at hand, I turn to consider how various categorization schemes fare with respect to the ameliorative desiderata. This is, in part, a contextual matter. And so, it's important to be clear that I'll focus on contemporary Western contexts.

2. The Socially Dominant Orientation Categorization Scheme

The socially dominant orientation categorization scheme exhaustively includes the categories *homosexual* and *heterosexual*. As noted above, the socially dominant orientation categorization scheme contributes to bisexual erasure. And so, it ought to be rejected. In what follows, I'll consider a revised version of the socially dominant orientation categorization scheme endorsed by Díaz-León, which is explicitly amended to include categories such as *bisexual* and *asexual*.

As discussed in the previous section, LGBTQIA+ social movements take on the aim of securing legal protections against orientation-based discrimination. The revised version of the socially dominant orientation categorization scheme is conducive to this aim because it can be used to track orientation-based discrimination. For example, consider a case in which an adoption agency denies the application of a homosexual, bisexual, or asexual individual who wants to adopt a child. If the individual's heterosexual counterpart would have been selected to adopt a child, there's evidence that the homosexual, bisexual, or

9. See Dembroff (2018: 36–38). For a general discussion of politically motivated cultural change, see Haslanger (2017: 153–59, 168–69).

10. In this way, desideratum (i) is included in desideratum (ii). I've separated the ameliorative desiderata for dialectical purposes.

asexual individual experienced orientation-based discrimination.¹¹ Along these lines, categories such as *homosexual*, *bisexual*, and *asexual* can be used in legal contexts to protect individuals against orientation-based discrimination.

This notwithstanding, the revised version of the socially dominant orientation categorization scheme fails to satisfy ameliorative desideratum (i). On this point, Dembroff claims:

Confusions between sex and gender—especially with regard to sexual orientation—regularly create difficulties for queer, gender-nonconforming, and intersex persons, as well as their partners. How should gender-nonconforming, transgender, or intersex persons (or their partners) describe their sexual orientations? [. . .] The current categories of sexual orientation offer little to no flexibility or clarity for these individuals. For these reasons, the current categories reinforce cisheteronormativity as well as heteronormativity. That is, because the current categories [. . .] have no place at all for many transgender or intersex individuals (or persons attracted to these individuals), they perpetuate prejudices that sexual orientations and gender identities that do not meet standard binaries of homosexual/heterosexual and cisgender man/cisgender woman are somehow deviant, dysfunctional, or even nonexistent. (2016: 5)

Here, Dembroff provides a powerful argument that *thickly-relational* orientation categorization schemes don't allow the ascription of orientations to many non-cisheterosexual individuals. Thickly-relational orientation categorization schemes primarily include thickly-relational categories such as *heterosexual* and *bisexual*, in which an individual is a member of a thickly-relational orientation category in virtue of their own sex and/or gender in relation to the sex and/or gender of the individuals to which they're attracted (Andler 2020: 215). For example, roughly, an individual is a member of the thickly-relational category *homosexual* in virtue of being attracted to individuals with the same sex and/or gender as themselves. In contrast, thinly-relational categorization schemes primarily include thinly-relational categories such as *male-oriented* and *genderqueer-oriented*, in which an individual is a member of a thinly-relational orientation category solely in virtue of the sex and/or gender of the individuals to which they're attracted (Andler 2020: 215). For example, an individual is a member of the thinly-relational category *male-oriented* solely in virtue of being attracted to male individuals, irrespective of their own sex features. With this terminology at hand, I understand

11. Note that in many jurisdictions in the United States, LGBTQIA+ individuals still aren't protected against discrimination by adoption agencies. See Harris (2017).

Dembroff's (2016: 5, 19, 24–25) argument against thickly-relational categorization schemes as follows:

- (1) We only ought to endorse an orientation categorization scheme if it ascribes orientations to transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals, as well as to individuals who are attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals.
- (2) Thickly-relational orientation categorization schemes cannot ascribe orientations to many transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals, as well as to many individuals who are attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals.
- (3) Therefore, we ought to reject thickly-relational orientation categorization schemes. (1, 2)

And here's Dembroff's reason for endorsing the second premise.

- (i) Thickly-relational categorization schemes can only ascribe orientations to members of the following *attenuated set* of individuals: female women and male men who are exclusively attracted to female women and/or male men.¹²
- (ii) Many transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals are, e.g., female men, male women, genderqueer individuals, or intersex individuals; that is, many transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals are not members of the aforementioned attenuated set.
- (iii) Many individuals who are attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals are attracted to, e.g., female men, male women, genderqueer individuals, or intersex individuals; that is, many individuals who are attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals are not members of the aforementioned attenuated set.
- (iv) Thickly-relational orientation categorization schemes cannot ascribe orientations to some transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals. (i, iii)
- (v) Thickly-relational orientation categorization schemes cannot ascribe orientations to some individuals who are attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals. (i, iii)

12. Regarding the source of exclusion, Dembroff claims: "assumptions that sexual orientation is always one-dimensional—concerning either sex-attraction or gender-attraction, but never a combination of the two—and that sexual orientation concerns the sex or gender of *both* potential partners are deeply embedded within the concepts associated with [categories such as *homosexual* and *heterosexual* . . .] The current concepts of 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' [. . .] inherently refer to a relation between the sexes (or genders) of sexual partners" (2016: 24–25).

Dembroff (2016: 5) explains that the revised version of the socially dominant categorization scheme only ascribes orientations to members of the attenuated set of individuals described in premise (i). For example, consider Josephine, a female woman who is exclusively attracted to female men. On the revised version of the socially dominant categorization scheme, Josephine isn't heterosexual (as she's not exclusively attracted to male men), homosexual (as she's not exclusively attracted to female women) or bisexual (as she's not attracted to female women and male men). In section four, I'll return to Dembroff's argument against thickly-relational categorization schemes. Here, I reject the revised version of the socially dominant categorization scheme because it fails to satisfy ameliorative desideratum (i).

3. Dembroff's Alternative Orientation Categorization Scheme

As noted above, Dembroff endorses a thinly-relational orientation categorization scheme. On this point, Dembroff claims that they understand sexual orientation, "*solely in terms of the sex[es] and gender[s] of the persons one is disposed to sexually engage, without reference to the sex or gender of the person so disposed*" (2016: 19). Dembroff's (2016: 9–12) account of sexual orientation is generally neutral with respect to the metaphysics of sex and gender. Here, I'll consider a version of Dembroff's categorization scheme that includes the following categories (among others): *intersex-oriented*, *female-oriented*, *woman-oriented*, and *genderqueer-oriented*.

To begin, note that Dembroff's categorization scheme can ascribe orientations to non-cisheterosexual individuals. For example, from the previous section, consider Josephine, a female woman who is exclusively attracted to female men. On Dembroff's account, Josephine is female-oriented and man-oriented. For another example, consider Dylan, an intersex man who is exclusively attracted to female women. On Dembroff's account, Dylan is female-oriented and woman-oriented. Here, I agree with Dembroff that their categorization scheme is "*capable of recognizing persons outside the gender or sex binary*" (2016: 19). Dembroff's categorization scheme satisfies ameliorative desideratum (i).

Moving to ameliorative desideratum (ii), Dembroff argues that their categorization scheme can be used in legal contexts to protect non-cisheterosexual individuals against discrimination. On this point, Dembroff claims:

[Concepts of thinly-relational orientation categories provide] tools for lawmakers to secure protections for sexual orientation under pre-existing protections against gender- and sex-discrimination [. . . Sexual] orientation discrimination can be easily re-described in terms of gender or sex discrimination by holding fixed that multiple individuals share the

same sex- or gender attractions, and yet some are discriminated against simply because they have a particular sex or gender in addition to those attractions. (2016: 19–20)

For example, consider Chris, a female man who is exclusively attracted to female women. Suppose that an adoption agency denies Chris’s application, and further suppose that the male counterpart of Chris (who, let’s say, is also female-oriented and woman-oriented) would have been selected to adopt a child. On Dembroff’s strategy of re-description, Chris is subject to sex-discrimination, and he ought to be legally protected accordingly.¹³

I agree with Dembroff that their categorization scheme ascribes orientations to non-cisheterosexual individuals and can be used in legal contexts to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals against discrimination. That said, in what follows, I’ll argue that LGBTQIA+ social movements have strategic reason to endorse a categorization scheme that includes categories such as *asexual*, *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, and *bisexual*. While Dembroff (2016: 3, 19) explicitly includes the category *asexual* in their categorization scheme, they recommend that we eliminate concepts of categories such as *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, and *bisexual*.

Now, it might seem that individuals who possess concepts of categories such as *female-oriented*, *woman-oriented*, *female*, and *woman* would more-or-less automatically also possess concepts of categories such as *homosexual*. If that were the case, however, Dembroff’s claim that we ought to eliminate concepts of categories such as *homosexual* while using concepts of categories such as *female-oriented*, *woman-oriented*, *female*, and *woman* would be self-undermining. But that’s not the case. It makes sense to claim that individuals ought to differentiate between members and non-members of categories such as *female-oriented*, *woman-oriented*, *female*, and *woman* without also differentiating between members and non-members of categories such as *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, and *bisexual*.¹⁴ Indeed, Dembroff speaks to this point directly; on their view, “there are no such sexual orientations as (e.g.) ‘homosexual’ or ‘heterosexual’ [. . . and] there is no

13. The Supreme Court of the United States correctly ruled that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects LGBTQIA+ individuals against employment discrimination in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, No. 17–1618, *Altitude Express, Inc., et al. v. Zarda et al., as Co-Independent Executors of the Estate of Zarda*, No. 17–1623, and *R. G. & G. R. Harris Funeral Homes, Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission et al.*, No. 18–107. The majority opinion echoes Robin Dembroff and Issa Kohler-Hausmann’s argument that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity amounts to “discrimination because of sex” (expressly prohibited by Title VII), see “Brief of Philosophy Professors as *Amici Curiae* in Support of the Employees,” nos. 17–1618, 17–1623, 18–107, (United States Supreme Court filed July 3, 2019).

14. Note that this result holds on the Haslangerian account of concepts discussed above, in which concepts are individuated by their role in our practices (Haslanger 2020).

distinction in the sexual orientations of (e.g.) a cisgender man and a transgender woman who both are exclusively attracted to women” (2016: 19).

Of course, eliminating concepts of categories such as *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, and *bisexual* would have extremely significant political upshots. For example, Dembroff holds that the elimination of the aforementioned concepts would do away with the separation between queer and straight communities (2016: 19). While I agree with this counterfactual assessment, I reject Dembroff’s proposed political strategy. Dembroff holds that in order to advance LGBTQIA+ interests, we ought to dissolve the social significance of same-sex and same-gender attractions, such that “[t]he statistical divide between cisheterosexuality and queer sexual orientations simply disappears” (2016: 19). At this historical moment, however, I reject such a strategy. On this point, I’m influenced by Díaz-León (2022: 305), who claims:

[There is a] similarity between those people who identify as male/men and are attracted to other males/men, and those who identify as female/women and are attracted to females/women. And I believe that it is politically useful to have concepts that make this similarity salient since this is an important dimension of discrimination that is politically useful to emphasize, to wit, these two communities occupy similar social positions regarding many factors such as cultural representations, access to marriage benefits, housing, healthcare, and so on [. . .] And those who are either male/men and are (only) attracted to female/women, or female/women who are (only) attracted to males/men have some similar privileges.

Along these lines, I’ll argue that LGBTQIA+ social movements ought to endorse a categorization scheme that includes categories such as *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, *bisexual*, and *asexual*. To begin, I’ll argue that differentiating between heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals is conducive to LGBTQIA+ solidarity.

Following Tommie Shelby, let’s say that a group has solidarity to the extent that its members, “identify, both subjectively and publicly, with each other or with the group as a whole [. . .] share a set of values or goals [. . .] show loyalty to in-group members as opposed to those of the relevant out-group [. . . and] trust one another” (2007: 68–70). Groups that sustain these features with respect to identification, shared value, loyalty, and trust have the potential to generate significant political power. Indeed, Shelby holds that black people, “can make progress in overcoming or ameliorating their shared condition only if they embrace black solidarity” (2007: 202). The same point about the political power of solidarity applies to LGBTQIA+ social movements, and so ameliorative desideratum (ii) provides reason to distinguish individuals with respect to sexuality in such a way that promotes LGBTQIA+ solidarity.

So, what divisions with respect to sexuality might promote solidarity among LGBTQIA+ individuals? Consider that Shelby argues that black solidarity is secured by the collective recognition of a shared experience of racial oppression; on this point, Shelby claims: “[t]he mutual identification among blacks—that familiar sense of ‘we-ness’—can be rooted, in part, in the shared experience of antiblack racism. This experience enables blacks to empathize with one another and sometimes moves them to provide mutual support in a world that is often hostile to their presence” (2007: 245).¹⁵ Following Shelby, I hold that asexual, bisexual, and homosexual individuals can promote LGBTQIA+ solidarity by collectively recognizing a shared oppression on the basis of non-heterosexuality.¹⁶ In order collectively to recognize that shared oppression, we need to differentiate between heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals; that is, we need an orientation categorization scheme that includes the category *heterosexual*.

On this point, many asexual, bisexual, and homosexual individuals are already quite keen to differentiate themselves from heterosexual individuals. Indeed, LGBTQIA+ cultures have generated a vast array of orientation-communicating practices, ranging from the historical handkerchief code to the linguistic dynamics involved in contemporary code-switching. These orientation-communicating practices are often quite subtle, so as to remain invisible to potentially hostile individuals.¹⁷ The value of in-group communication notwithstanding, I stress that we don’t need to choose between LGBTQIA+ solidarity and mainstream social inclusion. To the contrary, on account of its political power, LGBTQIA+ solidarity is crucial to securing equal access to mainstream institutions. Moreover, LGBTQIA+ solidarity doesn’t preclude coalition with cisheterosexual individuals.¹⁸ Again, here’s Shelby: “[a]lthough blacks should surely work with antiracist nonblacks against racism and other forms of social injustice, there is no principled reason why blacks must give up their solidaristic commitment to each other to do so.”¹⁹ LGBTQIA+ solidarity is entirely compatible

15. More expansively, Shelby (2007: 203–36) argues against attempts to secure black solidarity on the basis of shared culture, ethnicity, and/or national identity. Here, I don’t rule on whether the same points apply to LGBTQIA+ solidarity.

16. On my view, transgender individuals can likewise promote LGBTQIA+ solidarity by collectively recognizing a shared oppression on the basis of transgender gender identity. And LGBTQIA+ individuals can ultimately secure an encompassing LGBTQIA+ solidarity by collectively recognizing the inseparability of gender-based and sexuality-based oppression. For discussion of inseparable social identities, see Sara Bernstein (2020: 325–30).

17. For related discussion of in-group communication among members of oppressed racial groups, see Anderson (2017: 6).

18. For clarity, here I use ‘solidarity’ to refer to political unity among LGBTQIA+ individuals and ‘coalition’ to refer to political unity between LGBTQIA+ individuals and cisheterosexual individuals.

19. Indeed, Shelby notes that this compatibility of in-group solidarity and out-group coalition generalizes across other axes of oppression: “[t]here is room for nested and overlapping forms of

with coalition between LGBTQIA+ individuals and cisheterosexual allies, whose dedication to LGBTQIA+ social movements often emerges out of friendship, parenthood, or a sense of justice.²⁰

At this point, I've argued that LGBTQIA+ individuals can promote LGBTQIA+ solidarity by collectively recognizing a shared oppression on the basis of non-heterosexuality. Here's reason to differentiate between members and non-members of the category *heterosexual*. In what follows, I'll argue that in order to promote the well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals, LGBTQIA+ social movements also have strategic reason to differentiate between members and non-members of the categories *homosexual*, *bisexual*, and *asexual*.

To begin, consider the experiences and interests of asexual individuals. For example, it's common for asexual individuals to experience pathologization. On this point, Mark Carrigan's interviews about asexual experience include testimony such as, "I thought that there might be something wrong with me" and "I continued to wonder why I was broken" (2015: 342, 354). Of course, asexuality is entirely compatible with human flourishing. And the pathologization experienced by many asexual individuals is rooted in ideology: "[the] ubiquitous affirmation of sex, its perceived normalcy and centrality to a healthy life, can preclude self-acceptance as a culturally available option for asexuals" (Carrigan 2015: 345).

Now, LGBTQIA+ social movements have ameliorated the aforementioned experience of pathologization through the cultivation of asexual community.²¹ For example, like many other LGBTQIA+ organizations, NYC's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center hosts, "[a] support group for people who identify on the asexual and/or aromantic spectrum to share experiences, form community and explore their concerns and feelings around society, individuality, identity and more" (Oasis Support Group at The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center 2021). While this support group is open to allies and other LGBTQIA+ individuals, it's centered around the experiences and interests of asexual and aromantic individuals. In order to promote the well-being of asexual individuals, then, it's strategic to differentiate between asexual and non-asexual individuals. Here's reason to endorse an orientation categorization scheme that includes the category *asexual*.

Next, consider the experiences and interests of bisexual individuals. For example, William Jeffries, working with the Centers for Disease Control and

antiracist solidarity, just as there is space for more or less exclusive and inclusive collective struggles at other sites of oppression, such as class, gender, culture, and sexuality" (2007: 240).

20. Roughly, an ally is a cisheterosexual individual who takes up a role promoting LGBTQIA+ interests, see Blankschaen (2016).

21. Carrigan reports that "[t]he acquisition of a communal identity serves to ward off pathology [. . .] it facilitates a self-clarification and self-acceptance" (2015: 345).

Prevention, describes the highly-specific social issues that bisexual individuals face with respect to the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS:

Biphobia can manifest in erroneous beliefs that MSMW [men who have sex with men and women] are closeted gay men and, particularly for black men, responsible for HIV transmission to women. Experiencing these sentiments can contribute to social isolation and psychological distress, which in turn may promote HIV/STI risk through substance use, sexual risk behaviors, and avoidance of prevention services. Researchers have argued that biphobia may explain some MSMW's HIV testing avoidance. (Jeffries 2014: 323)²²

This situation calls for interventions tailored to bisexual individuals (Jeffries 2014: 324). Indeed, marketing campaigns, group meetings, and counseling services sensitive to the social experiences of bisexual men of color have produced significant, measurable improvements with respect to rates of unprotected sex.²³ Accordingly, in the context of ameliorating injustices related to the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS, it's strategic to differentiate between bisexual and non-bisexual individuals. Here's reason to endorse an orientation categorization scheme that includes the category *bisexual*.

Above, I argued that in order to promote LGBTQIA+ solidarity and LGBTQIA+ well-being, it's strategic to differentiate between members and non-members of categories such as *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, *bisexual*, and *asexual*. Accordingly, Dembroff's thinly-relational orientation categorization scheme faces issues with respect to ameliorative desideratum (ii).

4. The Queer Categorization Scheme

Above, I argued against Díaz-León and Dembroff's respective orientation categorization schemes. So, how ought we to categorize individuals with respect to sexual orientation? Here, I argue that we ought to endorse the *Queer Categorization Scheme*, which has the following features:

22. For discussion of disparities in rates of HIV testing in bisexual men compared to homosexual men (such that bisexual men are significantly less likely than homosexual men to have received an HIV test in their lifetime), see Jeffries (2010), Lyons et al. (2010), and Feinstein, Moran, Newcomb, and Mustanski (2019: 48).

23. These programs include *Hombres Sanos*, the Bruthas Project, Men of African American Legacy Empowering Self (MAALES), Enhanced Sexual Health Intervention for Men (ES-HIM), POWER, Men in Life Environments (MILE), and Project Rise, see Feinstein and Dodge (2020: 221–23).

- (a) Includes the categories *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, *bisexual*, *asexual*, and *queer*,
- (b) Distinguishes between attractions to sex features and attraction to gender features, and
- (c) Allows an element of interpretation, such that individuals have authority over whether their attractions to sex features and/or attractions to gender features determine their orientation.

Here, I'm influenced by Saray Ayala's account of the relation between sexual orientation and interpretation. On Ayala's view, there's "a core affect module consisting of some sort of neurophysiological state of the individual in relation to sexual-affective affects" (2016: 6). Yet, the properties at this neurophysiological level don't fully determine sexual orientation: "while desires/affects are themselves constituted independently of any interpretation, the selection of some of those desires/affects and their conceptualization as related to the sex and/or gender of someone is an interpretative process necessary for sexual orientation" (2016: 7).

On the Queer Categorization Scheme, an individual has authority over whether their sex attractions and/or gender attractions (fully) determine their orientation. For example, consider Triston, a male man who is exclusively attracted to male genderqueer individuals. On the Queer Categorization Scheme, Triston has authority over whether his male-to-male sex attractions and/or man-to-genderqueer gender attractions determine his orientation, such that (all and only) the attractions in exactly one of the following sets determine Triston's orientation:

- (α): {male-to-male attractions}
- (β): {man-to-genderqueer attractions}
- (γ): {male-to-male attractions, man-to-genderqueer attractions}

For example, suppose that Triston engages in an interpretative process such that his sex attractions determine his orientation. In that case, Triston's male-to-male attractions determine his orientation, and he's homosexual.

Here, there's a distinction between *genus-level attractions* and *species-level attractions*. Genus-level attractions include sex attractions and gender attractions. In contrast, species-level attractions include, e.g., female-to-female attractions, female-to-male attractions, and genderqueer-to-woman attractions. On the Queer Categorization Scheme, individuals have authority over what genus-level attractions determine their orientation, not over which particular species-level attractions determine their orientation. For example, consider Simone, a female woman who is exclusively attracted to female women and male men. On the

Queer Categorization Scheme, the attractions in exactly one of the following sets determine Simone's orientation:

- (δ): {female-to-female attractions, female-to-male attractions}
- (ϵ): {woman-to-woman attractions, woman-to-man attractions}
- (ζ): {female-to-female attractions, female-to-male attractions, woman-to-woman attractions, woman-to-man attractions}

Perhaps it seems arbitrary to endorse a categorization scheme that provides individuals with authority over what genus-level attractions determine their orientation, without also allowing similar authority with respect to particular species-level attractions. Yet, this aspect of the Queer Categorization Scheme is due to the demands of ameliorative desideratum (ii), which holds that we ought to endorse a categorization scheme conducive to the constitutive aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements. On this point, suppose that Simone mistakenly believes that she's exclusively attracted to female women, say on account of the invisibility of bisexuality in dominant cultural representations of sexual experience (see Fricker 2007: 163–67). A categorization scheme that provided individuals with authority over which particular species-level attractions determine their orientation would allow that Simone is homosexual. But we ought to reject that result on ameliorative grounds, as it would contribute to bisexual erasure.

In sum, on the Queer Categorization Scheme, individuals identical with respect to attraction(s) can differ with respect to orientation. That's because feature (c) allows individuals authority over whether their orientations are determined by their sex attractions and/or gender attractions. Neither Dembroff nor Díaz-León's accounts of orientation include such an element of authority. And so, feature (c) is distinctive to the Queer Categorization Scheme.

Now, the aforementioned element of authority raises an important question. In particular, why are the categories of the Queer Categorization Scheme orientations, as opposed to ways in which individuals can subjectively identify with respect to orientation? Here, consider an analogy to the gender category *woman*. While I don't endorse any particular account of gender in the context of this paper, note that there are prominent theories of gender on which an individual is a woman in virtue of sincerely self-identifying as a woman. Consider Dembroff's (2018: 33–38) account, for example, on which the membership conditions of gender categories vary across mainstream and queer cultural contexts. For example, in mainstream social contexts, an individual's gender is determined by their natal genitalia (2018: 33–34). In many queer cultural contexts, however, an individual is a member of the gender category *woman* in virtue of sincerely self-identifying as a woman: “[i]ndividuals are granted authority over their gender kind membership” (2018:36–37). To complete the analogy, as sincere

self-identification can figure into the membership conditions of gender categories, so interpretive acts can figure into the membership conditions of orientation categories.

It's important, however, not to overextend the analogy. On this point, consider again Simone (a female woman who is exclusively attracted to female women and male men). As noted above, in order to avoid perpetuating bisexual erasure, an orientation categorization scheme ought not to allow the result that Simone is homosexual. That's the case even if Simone mistakenly believes that she's exclusively attracted to female women. Likewise, ameliorative desideratum (ii) provides reason to reject a categorization scheme on which orientation is self-ascribed. Within this sort of ameliorative limit, however, individuals otherwise ought to have authority over the socially significant categories that they inhabit. This principle of authority is widely endorsed in flourishing LGBTQIA+ cultures, and it's a central motivation for feature (c) of the Queer Categorization Scheme.

At this point, I'll turn to explain the membership conditions of the categories in the Queer Categorization Scheme. To begin, on the Queer Categorization Scheme, asexuality is a distinct sexual orientation. An individual is a member of the category *asexual* just in case they don't have significant sexual attractions.²⁴ To be clear, some asexual individuals have romantic attractions, as opposed to sexual attractions, which are often felt towards individuals with particular sex and/or gender features (see Asexuality Visibility and Education Network 2021).

In order to explain the membership conditions of the remaining categories in the Queer Categorization Scheme, it'll be useful to have concepts of *binary attractions* and *cissexual sets of attractions*. Binary attractions exclusively involve the binary sex categories *female* and *male* or the binary gender categories *woman* and *man*. For example, the following attractions are binary: female-to-male attractions and woman-to-woman attractions. In contrast, neither genderqueer-to-man attractions nor intersex-to-intersex attractions are binary. Next, cissexual sets of attractions involve attractions between cisgender individuals. For example, the following sets of attractions are cissexual: {male-to-female attractions, man-to-woman attractions} and {female-to-female attractions, woman-to-woman attractions}. In contrast, recall Josephine (a female woman who is exclusively attracted to female men). The following set of Josephine's attractions isn't cissexual: {female-to-female, woman-to-man}.

24. More precisely, an individual is asexual just in case their orientation is determined by an empty set of sex and/or gender attractions. Now, what's required to have an empty set of sex and/or gender attractions? Here I deny that the direct mental representation of sex and/or gender features is a necessary condition for having a particular sex and/or gender attraction. Thanks to an anonymous referee for discussion.

With this terminology at hand, on the Queer Categorization Scheme, an individual is a member of the category *homosexual* just in case the attractions in exactly one of the following sets determine their orientation: a set of binary same-sex attractions, a set of binary same-gender attractions, or a cissexual set of same-sex and same-gender attractions. This point might be expressed in grounding-theoretic terms: an individual is homosexual just in case their orientation is grounded by the attractions in exactly one of the following sets: {female-to-female attractions}, {woman-to-woman attractions}, {female-to-female attractions, woman-to-woman attractions}, {male-to-male attractions}, {man-to-man attractions}, {male-to-male attractions, man-to-man attractions}. For example, recall Triston, a male man who is exclusively attracted to male genderqueer individuals. On the Queer Categorization Scheme, Triston has authority over whether his sex attractions and/or gender attractions ground his orientation, and Triston is homosexual just in case he engages in an interpretive process such that his male-to-male sex attractions ground his orientation.

Next, an individual is a member of the category *heterosexual* just in case the attractions in exactly one of the following sets ground their orientation: a set of binary other-sex attractions, a set of binary other-gender attractions, or a cissexual set of other-sex and other-gender attractions. For example, an individual is heterosexual if their female-to-male attractions ground their orientation. For another example, an individual is heterosexual if their orientation is grounded in their male-to-female attractions in concert with their man-to-woman attractions.

Next, an individual is a member of the category *bisexual* just in case the attractions in exactly one of the following sets ground their orientation: a set of binary same-sex and other-sex attractions, a set of binary same-gender and other-gender attractions, or a cissexual set of same-sex and other-sex attractions in concert with same-gender and other-gender attractions. For example, an individual is bisexual if their orientation is grounded in their male-to-male attractions in concert with their male-to-female attractions.

It's important to note that these membership conditions diverge to an extent from those provided by some LGBTQIA+ individuals and organizations. I don't take this point lightly, and I'll return to address it below. Moreover, I stress that the aforementioned membership conditions aren't essential to the Queer Categorization Scheme. That's because they might be somewhat modified while retaining the distinctive element of interpretation in feature (c).

Next, on the Queer Categorization Scheme, an individual is a member of the category *queer* just in case the attractions in exactly one of the following sets ground their orientation: a set of non-binary sex attractions, a set of non-binary gender attractions, or a non-cissexual set of sex and gender attractions. For example, an individual is queer if their woman-to-genderfluid attractions ground their orientation. For another example, an individual is queer if their orientation

is grounded in their female-to-female attractions in concert with their woman-to-man attractions.

At this point, I turn to consider how the Queer Categorization Scheme fares with respect to the ameliorative desiderata. To begin, I deny premise (i) in Dembroff's argument against thickly-relational categorization schemes by demonstrating that the Queer Categorization Scheme ascribes orientations to transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals, as well as to individuals attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals.

Things are about to get complicated. But that's to be expected. Transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals, as well as individuals attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals navigate categorization with respect to sexual orientation in ways that aren't always (ahem) straightforward.

To begin, the Queer Categorization Scheme can ascribe orientations to genderqueer individuals as well as to individuals attracted to genderqueer individuals. For example, consider Elaine, a female woman who, for most of her life, has been exclusively attracted to other female women. In the past few years, however, Elaine developed enduring sexual attractions to some genderqueer female individuals. Reflecting on this change, Elaine might reason: "My interest in female individuals is more important to my sexual orientation than any of my gender hang-ups. After all, I might have been attracted to some female men if I hadn't been socialized in a culture that places so much significance on gender." Alternatively: "While I enjoy female bodies, I'm also drawn to genderqueer gender presentation. That said, homosexuality is important to my self-conception, and I don't want to give it up." In either case, Elaine interprets her attractions such that her female-to-female attractions ground her orientation, and she's homosexual.

But these aren't the only interpretative options available to Elaine. For example, Elaine might reason: "Being a lesbian is really important to me, but I don't need to be homosexual in order to be a lesbian. After all, I know some heterosexual trans men who are part of the lesbian community.²⁵ I'm attracted to women and genderqueer individuals, and I'd like my orientation to reflect my sexual phenomenology." Here, Elaine interprets her attractions such that her woman-to-woman attractions in concert with her woman-to-genderqueer attractions ground her orientation. And she's queer.

On the Queer Categorization Scheme, then, Elaine has authority over whether her (female-to-female) sex attractions and/or (woman-to-woman and woman-to-genderqueer) gender attractions ground her orientation. To be clear, however, that authority doesn't foreclose normative assessment. For example, if

25. Continue inner dialogue: "Plus, I read Gayle Rubin's interesting paper on the topic, 'Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries' (2006: 476-478)".

Elaine were to decide that her sex attractions ground her orientation (such that she's homosexual), she might disrespect the genderqueer identity of some the individuals to which she's attracted. Authority generates risk. But that doesn't mean that individuals ought to be denied authority over the socially significant categories that they inhabit. The solution, instead, is to cultivate incentive structures and epistemic resources that are conducive to the ethical exercise of authority.

Next, the Queer Categorization Scheme can ascribe orientations to transgender individuals and intersex individuals, as well as to individuals attracted to transgender or intersex individuals. For example, consider again Chris (a female man who is exclusively attracted to female women). On the Queer Categorization Scheme, Chris's orientation is either heterosexual, homosexual, or queer. For example, if Chris engages in an interpretive process such that his female-to-female attractions ground his orientation, then he is homosexual. Additionally, consider again Dylan (an intersex man who is exclusively attracted to female women). On the Queer Categorization Scheme, Dylan is heterosexual in case he engages in an interpretive process such that his man-to-woman attractions ground his orientation.

Given this flexibility, note that orientation ascriptions are sensitive to a more general concept of sexual orientation. On this point, I'm inclined to think that we ought to endorse a concept of sexual orientation such that orientation isn't a "deep" feature of the self that necessarily remains constant across contexts.²⁶ For example, in contexts in which Elaine is attempting to make her experiences intelligible to a few straight relatives, she might claim homosexuality. In contrast, while communicating her sexual desires to members of a local LGBTQIA+ community, Elaine might interpret her attractions such that she's queer. There's so much complexity that could be explored here. For the present purposes, however, what's important is that the Queer Categorization Scheme ascribes orientations to transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals, as well as to individuals attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals. And so, the Queer Categorization Scheme satisfies ameliorative desideratum (i).

Next, regarding ameliorative desideratum (ii), I hold that the Queer Categorization Scheme is conducive to the constitutive aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements. As discussed at length in the second section, in order to promote LGBTQIA+ solidarity and LGBTQIA+ well-being, it's strategic to differentiate between members and non-members of thickly-relational orientation categories. Accordingly, the Queer Categorization Scheme satisfies ameliorative desideratum (ii).

26. Here, I follow Cheshire Calhoun, who claims to have "switched sexual orientation from heterosexual to lesbian" (2000: v). See also Rubin (2011:147-48).

At this point, I'll return to the membership conditions of the category *bisexual*. (Again, I don't aim to settle this contested issue in the context of this paper.) As noted above, on the Queer Categorization Scheme, the membership conditions of the category *bisexual* diverge to an extent from those endorsed by some LGBTQIA+ individuals and organizations. For example, the Bisexual Resource Center (2021) holds that an individual is bisexual just in case they're *non-monosexual*, in contrast to *monosexual* individuals who are attracted to individuals of a single gender. Yet, it's important that some non-monosexual individuals don't self-identify as bisexual, e.g., some women who are attracted to both women and genderqueer individuals don't self-identify as bisexual.²⁷ Of course, individuals can be mistaken about their orientations. My point here is methodological. On account of the aforementioned disagreement, it wouldn't be justified simply to defer to the non-monosexual interpretation.

Earlier, I argued that LGBTQIA+ social movements ought to categorize individuals with respect to sexual orientation in such a way that promotes LGBTQIA+ solidarity and LGBTQIA+ well-being. Along these lines, LGBTQIA+ social movements have strategic reason to endorse an orientation categorization scheme that includes the category *queer*. That's because members and non-members of the orientation category *queer* have significantly different social experiences, which aren't tracked by the monosexual/non-monosexual distinction. In particular, members of the orientation category *queer* are unjustly affected by *cisnormativity*. Broadly, *cisnormativity* is an element of the dominant ideology which holds that an individual's gender (as either a man or a woman) is determined by their sex assigned at birth (as either male or female). As Susan Stryker explains, "our culture today tries to reduce the wide range of livable body types to two and *only* two genders [. . .] with both genders being based on our beliefs about the meaning of biological sex" (2017: 17).

Regarding the ways in which *cisnormativity* unjustly affects the well-being of members of the orientation category *queer*, consider the sexual stigmatization of trans-attracted individuals, here described by Julia Serano:

[T]rans people and bodies are highly stigmatized throughout society. This stigmatization inflicts shame on those of us who are trans—a shame that many of us work hard to overcome. But this shame also affects people who find us attractive—not in the same way, nor to the same extent, but it does affect them. Rather than seeing their attraction toward us as "normal" and "healthy," society teaches them to view it as a "fetish." This shame encourages them to keep their attraction secret—this applies to both cis people who self-identify as "admirers," "fetishists," or "chasers" and purposefully

27. The Bisexual Resource Center (2021) acknowledges this empirical point.

seek out trans partners, as well as to those cis people who are surprised to find out that the person they are attracted to, or dating, or have fallen in love with, is trans and who subsequently hides that info (and sometimes even their partner's existence) from friends and family. (2016: 207–8)

Here, Serano explains that cisnormativity unjustly affects the well-being of trans-attracted individuals, rendering (what are often) normatively unproblematic sexual attractions a source of distress.²⁸ Of course, the cisnormative stigmatization of trans-attraction unjustly affects the well-being of transgender individuals, as it further complicates the process of sustaining healthy sexual relationships (Dembroff 2016: 11).²⁹ Moreover, cisnormative ideology represents transgender gender identity as a result of sexual perversion. On this point, Talia Mae Bettcher explains that individuals often “construe transsexuality in terms of sexual desire [. . . and] reduce cross-gender identification to a kind of sexual fetish” (Bettcher 2014). In part, the cisnormative stigmatization of transgender sexuality explains oppressive phenomena such as accusations that trans women are sexually deceptive homosexual men as well as testimonial injustices in medical contexts involving “auto-gynephilic” diagnoses of gender dysphoria (see Bettcher 2007 and Moser 2009). Because members of the orientation category *queer* share interests with respect to sexual destigmatization (viz., involving the mitigation of the effects of cisnormativity), it's strategic for LGBTQIA+ social movements to differentiate between members and non-members of the orientation category *queer*.

In sum, the Queer Categorization Scheme is conducive to the constitutive aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements, especially involving the promotion of LGBTQIA+ solidarity and LGBTQIA+ well-being. Furthermore, the Queer Categorization Scheme allows the ascription of sexual orientations to transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals, as well as to individuals attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals. The Queer Categorization Scheme, then, satisfies ameliorative desideratum (i) and ameliorative desideratum (ii). And so, I endorse the Queer Categorization Scheme.

5. Conclusion

The following question is normatively significant. How ought we to categorize individuals with respect to sexual orientation? While the socially dominant

28. The parenthetical qualification is required on account of the fetishization of transgender individuals; it's wrong to sexualize individuals in ways that are “*depersonalized*,” “*homogenized*,” or “*otherized*,” see Zheng (2016: 407–8).

29. For related data on the prevalence of discriminatory dating preferences, see Blair and Hoskin (2019).

orientation categorization scheme is somewhat conducive to the constitutive aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements, it doesn't allow the ascription of sexual orientations to many non-cisheterosexual individuals. In contrast, categorization schemes that primarily include categories such as *female-oriented* and *woman-oriented* allow the ascription of sexual orientations to transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals, as well as to individuals attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals, but such categorization schemes aren't always conducive to the promotion of LGBTQIA+ solidarity and LGBTQIA+ well-being.

Ultimately, I hope to have developed an orientation categorization scheme that allows the ascription of sexual orientations to transgender, genderqueer, and intersex individuals, as well as to individuals attracted to transgender, genderqueer, or intersex individuals, while being conducive to the constitutive aims of LGBTQIA+ social movements. That said, I stress that I do not aim to legislate, only to provide conceptual resources. Like other social categories, sexual orientation categories are essentially negotiable. Still, this much is fixed: "Our categories are important. We cannot organize a social life, a political movement, or our individual identities and desires without them" (Rubin 2006: 479).

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