

Logical Generics and Gay Identity

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ABSTRACT

Gays identity is usually cast in generics—statements about an indeterminate number of members in a given category. Sometimes these generic statements often get built up into folk definitions, vague and imprecise ways to talk about objects. Other times generics get co-opted into authentic definitions, definitions that pick out a few traits and assert that real members of the class have these traits and members that do not are simply members by a technicality. I assess how we adopt these generic traits into our language and what are the ramifications of using generic traits as a social identity. I analyze the use of authentic definitions in Queer Theory, particularly Michael Warner’s use of authentic traits to define a normative Queer identity. I do not just simply focus on what are the effects, but how these folk or authentic definitions gain currency and, furthermore, how can they be changed. I conclude with an analytic account of what it means to be gay and argue that such an account will undercut many of the problems associated with folk or authentic definitions about being gay.

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Logical Generics and Gay Identity

What does it mean to be gay? This question seems obvious but answering it is actually presupposed by any other question about gay politics. Questions of marriage, legal benefits, employment rights, medical decisions, economic treatment, and even social legitimacy all rest squarely on the definition of what it means to be gay. Usually identifying who qualifies as gay has been defined by logical generics, traits that are commonly associated with the term “gay,” but have little to do with the actual definition. These social definitions serve as a strong starting ground for how gays are talked about in terms of social, political, and economic agency. Gays cannot marry because they are promiscuous. Gays cannot work near children because they are sexual predators. Gays cannot live together because they do not know how to be committed to each other. Here I propose a new way of talking about gay identity. My proposal is a thin analytic definition of being gay that does not give any of these objections room to stand and so the result is a clear path to social, economic, and political agency for gays. To be gay is to sexually desire someone only of the same sex.

I will begin by simply describing how the term “gay” is used. Sociologist C.J. Pascoe documents in *Dude, You’re a Fag* that “fag discourse” (70-82) largely informs, and is largely informed by, a descriptive account of how “gay” is identified.¹ Because fag discourse is, as Pascoe notes, purely a pejorative

¹ Pascoe describes fag discourse as a game of verbal one upsmanship between people, usually adolescent males. The epithet “fag” is used to describe any undesirable behavior, though it usually coincides with effeminate behavior that would typically identify someone as gay.

enterprise, it does not really concern itself with identifying members of the social kind gay. Thus, I will try to limit myself to a more detached examination of how description works. Gays are described, by and large, by either folk definitions or authentic definitions. Both of these proposed definitions are not actual definitions, insofar as they lack a kind of logical rigor, but are instead constituted by logical generics. Logical generics are statements about members, though not all members, of a certain population. Folk definitions are built up by a collection of logical generic statements and act as a way to try and identify gays in ordinary language. Folk definitions are, by their very use, vague and imprecise, but retain a strong social and political currency. Authentic definitions, often proposed by Queer Theorists, are also made up of a collection of logical generic statements, but instead of simply picking out members who have those traits, authentic definitions try and apply a normative force to coerce members who might identify or be identified as gay into adopting the specific traits picked out in the authentic definition. Members who do qualify as gay, but do not qualify as authentically gay, are seen as technical or boring members.

This social description is largely based on certain social traits or markers for easy identification; these markers are used by friends and foes of the gay community alike. By using these external markers, I will develop an account of how logical generics structure this identifying process. This section is important because it sets up not only what generics are, but how they are used. Ultimately, generics act as a sort of folk definition in ordinary language. Far from being some

innocuous utterance in ordinary language that we can ignore, folk definitions are the basic building blocks that we construct more rigorous and precise terminology out of. Understanding generics and these folk definitions is important because before we know where we are going, we must first know where we are.

In the second section I will provide a brief historical account of how the word “homosexual” gained currency. The historiographical emergence of the word marked a specific change not only in language, but also conception. The word documented not simply a sex act, but an entire interior psychology. This interior psychology was marked by attitudes, behavior, and desires. Unlike sodomites, homosexuals could now be identified through non-sexual markers. These markers stood in place of the sex act and gained the forbiddenness of the identity which they marked. The importance of this transfer, from act to identity, is that the identity could support more traits for recognition. The sodomite, by definition, could only be identified by one act, and one act only. Homosexuals, because of this convergence of discourse, could be identified by numerous other and, more interestingly enough, non-sexual traits. Additionally, the serious overtones of what the homosexual was—a deviant, a criminal, a predator—required that society be aware of these traits; to see these traits was, in a way, to see the homosexual.

In the third section I will turn to an account of normative or linguistic construction of what amounts to an authentic identity. This section will examine the work of Michael Warner and Leo Bersani. Both men argue against the negative stereotypes associated with the gay or Queer community, but argue that these traits

are not stigmas, but rather opportunities to expand social acceptance and legitimacy. In framing Queers as the real or exemplary gays, Warner smuggles authenticity in as an actual definition of what being gay means. I will argue that Warner's Queer/gay distinction is not simply a linguistic distinction, but functions as a part of a larger political project. The intimate connection between language and politics reflects that language is not just what we talk about, but what we *want* to talk about.

The last section will put forward and defend my definition. Additionally, I will look at some of the advantages of my position in relation to authentic definitions or folk definitions. Both of these definitions, I will argue, have a kind of normative force to them; folk definitions have a much weaker and more prudential kind of force. My argument will be that when we define gays in terms of same-sex desire, the arguments put forward against gay rights no longer have room to stand: gays are promiscuous not only misidentifies, but also misdefines what it is trying to talk about. In a similar way, an analytic definition undercuts the other authentic and folk definitions.

1 Generics

Logical generics are a curious logical structure. In “Generics: Cognition and Acquisition” Sarah-Jane Leslie states that “generics express generalizations. This is intended as a weak and untendentious claim; generic sentences are not about some specific instances of the category...but rather about the category in general” (21). In terms of how we form categories, logical generics are “a very powerful mechanism for induction; [they] draw robust inferences from very few examples (31). Additionally, they seem to be how people first acquire concepts and understanding of groups (2 & 21-28). Logical generics occupy an odd middle ground between universal and existential claims. “That ‘tigers have stripes’ is true might not seem particularly troubling; even if some tigers lack stripes, *most* tigers sport them” (1). When we say “tigers are striped” we do not mean that all tigers are striped or even that one tiger is striped, but, rather, that generically or stereotypically speaking, tigers are striped.

We might be tempted to say that the truth value of something that is generically true is only a matter of numbers, but there are several generics that seem to suggest, according to Leslie, that it is not the case that a majority is required for a generic to be true. “Examples such as ‘birds lay eggs’, though, indicate that it is not necessary for the truth of these sentences that the majority of the kind in question satisfy the predicate; most birds do not lay eggs, yet ‘birds lay eggs’ is true” (Leslie 1)—roughly half of birds are male and don’t lay eggs. Additionally, some female birds might not mate, or be sterile, or otherwise not lay

eggs. Thus, “birds lay eggs” is not true purely by numbers. We might, however, take Leslie’s example and say that “birds lay eggs” is a vague way of talking about how the species reproduces. So in reality, when people say “birds lay eggs”, they really mean “birds are the kind of species that reproduce by laying eggs”. The reference here is about the category, not each individual member. This example is important because it demonstrates how generic statements might be poorly phrased and not actually reference what they seem to be referencing at a first glance. This vagueness does not mean that logical generics are flawed, but rather that they are a product of ordinary language which is notoriously messy and vague.

What do we make of generics that are used as if they were true in spite of the numbers? Leslie renders these generics, like “Mosquitoes carry the West Nile Virus”, as true, even though less than 1% of mosquitoes actually carry the disease (Leslie 1-2). I may go my whole life without ever encountering a Mosquito with the West Nile Virus, yet still believe “Mosquitoes carry the West Nile Virus” is true. Because generics are based on induction, all that needs to occur is for me to encounter a West Nile mosquito or even hear of a report that a mosquito is carrying the West Nile Virus. I might find the report so scary that it acts as a kind of default for all my other experiences with the uninfected mosquitoes. I think Leslie is right in her account that the generic sentence about mosquitoes is treated as true, but I think we need to make some further qualification. *Treating* a sentence as true is not the same as the sentence *being* true. The sentence “Mosquitoes carry the West Nile Virus” is treated, or believed, to be generically true, but this truth value is attributed

to the sentence despite the fact that it is empirically, or actually false. On Leslie's account, here at least, I am not aware of this distinction. Though Sally Haslanger begins to apply this distinction later on to Leslie's categories of generics in "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground", the distinction between a generic believed to be true and a generic being true, is not made. This distinction is sometimes hard to draw, but I think making it will help us get clear on how generics are used in discussing social kinds in ordinary language.

Other generics that are believed to be true in spite of the numbers are: "Sharks attack bathers,' 'tigers eat people,' and 'Rottweiler's maul children'" (Leslie 14). Leslie's reasoning for why these are true despite the numbers is that

In all of them, the sentence attributes harmful, dangerous, or appalling properties to the kind. More generally, if the property in question is the sort of property of which one would be well served to be forewarned, even if there were only a small chance of encountering it, then generic attributions of the property are intuitively true. We see a similar phenomenon elsewhere in our judgments: compare the number and regularity of times one must worry to be a worrier versus the number of murders one must commit to be a murderer (Leslie 15).

Here again Leslie seems to be saying that these foreboding generics are true, without qualification that they may be believed to be true while actually being false. On my account generics are true generics if they accurately describe an

overwhelming number of members in the population. “Tigers are striped” is a true generic because it accurately describes an overwhelming number of tigers.

Sometimes, however, we may adopt generics that language users believe are true, even though the generics do not accurately describe what members of the given population are like. There may be various reasons for why, even in the face of contrary evidence, that generics believed to be true, though actually false, retain currency. One might be that a majority of language users believe the generic to be true and use the generic in ordinary language. The generic is accepted *as if* it were true. Yet this perseverance can be adequately explained, I think if we make a further distinction between the kinds of generics.

There are two relevant generics in this discussion: foreboding generics or essential generics.² The first two examples we talked about, “tigers have stripes” or “birds lay eggs”, describe traits we deem important or essential to the identity of tigers and birds. Certainly there are instances where some members lack one of the essential properties, sterile or male birds or albino tigers, but the generic statement remains relatively unaffected by the absence of this trait. Leslie cites Nisbett and Ross’ work that “argued[d] that people are affected by information in proportion to the vividness and concreteness of that information and note that this predicts that the *absence* of an event or property should have disproportionately little impact, in

² Sarah-Jane Leslie makes other distinctions with generics (“Generics: Cognition and Acquisition” and “Generics and the Structure of the Mind”), which are more sophisticated and fruitful, but not directly relevant here. Sally Haslanger, taking cues from Leslie, also develops a different classification of generics in “Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground”. I recognize that my account here is woefully inadequate to offer a competing classification, but I believe it is sufficient for the application of generics I am attempting here. I am considering this work more of an application of generics, so my scope and analysis will fall far short of Leslie and Haslanger.

virtue of such information being more easily overlooked” (36). We tend to overlook the examples where a member did not have an essential trait because, according to Leslie, we use generics to try and find a good way of predicting future encounters. Thus, essential generics name properties or traits in something that are good ways of identifying future examples.

I find Leslie’s predictive account to be somewhat problematic. Leslie gave several examples of generics that are true, in spite of numbers of cases confirming them, because the generic identified a trait we would be good to be “forewarned” (15). Let’s call these generics “foreboding generics”. She gives the example of “sharks attack bathers” or “tigers are ferocious” and says that we believe these generics to be true because they tell us about a trait that we should be cautious of. Let’s look at the example “mosquitoes carry the West Nile Virus”. This generic tells us about a trait we should be forewarned about, and we count it to be true, even though less than 1% of mosquitoes are actually infected with West Nile. Leslie reasons that the trait of carrying the West Nile Virus is true of mosquitoes because they potentially carry it and it is better to be safe than sorry. She contrasts the mosquito example with “accountants are murders” and says that “we also don’t decide that ‘accountants are murders’ is true even though some accountants have been known to kill” we “look for a *good predictor* of the property in question; it avoids generalizing to overly broad kinds to irrelevant kinds” (Leslie 41). But why do we say that “accountants are murderers” is false? Certainly accountants can be murderers and it is a very safe practice to avoid murderers. If the chances of finding

a murdering accountant is statistically equitable to the infected mosquito, then why do we not, on Leslie's account, believe that "accountants are murderers" is true? I believe that we can retain Leslie's observation, that generics are used as good predictors only when we are talking about essential traits, or traits that appear in an overwhelmingly large number of the population. We cannot retain the idea that generics are good predictors when we only consider foreboding generics.

So what makes a generic based around fear believed to be true? To clarify, while all foreboding generics are false, in terms that they do not accurately describe the world, they retain use in a respective language community because they are believed to be true. I believe this perseveration occurs for two reasons: (1) fear of interacting with the group in question and (2) that the group of language users in question believes that the foreboding trait is part of the nature of the generic. Either condition can enable a generic to be used, but if the generic is based purely on fear, then it seems that the generic fades in and out of use. Social kinds are a little more complex, but if the generic is based purely on fear, and not on the belief that the generic represents an intrinsic part of the kind's identity, then the generic fades when things settle down. "Japanese-Americans cannot be trusted" was a generic in the United States during World War II. The generic was accepted by the language users because they were afraid of more Japanese-Americans sharing secrets or enabling another attack on American troops. This generic was so strong that it functioned as if it were a definition for the social kind "Japanese-American," and lead to internment camps. But when the war was over and the fearful atmosphere

dissipated, the generic “Japanese-Americans are treacherous” largely faded not only from discourse, but from belief.

In many cases, I believe that foreboding generics blend together with essential generics. Because we mix these two kinds together we are able to use foreboding generics as good predictors of a future encounter because they are coupled together with essential generics. Traits that are extremely poor ways to identify members are mixed in with traits that are good ways of identifying members. When we talk about foreboding generics, we do so already with a backdrop of the essential generics. So we use the essential generics to be a good predictor of what we are supposed to see, and then we use the foreboding generic to know that what we have identified is to be avoided.³ If foreboding generics stood on their own, we would, as Leslie points out, only really be able to identify traits that occur in 1% or so in a population. Take a step back for a moment: the generic about mosquitoes or sharks identify a trait that will be found in less than 1% of the population. In no other instance would we accept something that unreliable as a “good predictor”. So why do we attribute the trait of disease to the mosquito? Leslie makes a nice point that the extremeness of an experience can override other mundane instances with the same subject in question: “if by default, we are

³ A case of food poisoning, for instance, will usually have a person swear off a restaurant or specific food, even though there have been many other instances where the food was fine. So the generic conception of food at that restaurant prior to the foreboding trait of illness inducing was simply that it was tasty, edible, etc. But after the foreboding instance happened, the generic conception accumulated the foreboding trait into the new essential conception. The generic, however, is mainly relative to the language user who got sick. His testimony might be persuasive enough to convince other people to adopt that generic conception of the restaurant (he might be a food critic), but by and large I suspect that if we have not interacted, immediately or through testimony, with the foreboding trait, we will not accept it as saying something accurate.

disposed to generalize striking information more readily than nonstriking information, then we would predict that in high-demand situations we might make overly high *statistical* generalizations concerning striking information” (42). So if we feel panic, fear, or pain in a certain situation, we might, just by the nature of induction, let that experience influence all our other experiences with that same subject or object. “The more striking appalling, or otherwise gripping we find the property in the generic, the more tolerant the generic is to exceptions” (Leslie 15).

But what about other foreboding generics about social kinds? “Blacks are criminals” is a generic based on fear and is believed to be true by many language users. An interesting empirical question might be how many language users are required to consent to a statement before it is believed to be a “true” generic, but a problem with this inquiry might be public and private assent. This ability to conceal public detection would make any empirical verification difficult. Some people might be wary of expressing their assent to “blacks are criminals” in public, but might not be hesitant in private. In either context, however, they believe it, so at what stage does the assent, implicit or explicit, reach critical mass for a given generic to gain currency? “Blacks are criminals” lingers in American discourse largely because, I suspect, many language users still believe, privately or publically, that the generic attributes something essential to black identity.⁴ So the

⁴ Andrew Hacker, specifically in *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* argues that not only do Whites in the U.S. tend to believe this conceptions of Blacks, but also that Blacks are aware of how Whites perceive them. Additionally, race theorist Frantz Fanon makes this same point, that Whites imagine Blacks to be deviant, though not just legally, and that Blacks are aware of this White perception. Both men explore the ramifications for how Blacks form Black identity in response to this White gaze.

generic “blacks are criminals” is based not only on fear, but also on the entrenched view that to be black means to break the law. The number of language users simply, however, determines whether or not a generic exists or is used, the number of language users does not determine the truth value of the generic. We might mistake the fact that because a lot of people use the generic that it must be true, but as the generics involving categorization of social groups show, the number of language users using the generic is irrelevant to the truth value of the generic.

Blending foreboding generics with essential generics is somewhat context sensitive. In areas where there are more frequent cases of infection, “mosquitoes carry the West Nile Virus” might be more intimately joined to the other essential generics about mosquitoes: “mosquitoes fly”, “mosquitoes are small”, etc. In places where infection rates are low, say Midwest America, the foreboding generic might only be relevant when infection rates spike. Without the context of increased infection rates to induce fear in people, the Midwest generic conception of mosquitoes might simply be “mosquitoes fly”, “mosquitoes are small”, or “mosquitoes are annoying”. Sometimes, however it may prove extremely difficult to separate the essential traits from the foreboding traits. “Black Widows are dangerous”, for instance, is deemed true even if people don’t live near Black Widows. While there is good evidence to talk about how and why Black Widows are dangerous, there is also the scientific observation that spiders are usually more afraid of humans than humans are of spiders. Even with this observation, we do not, for better or worse, give the Black Widows a fair day in court.

1.1 Generics and Use

Generics are rooted in how an object is perceived; the use of the generic may be based more on belief rather than fact. Many times the belief of language users corresponds to reality: tigers have stripes, grass is green, trees have leaves, etc. Sometimes, however, and especially with foreboding generics the generic says something factually false about what it is describing. If the trait in question is foreboding enough, the generic will be resistant, if not immune to, revision. Take the generic “sharks attack bathers”—even though we are told by the marine biologist that they are quite docile and kill less people a year than bee stings the generic retains currency. Even if we heard the biologists’ evidence every day for a very long time, I do not think our generic conception of sharks would actually change. Perhaps, on land or in the aquarium, we would say that it changed, but we would most likely revert back to the old generic when we see a dorsal fin in open water. I believe this perseveration occurs because the foreboding generic has fused with the essential generic of what it means to be a shark.⁵

⁵ We might be tempted to say that it is not an essential property of sharks to maul people, but rather that when someone is mauled at the beach it is done by a shark and not a starfish. Ariel Cohen’s account of absolute (the trait in question is present in over 50% of the population) and relative (the trait is more likely in a specific population among other similar populations) generics explores this possibility. The generic “Mosquitoes carry the West Nile Virus” is true on this account as a relative generic—“mosquitoes are far more likely than other insects to carry the virus” (Leslie 10). But Leslie states that “Cohen gives us no procedure to determine whether a generic is absolute or relative” and goes on to give counterexamples of generics that are false, but would be true under Cohen’s account. “‘Books are paperbacks,’ ‘Chickens are female,’ ‘bees are sterile,’ ‘dogs have three legs’. These are all intuitively false, but are rendered true by Cohen’s account—the first three being absolute generics, the fourth being a true relative generic since a three-legged animal is very likely to be a dog” (Leslie 10-11).

Generics based on fear are not formed by a rigorous examination of language, but on either experience or warnings. Because these generics are formed on fear, reasoning will be met with resistance precisely because it is treating what is a structurally irrational belief as a rational belief. Foreboding generics are insulated by the fear they are believed to represent. Sometimes we can use reason to explain to people who are afraid why they shouldn't be, but sometimes not. There is no exact approach as to how to change a generic if it represents a fear that the language user believes to be an essential property of the thing in question. So long as language users believe that the traits identified are what the thing is, they will continue to use the generic, regardless of its actual truth value. Thus, rational arguments will simply be talking past what is really the issue. If the generics are rooted in experiences, then only other experiences can change them. Sometimes this change may occur with a few vivid experiences, other times this change might be slow, and sometimes, change might never happen. Yet if there is going to be any attempt at all to engage, we should be aware of what will be more likely to be effective and what will be less likely to be effective.

Fear is not the only barrier to changing a generic—tradition and authority also may play a role. We may develop generics about things we have never experienced, but nevertheless believe a person whom we believe is trustworthy or in a better position to know. Additionally, we may develop some kind of custom with the generic; the longer we keep it, the more natural we take the generic to be. To challenge the generic, then, is not only to challenge what we deem essential to

the concept of a thing, nor is it to only call into question the potential threat level of a thing, but it is also to call into question the authority of who told us and the customs we developed with the generic. Thus, challenging the authority or validity of a generic is not an innocuous linguistic analysis, but a serious psychological challenge to the speaker's conception. Challenge her beliefs and you challenge those who told her the belief was true. The adoption and retention of some generics may be less about facts and more about belief.

What happens when two language users have different generics about the same thing? Because logical generics are created by induction, the truth value of a statement might be dependent upon experiences. Leslie denies that this relativist objection poses a problem because "'Tigers are striped' cannot be understood as expressing a universal claim to the effect that *all* tigers have stripes; it is compatible with the existence of stripeless albino tigers in the way that the universal claim is not" (Semantics Leslie). But what if the only tigers someone has seen are albino tigers? Inductively, then, she will say that "tigers are not striped" and seem to have solid evidence to say so; all of her experiences speak for the claim, and none of them against it. So what do we do when we run into conflicting generics? David Hume, in his section on miracles in *An Enquiry of Human Nature*, gives an example of an Indian prince who has never seen water freeze (172-73). The prince does not believe accounts that water can turn into a solid at given temperatures because all of his experiences contradict the claim. Yet Hume is in a better epistemological position than the prince, for he knows that water will turn

into a solid at a given temperature. The prince, therefore, is wrong, but not in some blameworthy way, just insofar as he is saying something false. In the same way, the person who grew up with only the experiences of albino tigers is wrong insofar as she is saying something false about the general nature of tigers, not that she is blameworthy in any sense.⁶

There are some instances, however, where the tension between two generics is not easily resolved. The ordinary conception of sharks being vicious killers is likely fostered by Hollywood movies or sensationalized news stories. People who study sharks and work in aquariums or zoos, however, have more experience with sharks and in fact are better informed about just what sharks do and don't do than the average person who believes "sharks attack bathers." The generic relative to the scientific community might be that "sharks are docile." Clearly both generics cannot be right because they contradict each other, but how do we resolve the discrepancy? Certainly scientists or nature shows might try to educate people on the relatively low risk nature of sharks, but most likely the next time those very people in question encounter a shark they will revert back to the old generic that "sharks attack bathers." This conflict between the two generics seems relatively harmless; for the most part sharks do not really care about their reputation in the human world.

⁶ Typically, generics are resistant to change. Yet Hume's example is a curious counter point: suppose the prince moves to England and sees water freeze every winter. Will his generic about water change as well? He might make the distinction and say that "water is liquid" and "ice is solid" and try to preserve the original generic by simply distinguishing between liquid and solid water, but I suspect that he would have to revise his beliefs. Moving the prince to England might show that generics are not absolutely immune to revision.

1.12 Generics as Folk Definitions

Often times the collection of generic traits acts as a convenient social way of defining an object. “Tigers are striped”, “tigers are ferocious”, “tigers have four legs”, etc. all give us a good way to talk about what tigers are, but they do not really provide a definition for what a tiger is. Yet all of these generics are bundled together when we say the word “tiger” in ordinary language. So a folk definition is the collection of generics. Because they are simply a bundling of terms, folk definitions are not definitions in the logical sense; they do not stretch across all possible worlds, but they do carry significant weight in this actual world. Folk definitions act as imprecise, easy, and accessible way of talking about objects. While these folk definitions are by no means precise or exhaustive, they, in ordinary language, act *as if they were definitions*. In contrast, there are also logical definitions of things. Logical definitions are simply a full account of what a thing is in all possible worlds. These definitions might be extremely technical, like a zoologist’s definition of tiger, or extremely ordinary, like “bachelor” and “unmarried male”. Folk definitions cannot be dismissed as a matter of prejudice or ignorance; we use these folk definitions all the time to get by in daily activities. Where else could philosophers draw their more refined definitions if not from these folk definitions? Philosophers cannot, therefore, pretend that they are above these folk definitions. In recognizing the origin of a more rigorous definition as beginning in the folk definition, we are in a better position to challenge and critically engage not just a problem of language, but how language is used.

Folk definitions are not just used by uneducated people; they often slip into serious political, legal, philosophical, medical, or social discourse. This transition, from folk to actual definition is problematic when the question of rights is being decided on. One such problem is when folk definitions—treated as actual definitions in ordinary language—take on the authority of a total and finalized definition. This problem is not how we write the dictionary, but how we practice and use language. The problem of using folk definitions as actual definitions is very serious: legislators write laws based on folk definitions, doctors identify disorders because of these folk definitions, and societies criminalize identities because of these folk definitions. A very practical use to philosophy is blunting the very natural move from folk definition to actual definition. Philosophers must resist the temptation to simply say that people are using the wrong definition and that the rest of the argument is flawed. This dismissal, after wiping our hands clean, does not really resolve any problem. Certainly it may make us feel better about ourselves that we applied rigor where others did not, but that is not helpful. Insofar as philosophy is a problem solving enterprise, it must try to understand where these “false” definitions come from and how to best engage them. Leslie notes that our default setting for logical structure seems to be in terms of generics rather than universal or existential quantifiers. Insofar as logical generics seem to be a default setting for how we understand things in the world, we might have to take a different approach in terms of how we engage beliefs. This development suggests that generics might be inescapable (Leslie 2-5). This inevitability is not a bad thing *ipso facto*, but it is

when the generic covers up an actual definition and is treated as a definition as opposed to an indicator. Additionally, knowing that generics develop early in life is perhaps the most useful tool in investigating changed social conceptions. Instead of lecturing the conservative who believes the pejorative generic and provocatively asking “how could you ever think that?”, generics offer us a new and more productive way of talking with people who hold different beliefs.

1.2 Changing Generics

Realizing a lot of negative generics beliefs don't come from serious reflection and analysis of argumentation, but from experiences can lay the groundwork for future dialogue. Treating beliefs based on generics as if they were based on rigorous philosophical reflection is unproductive because it mistakes the source of belief. By misidentifying the source of belief—reflection instead of experience—in a discussion we might only entrench the belief we are trying to change; a full confrontation, public or private, might embarrass or humiliate the person. The moral, I believe, is that we must provide a way to save face, even if this opportunity is wildly undeserved, by avoiding argumentation and instead provide better experiences to supplant the generic. Another important dimension of dialogue would be is whether or not we view the person we are engaging with an intellectual equal. If we feel the person we are talking with has authority on the subject matter, we are more willing to listen and take their evidence seriously. I am not resistant when the marine biologist tells me about sharks because I view her as an authority on the matter. I will accept her evidence as best as I can. My resistance

to changing the generic about aggressive sharks is more a matter of praxis or survival instinct; I do not retain my generic in spite of her position because I am simply intellectually stubborn. On the other hand, we might not be so open to honest dialogue if we feel the person we are talking with is our intellectual equal or inferior. If he is my equal, then my experiences and thoughts are just as good as his, and if he is my inferior, then I don't have to listen to him. The issue of identifying and conceptualizing social groups is a very charged issue. People, I imagine, are skeptical about experts on people of a social kind. Certainly the general public may accept the findings of a sociologist or a demographic study, but those do not act as experts on Southeast Asians. They offer statistic on people, but as outlined above, statistics may have little to no effect on how we form our folk definitions about people. Furthermore, what would it mean to say "you should listen to me, because I'm an expert on Black people"? It sounds, at the very least, odd. Someone might be an expert on Black food, Black culture, Black employment, but all of these areas of expertise are extremely vague: what is "Black food"? Is it food that Blacks make? Food that Blacks eat? Does just one Black person have to eat it, or is does the food in question have to be eaten by a majority of Blacks? I believe that we tend to reject overt authorities on issues of particular social identities because we have the notion that our experiences with a particular social identity is just as good as someone else's experiences with the social identity.

Simply providing one counter example or experience will not change the generic. If the belief is based on experience, then experience is the only kind of

recognized currency. Some beliefs may require more experiences than others: a friend may have a belief that a restaurant is awful, but I persuade him to try it one more time and this time we get good service. My friend's opinion of the restaurant has changed. Other beliefs may require several experiences: a girl who grew up in a racist town with a racist family will not overturn her belief that "Blacks are criminals" by meeting one Black man who is not a criminal.⁷ Belief perseverance is a challenging barrier to breach.

One reason why generics might be difficult to change is because the language user believes that the generic picks out an essential property of what it is talking about. The racist girl may have a hard time even conceiving of someone who is Black who would not steal. Even meeting one Black person who is honest simply relegates the honest Black man as a logical possibility or some other kind of conceptual curiosity. The tipping point for how many honest Black men she would have to meet probably varies from person to person and is most likely decided by a multitude of other factors: when she is living, where is she living, what is her class, total number of experiences she has had with Blacks, etc. Thus, new experiences are not blank slates to build off new generics, but constantly fighting with past experiences to support or undermine the generic conception. Another reason why generics may be hard to dislodge is that they call into question too many other

⁷ Some beliefs may never change no matter how many experiences there are. Veena Das, an anthropologist, documented in *Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain* that many women, during the partition of India and Pakistan, were abducted, raped, and assimilated into their rapists' communities as family members. Most of these women adopted the belief that they could never be accepted back into their original communities or families. This belief persisted despite several overtures to get the women back to their original communities.

things to warrant serious revision. Suppose that the same girl believes “Blacks are criminals” because her family told her. To challenge her belief about Blacks then is to challenge not only her conception, but also the authority of her family and community. If we take off our philosophical hats for the moment, I would suspect that most of our beliefs are because someone told us—perhaps we read something in a book. Either way, to seriously challenge these authorities is a daunting epistemological task, especially if the task involves pointing out how these authorities messed up on something so basic as the blanket assessment of the moral character of an entire group of people. The inevitable next challenge is to assess what else was wrong.⁸

1.3 Stereotypes

A good way to illustrate the potential error of generics is by looking at stereotypes. Stereotypes are not always bad. Though usually thought of in the context of racism or some other form of bigotry, we rely on stereotypes for basic interaction with the world. Miranda Fricker in her work *Epistemic Injustice* argues that a neutral conception of stereotypes gives a pretty good account of how we interact with other social groups. Stereotypes are, for Fricker, “*widely held associations between a given social group and one or more attributes*” (30). This neutral conception of stereotypes is a good one because it enables us to talk about both positive and negative generalizations about groups. Additionally, Fricker

⁸ Sometimes, this reluctance will not be so grandiose; the girl may just say that her community is just old fashioned or racist and that she could not wait to get out of the town. I suspect, however, that the large number of people do not challenge societal norms in this way.

makes the point that stereotypes may be either good or bad depending on the context. “The stereotype of women as intuitive is a case in point. In contexts where it is assumed that ‘intuitive’ suggests irrationality, the stereotype is derogatory; but in contexts where intuition is regarded as a cognitive asset, the stereotype is complimentary” (31). We collect individual examples and then abstract enough of a common experience so as to have an association that holds true to as many cases possible within the given class. The benefit of forming stereotypes, as Fricker argues, is that “without such a heuristic aid [the hearer] will not be able to achieve the normal spontaneity of credibility judgment that is characteristic of everyday testimonial exchange” (32). Basically Fricker’s point is that without stereotypes we would have to treat each encounter with someone as a totally new experience and could not derive basic expectations or predictions in regards to their behavior. Without stereotypes, we would have to doubt the credibility of any new person’s testimony because we would have to start from the ground up and not rely on any past experiences with people to give us evidence of whether or not she can give good testimony.

We come to learn stereotypes not only from the lore of our fathers⁹, but also from our experiences. Stereotypes act as a tool to help us gather, sort, and process information from given people. Stereotypes, as Fricker’s account points out, are not always bad; they sometimes simply give us a reference point on how to approach an individual. Stereotypes become bad when they become unreliable ways of

⁹ This epistemological position is similar to Quine’s general epistemological guidelines: simplicity and conservatism.

interacting with a population. Stereotypes become prejudicial when they influence or alter our observation of an individual in spite or in absence of a given trait. Stereotypes become bad when they block out the individual in front of us, when the individual is not an individual but only a manifestation of the stereotype. What makes the prejudicial stereotype bad is that “the association is false, the stereotype embodies an *unreliable* empirical generalization about the social group in question” (32). Suppose, for instance, a clerk raises his voice to an elderly customer and the customer gently assures the clerk that she is not hard of hearing. If the clerk continues to speak in a loud voice so as to follow his stereotype that the elderly are hard of hearing, despite the woman’s protest, he is engaging in a prejudicial stereotype. The clerk does not see the elderly woman in front of her, he simply sees an elderly customer: for him she could be any other person, and so the individual identity of the elderly woman is lost in the prejudice of the social kind, even though she is absent of the stereotype that elderly are hard of hearing. Fricker goes on to point out another part of prejudicial stereotypes: “prejudice is not always *against* someone or something, for there can be prejudice *in favor*” (35). If I insist that my science tutor be Asian, based on the stereotype that Asians are good in the sciences, despite the fact that the only Asian tutor available is terrific at language arts and dismal at science, then I am being prejudicial—I am staying with my stereotype in spite of, not because of, the evidence.

1.31 Kinds of Harm in Stereotypes

A person belonging to a social kind is harmed when the stereotype or generic acts as the actual definition for that social kind. Recall that generics are rough and ready sketches and provide a good enough account of something for everyday purposes, but when these sketches act as the hard and fast way of indentifying the group, the generic oversteps its usefulness and actually oversimplifies. The generic informs not only outsiders to the social kind, but also makes those belonging to the social kind aware of how they are expected to act. When the use of the generic persists, in spite of an individual members' protest, the individual has been harmed because the individual's identity is no longer recognized; he could be replaced by any other member and the treatment would be the same.

I would like to identify three kinds of harms generics or stereotypes can do: (1) an obvious harm of negative social or political policy (2) a harm that Fricker identifies in being degraded as someone who is not capable of giving adequate testimony and (3) the ability of people belonging to the generic group in question who degrade or dismiss other members who disagree. The result of this third harm is the person degraded does not just doubt what she knows, but also who she is and where she belongs. The first kind of harm is that people believe all, or enough, members of the stereotype have the trait in question and so legislation is passed to curb or discourage the negative stereotype. This harm works also with "positive" stereotypes; the belief that women were naturally better in the homestead led to several discriminatory policies and laws all around the belief that women were

naturally better in homemaking. An example of the second kind of harm is if a man states that gays are promiscuous, and an openly gay man contradicts him, points to himself as evidence, and the man insists that gays are promiscuous, the gay man has been harmed. Fricker explains that this harm is a testimonial injustice: the testimony of the gay man belonging to the social kind of gay is disregarded, even though his epistemic position may in fact be better. “When someone suffers a testimonial injustice, they are degraded *qua* knower, and they are symbolically degraded *qua* human. In all cases of testimonial injustice, what the person suffers from is not simply the epistemic wrong in itself, but also the meaning of being treated like that” (44)—if I suffer testimonial injustice it is degrading insofar as someone claims that she knows my existence better than I do.

The third harm I identify is when members of the same social kind as the speaker deny the speaker’s testimony and at the same time cause the speaker to doubt her own place in the community she rightfully belongs to. Sometimes the doubts expressed about a given testimony can in fact appear so assured that the speaker begins to self-doubt. Suppose, to return to the above example, that when the gay man denies that gays are promiscuous, others take notice and correct him. Some of these denials might even come from other gays: sex just isn’t that big a deal. By itself, “sex just isn’t that big of a deal” is not an injustice, but when stated as the generic belief of the gay community by certain members of the gay community so as to correct those who dissent and show them that they are in error for thinking contrariwise, the statement denies the gays in opposition a sense of

legitimately belonging to the gay community. This particular kind of harm is deeper than the kind mentioned by Fricker. Fricker goes into a lot of detail about how people can deny a speaker the right to give a good testimony about external things. The harm I am identifying, however, is internalized in the speaker—maybe these other people do know my existence and experience better than I do; maybe I am wrong about what I know because of who I am. Depending on what kind of community the speaker identifies herself with, the harm might be greatly magnified. Telling someone they don't belong to a book club, when they rightfully do, might not do that much damage, but, as Fricker points out, there are certain parts to our identity—"racial, political, sexual, religious" (53)—that matter more. This kind of injustice is expressed through generics because it picks out "authentic" traits that the speaker may not identify with. The implicit point is, then, that the speaker is only a member on a technicality. This harm is serious, as people are denied membership into the very community in which they rightfully belong.

1.4 The Gay Generic

Like other generics, gay generics are constructed by either essential properties or foreboding traits. Sometimes, depending on the language community in question, the folk definition for being gay might be made up of both. I will argue that essential generics about gays are most likely due to limited interaction or exposure to gays. In this way, essential gay generics are unlike other essential generics—tigers are striped, dogs have tails, or birds fly—because they do not map onto the majority of things the generic represents. Because of this limited exposure,

gay essential generics only represent the traits that the speaker has been exposed to. Some essential gay generics are that gays are artsy, gays are fashionable, or that gays are sassy. In some ways, then, these essential gay generics do help people pick out who is gay in society. Essential gay generics help us pick out who is gay accurately in the sense of “here is the criteria for what gays are like”. This criteria is not just used by straights to identify others who are gay, but sometimes by gays to identify not only other gays, but also to establish their own social identity as gay. Think, for a moment, about people who are coming out and want to now be socially identified as gay. They understand that the essential gay generic traits will help others identify them as what they want to be identified as. Contrariwise, people that want to stay in the closet, for whatever reason, also are aware of these essential gay generics and avoid the behaviors that would pick them out as gay. Closeted gay men might not talk about theater or control control syllabant “s’s”, while closeted lesbians might refrain from talking about sports or wearing flannel.

The second reason I suggested that the generic conceptions of gay people hold so tightly to identity is due to fear. I mean two different things by “fear”: (1) a resistance to a strong challenge to traditional and comfortable assumptions about social, sexual, and gendered ordering and (2) a more extreme form manifest in the legal defense, “homosexual panic”. The first sense of fear seems pretty straight forward: socialization gives very few incentives to be gay. From a very young age children are told in explicit and implicit ways to be straight. Social, moral, and familial expectations bear down at every turn to have a “normal straight life.” In

seeing gays in parades, movies, and other public social roles as not only living an alternative lifestyle, but reveling in it, the assumption that the expectation, of a straight life as the only life, is severely challenged. I do not think that most straight people find this garish display liberating, and it is perhaps one of the root causes for animosity towards gays. Questioners of long held norms are rarely thanked for their inquiry.

The legal defense of a “homosexual panic” is explained by Eve Sedgwick in her classic work *Epistemology of the Closet*. “The homosexual panic defense performs a double act of minoritizing taxonomy: there is, it asserts, one distinct minority of gay people, and a second minority, equally distinguishable from the population at large, of ‘latent homosexuals’” (20). Sedgwick goes on to say that these “latent homosexuals” are so insecure about their heterosexuality—because they are secretly gay and cannot bear to admit it—that when confronted with the prospect of a same sex sexual encounter, they may respond with any amount of force to neutralize the perceived threat. The gay person suffers the retaliation because he can recognize the “inner homosexual” in the straight person; if left unchecked, the gay person’s advance means to the heterosexual that he must really in fact be gay, a fact he cannot cope with and so must destroy or silence the evidence suggesting it. This legal defense, as noted by Sedgwick, is by far a minority position; nevertheless, it demonstrates the depths to which anxiety can be roused.

The result of these essential generics is that we have a folk definition of what it means to be gay. It is important to note that this folk definition is somewhat context sensitive. This folk definition is not binding nor is it absolute; if somebody met a gay person who was none of the above traits, she would not say that he is not gay, but rather does not fit into the generic conception of being gay. The current conception of what it means to be gay is roughly a disjunctive definition.

$(\text{GenG}) \rightarrow (P \vee W \vee F \dots)$

G= Gay
P=Promiscuous
W=Witty
F=Fashionable

As the conditional definition stands, someone is gay if they have one or more of the stereotypical traits. At first this definition seems pretty plausible, straightforward, and commonsensical. But if we look closely, this is not actually a definition; it simply picks out category traits that help identify who is gay. Additionally, all the disjuncts are empirical, which means they are synthetic matters of fact and are open to change; they are not analytically necessary in terms of defining what it means to be gay. Furthermore, to be a promiscuous gay man already means that someone is gay prior to being promiscuous, so the generic conception of gay identity can help us identify gays, but it does little to define what being gay means. The generic conception falls apart as a definition when we pare away not only the lion's share of the disjuncts, but all of them. We might say that no disjunct in particular is necessary for the entire statement to be true, but the statement cannot be true if none of the consequential disjuncts are present.

What, though, do we make of the generic “gays are promiscuous”? How does promiscuity, a generic, differ from the definition I proposed at the beginning of this work—to be gay is to sexually desire someone only of the same sex? For starters, promiscuity picks out what is perceived to be a key part of gay identity: sex. Not only are gays promiscuous, but they are also probably kinky or into weird sexual practices. But why does sexuality or sex figure so largely into gay identity? I believe that we link the desire of wanting to be sexually involved with members of the same sex as a necessary, or close to a necessary, link to actually having sex with them. One reason may not necessarily be because of gay identity, but rather because of how sex is socially conceived. It is encouraged, if not expected, in popular culture for teenagers to be sexually active; if not by the end of high school, then by the end of college. There may be significantly different expectations for men and women—men are supposed to have had multiple partners, while women are supposed to have had only a few or none at all. Because homosexuality is often discovered or experimented with in these developmental years, sex is, along with raging hormones, at the forefront. But is this coupling of act with desire justified?

Are gay virgins like unicorns—logical possibilities, but something most will never see? The phrase has no element of contradiction, but it does seem to be odd, or at the very least, curious. This curiosity, I believe, is largely due to the generic that gays are promiscuous: not only have gays had sex, but they’ve had lots of it, or so the story goes. As an interesting anecdote, I was once at a party in grad school where everyone was gay and a bunch of us were standing in a circle just

talking. Suddenly, one of the people suggested we play “Tops or Bottoms,” which was a game where we had to guess if the person was either sexually a top or a bottom. I was stunned; I didn’t really know what to say: I had never really discussed my sex life with what were basically perfect strangers. When it finally came to my turn, I still didn’t know what to say, but apparently they didn’t either. The group was split on what position I actually was. I find this anecdote relevant here, because the game never even considered that I could have been a virgin. The concept of being gay was already tied to have been sexually active. Yet sexual activity is not required for being gay; I can know my desires without ever acting on them. Thus, the gay virgin contrasts nicely with the generic that “gays are promiscuous” because it is exactly this contrast that reveals promiscuity, or sex itself, to be a generic aspect of gay identity.

What happens when generic conceptions about group identity conflict with what is actually the case? Fricker talks about this social dissonance somewhat in her discussion on prejudices concerning social groups. She describes such prejudicial conceptualizing of a group as “*a widely held disparaging association between a social group and one or more attributes, where this association embodies a generalization that displays some (typically epistemically culpable) resistance to counter-evidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment*” (35). So even though a generic account of group identity for gays may come into conflict for people outside the social kind in question, the generic account persists. For example, suppose a woman has the belief that gays are sassy. She works with a gay

man who is actually rather dull but she befriends him solely on the expectation that he will be her “gay best friend.” Despite this lackluster friendship, she still holds onto the belief that gays are sassy. The individual’s identity is marginalized to maintain a prejudicial stereotype of the group.

What then, makes generics about sharks different from generics about gays? For starters gays are people who can be hurt by generic stereotypes in a variety of ways: physically, emotionally, economically, politically, etc. Sharks, by and large, aren’t really hurt by the generic “sharks attack bathers”; few, if any, people actively have vendettas with sharks because of the generic. Equally so, the generic inspires fear in swimmers, so the reaction is to swim away from the shark, not to swim out to it and fight. We might not hold anyone morally responsible for the generic, however untrue it may be, that “sharks attack bathers,” but we might with the generic “gays are promiscuous.” A key point of responsibility is that the person holding the negative view of gay people might not have had enough experiences with gays to be justified in holding that position, because that position has significant ramifications. We might not hold someone responsible if the belief was something innocuous, like people on the East Coast say soda instead of pop—not much hinges on this belief. But even if it were the case that someone’s limited exposure to the generic dilutes responsibility for retaining the generic, we are arguing a pragmatic position rather than a rational conviction: the negative generic about sharks can be countered by reading articles on sharks, or going to aquariums or zoos, or even by watching nature shows.

To counter the negative stereotypes of gays, a person might try to go out and meet more gay people. But this adventure is problematic from the start, and for at least two reasons: (1) many sites commonly associated with the gay community are bars, pride parades, and bathhouses which would likely reinforce the generic or the stereotype. There are many locations that would likely refute the generic, a gay bookstore, or B&B, but if the seeker is aware of gay culture only insofar as the generics informed him, he will have a hard time breaking out of this conception. (2) Gays do not have an easily identifiable marker. Many gays can blend in or stay in the closet and thus avoid detection by the seeker. Skin color, language, or even dress do not guarantee that a new gay person can be identified. A fundamental and pragmatic use of language is to find an easy way to identify people or groups. Being pragmatic in our concerns does not mean that we are being un-philosophical, but rather that we are looking to the effects of the generic as a sort of *sub rosa* advice: beware of sharks, they attack. Beware of gays, they corrupt.

2 History and Origins of Authenticity

Where did the foreboding generics about gays come from? Foucault, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, documents and explains how these generic traits were associated with historically associated with homosexuality. The importance of the transition between the identity of the sodomite and of the homosexual was that the new social category, “homosexual”, inherited and invented foreboding traits to identify what it was. Briefly, the identity of the sodomite was one of action while the identity of the homosexual was one of desire. Sodomites were people who engaged in or had engaged in sodomy, while homosexuals did not require an expressive sex act to be counted as part of the social kind. The move from focusing on acts to focusing on desires has foundations, Foucault shows, in the Christian Pastoral tradition of the confession. The confession reframed the concern, in the context of sexuality, from “what did you do” to “what did you want to do.” Already this desire speaks to a deeper dimension of the human makeup because actions can only identify a person if the opportunity was present (Foucault 18-25). The desire shows a more “direct” view to who or what a person is because the desire for an action fundamentally means not only looking for opportunity where the action can be done, but also it shows a desire to make opportunities where none may have existed before.

How else did desire differentiate the homosexual from the sodomite? For starters “sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them” (Foucault 43). The sodomite existed only

insofar as he stood in contradiction to the law. His identity was, therefore, somewhat flat insofar as his one-dimensional existence was only understood in jurisprudence.¹⁰ Though rooted in the concept of the sodomite, the “homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (43). We find the difference between the two categories in the internal identity of the homosexual, which came about only with the convergence of other discourses outside of law. Psychology was needed to explain the new desire, economics was needed to explain the inability to increase population, medicine was needed to explain the gender inversion, and psychiatry was needed to explain a potential cure (Foucault 36-41). The sodomite had none of these discourses to open new contours to his identity, and more intriguing about the homosexual was that the very act which condemned the sodomite to the asylum, the jail, or the confessional never had to occur with the homosexual. The condemnation was diffused, “it was consubstantial with him, less a habitual sin than as a singular nature” (Foucault 43). The fact that the identity of homosexuality began with desire, and not a sex act, signified to Foucault that some particularly profound transformation was underway when all of the discourses converged: “the sodomite had been an aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (43).

Though the homosexual was something entirely new historiographically, there nevertheless were other sexual identities it was in company with. Foucault

¹⁰ Imagine any identity being represented only in terms of legal documents. We would know very little about any identity aside from a few basic facts, residency, possessions, place of work, etc.

calls this catalogue of sexualities, “peripheral sexualities” and he lists them as: “the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage” (38-9). These identities were more than simply unconventional, they were unnatural. We return to the distinction between desire and action as Foucault informs us that these peripheral sexualities were unnatural ways to *be* which correspond with the list of unnatural ways to *act*. “To marry a close relative or practice sodomy, to seduce a nun or engage in sadism, to deceive one’s wife or violate cadavers, became things that were essentially different” (39); the difference Foucault is talking about here is that this understanding of unnatural *behavior* is precisely an unnatural identity. Behavior, in this category, presupposed a desire and an intention to perform the unnatural identity. Anyone could partake in an unnatural act under the influence of drugs, but to desire the act, to make it into an identity, suggested a deeper interior and psychological motive that was inseparable from the very person in question. Foucault provides a list of unnatural acts and unnatural identities: the enumeration of unnatural acts is essentially different from the peripheral sexualities insofar as one is an action and the other an identity, yet the two are coupled together in this list: why?

Foucault described the point of divergence between acts and identity—between sodomite and homosexual—as there being an interior and complex element in the peripheral sexualities that is noticeably lacking in the docket of unnatural actions. But the two are linked in terms of how they were understood at

the time: the peripheral sexualities were, no doubt, something more complex, but they share a close enough resemblance to the unnatural actions so as to retain the stigma from the actions. Foucault talks of two different registries keeping track of the different classes: “there emerged a world of perversion which partook of that of legal or moral infraction, yet was not simply a variety of the latter” (40). This new world was the world of the peripheral sexualities, “an entire sub-race race was born, different—despite certain kinship ties—from the libertines of the past” (Foucault 40). The rebellious identity that so characterized the sodomite stayed with the new sexually peripheral identities: fundamentally, each new peripheral identity was a challenge to the old order, “the procreative couple” which “laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principle of secrecy.” In the beginning, “a single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space” (3).

Society, motivated by the various discourses, called each new identity forward to probe, catalogue, and analyze it (39). The procreative model could not help but be challenged, for here were the challengers being called forward from the periphery to the center, if only to testify and genuflect. “From the end of the eighteenth century to our own, they circulated through the pores of society; they were always hounded, but not always by laws; were often locked up, but not always in prisons; were sick perhaps, but scandalous, dangerous victims, prey to a strange evil that also bore the name of vice and sometimes a crime” (40). The

homosexual's identity, even after the Victorian paradigm, unavoidably challenged various social, political, and medical norms. Those professionals and authorities that were charged with coming up with an identity for homosexuality were thus between the old and established identity of the sodomite and the new, not yet fully defined, identity of the homosexual. Occupying this nexus, the professionals constructed an identity out of the social conditions, attitudes, and beliefs of their time period. Considering the backdrop of the sodomite, can we really say the homosexual was an entirely clean break with past conceptions? Did these social authorities simply develop an entirely new thing? Yes and no. No in the sense that, as Foucault notes, the homosexual "species" arose from the "aberration" of the sodomite (43), but yes in the sense that the homosexual was defined entirely by desire and not by action. But where did these official or authoritative definitions come from? Were they simply incubated in an isolated environment of academics or other intellectuals?

Ian Hacking, in his article, "Making Up People," argues that the social identities people imagine themselves to have are not immutable but rather contingent throughout time. Identities are constructed by society for people. Hacking's point is that the social identities we construct have certain characteristics and once a person adopts or manifests those given characteristics, we consider her a member of that class. His position seems pretty straightforward, but his argument is subtle; society constructs identities and defines the characteristics so it can control, protect, and organize itself. We may want to say that how society talks about

people and what people really are, are two different things, but this objection misses Hacking's main purpose. Society defines how a given class of people is supposed to be and when the definition gains traction through institutions more and more people begin to fall into that given class. Hacking does not say that all parts of an identity are immutable: the biological make up of individuals, for instance, is relatively fixed, but this immutability is not Hacking's concern. The social norms give people constructed expectations to meet; people become these identities based largely on the social constructions and expectations, all of which are contingent.

A good example to illustrate how people are defined from above—by institutions, experts, and professionals—is how society first introduced, and then accepted, multiple personality disorder.

A few psychiatrists began to diagnose multiple personality. It was rather sensational. More and more unhappy people started manifesting these symptoms. At first they had the symptoms they were expected to have, but then they became more and more bizarre. First, a person had two or three personalities. Within a decade the mean number was 17. This fed back into the diagnoses, and became part of the standard set of symptoms. It became part of the therapy to elicit more and more alters. Psychiatrists cast around for causes, and created a primitive, easily understood pseudo-Freudian etiology of early sexual abuse, coupled with repressed memories. Knowing this was the cause, the patients obligingly retrieved the memories. More than that, this became a way to be a person.

The interesting twist that Hacking's example provides is that the identity was not just created from above, by medical institutions and doctors, but also from below, by the very people who identified as suffering from multiple personality disorder. How could it be otherwise? The doctors may fish for more symptoms, but it is only the patients who can provide. The resulting dialectical dynamic is that the identity of "multiple personality disorder" is created from both above and below.

Hacking does not fully address the question of whether identities are ultimately constructed from above or below. Perhaps this question is too complicated to be addressed fully. He does provide an example, however, of how homosexuality was constructed by psychiatric discourse, how homosexuals were placed in institutions, and then how homosexuals were able to reverse the very rules against them. The medical world branded homosexuality as a disorder but "gay pride and its predecessors restored to homosexuals a control of the classifications into which they fall." Hacking's observation then is that when we have these new social identities, it is hard to say that authorities are defining them solely in terms of professionalism. Insofar as professionals live in a given social context, their definitions will reflect the attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs of that social context. Thus, when the various discourses described homosexuality in the 1800s, they did so with the ordinary language of the time. Insofar as logical generics are embedded in ordinary language, they influence how professionals develop these authoritative definitions. But aside from making the largely uninteresting point that legislators, doctors, religious leaders, etc, all speak from

their given time frame, what I do think is interesting is what happens when we leap from ordinary language users who use generics and folk definitions to professionals who, by their very use of the words, transform the folk definition into an actual definition in an authoritative position. Once the language users adopt the generic in their respective field, the folk definition ceases to be a folk definition and becomes an actual definition, or is perceived to be an actual definition.

2.1 New Natural Law

The formulation of gay identity in philosophy of law, specifically New Natural Law, is a good case study of how folk definitions gain authoritative currency. John Finnis, one of the chief architects of the New Natural Law movement, characterizes homosexual sex acts as intrinsically wrong. Yet this definition of homosexual sexual immorality comes from being defined off of what heterosexual sexual morality is. Finnis, in “Law, Morality, and ‘Sexual Orientation,’” argues that “parenthood and children and family are the intrinsic fulfillment of [marital sexual union]” (1065). Procreative marital sex is intrinsically good because “the union of the reproductive organs of husband and wife really unites them biologically...reproduction is one function and so, in respect of that function, the spouses are indeed one reality” (1066). Moral sex is not simply an expression of passion or lust, but requires a deep dedication to each other in a formal or public commitment. The public nature of this commitment signals to the rest of the community that this model of deep emotional investment is something worth striving for. The reproductive aspect of procreative marital sex is

intrinsically good because the dedication the couple has to each other is no longer bound in a “*personal reality*” (1066); it is literally embodied in the next generation (1068). It is the continuity of this dedication that is *ipso facto* morally good (1070-71) because it ensures the survival of the community. Finnis’ argument is that we cannot separate these goods into individually intrinsic goods; they go hand in hand with each other. So a series of one night stands that produces children is not intrinsically good because the parents lack dedication to each other. A couple who is emotionally invested in each other, but does not want kids and in fact goes out of their way to make sure that their sex is not-procreative, is missing the point of sex. Sex is not for individuals to feel good in the throes of passion or even feel long term desirability; rather, sex is a commitment to each other beyond the present moment.

After defining and defending moral sexual conduct for heterosexuals, Finnis moves to defining why homosexual sex acts are intrinsically immoral. Homosexual acts cannot, by biological facts, reproduce; they can only pretend authentic sexual heterosexual love. Homosexuals mimic sexual love because they can only engage in alleged mutual devotion to one another (1069). This devotion is alleged precisely because it does not entail procreation. If the purpose of sex is to biologically unite people through children and emotionally unite them in mutual devotion to each other and the raising child, then homosexual sex by definition cannot be genuine devotion. Finnis is not saying that people in gay relationships cannot sacrifice for each other, but rather that affection homosexuals feel for one another is tied to the

present and cannot secure the future of the community. This inability is tied to biological facts rather than emotional inability. An important point to note here is that Finnis is not saying that because a majority of homosexual sexual encounters occur in a back alley or are the product of a one night stand all homosexual sex acts are wrong. As far as I know, Finnis gives very few figures to support his claim. This evidentiary absence is not because he is lazy or is afraid that empirical evidence would count against him, but rather that homosexual sex is wrong by definition. Finding examples of “moral” sexual acts between homosexuals would simply be, for Finnis, finding people who are good pretenders.

Stephen Macedo, in “Homosexuality and the Conservative Mind,” criticizes how New Natural Lawyers have defined and used homosexuality identity. Macedo, confused by “the frequency with which conservatives translate their opposition to promiscuity and liberationism into blanket condemnations of homosexual conduct is as puzzling as it is illegitimate” (264), attempts to use the very definitions New Natural Law uses against itself to argue that not all homosexual sex acts are intrinsically immoral. If the doctrine of New Natural Law picks out a social category by a false way of knowing about that social category, then, Macedo reasons, the rules built up upon that dubious category seem to collapse. But are the New Natural Lawyers really unaware of non-promiscuous gays? I don’t think so, nor are they stopping their ears by ignoring obvious examples. Instead, the immorality of being gay is built into the definition of being gay. Immorality is not a consequence, but an expression of identity.

I believe that Macedo's objection to New Natural Law identifies that the definition New Natural Lawyers are using is based on a logical generic conception of gay identity, specifically a generic definition that identifies gays as promiscuous or otherwise sexually unfit. Macedo rightly points out that New Natural Law frames the ethical constraints on universal character traits, but the belief that gays are intrinsically promiscuous is simply false—all that is needed is one counter example—yet the belief remains.

[Finnis] refers off-handedly to 'the modern 'gay' ideology,' which treats 'sexual capacities, organs and acts as instruments to be put to whatever suits the purposes of the individual 'selves' who have them'. Millions of homosexual live are thus presumptively epitomized by a promiscuous liberationist 'gay lifestyle,' which rejects all sexual restraints and value judgments. These sweeping generalizations are, however, overgeneralizations. Not all gay people are promiscuous (284).

Macedo believes, therefore, that New Natural Law identifies gays by the generic "gays are promiscuous". Macedo points to the fact that a minority of gays are promiscuous and that the entire category should not be defined by a few individuals. On Macedo's characterization of New Natural Law, New Natural Lawyers out what they deem to be a salient trait of homosexual identity: promiscuity.

The definition that Finnis uses acts as an intellectual touchstone for other conservative conceptions of being gay. Macedo argues that as a matter of facts, this characterization is false. So where does it come from? We might be tempted to say that conservatives just have a limited exposure to gay people, and that may be true, but I think there is something deeper going on. The generic of promiscuity, among other deviant traits, is a challenge that homosexuality represents to the established social and gendered order. While this challenge may inspire some kind of fear or anxiety, it is also believed to be essential to being gay. Attributing deviance to homosexuality is seen in how gay rights are argued: it is not the promiscuous gays that are denied marriage, but all gays. It is not just the infected gays that cannot donate blood, but all sexually active gays. Not just high risk gay sex is not taught in public school health curriculum, but sexual education about any kind of gay sex.

The outline of logical generics above in no ways defends the generic that “gays are promiscuous” should be the case. In fact Macedo is right to point out that most gays are not promiscuous (264 & 272), yet Macedo believes New Natural Lawyers do seem to take their ethical cues from the generic that “gays are promiscuous”. Despite his observation, I do not think Macedo is productive in getting New Natural Lawyers to abandon their belief because he does not understand what kind of belief it really is. To be fair, Macedo is not totally unaware that promiscuity is a conservative stereotype, but he wrongly assesses its function: “Perhaps sensing the weakness of their moral arguments, conservatives fall back on stereotypes depicting all homosexuals as promiscuous, uncommitted, and

irresponsible. Such overgeneralizations may provide psychological comfort, but no reasoned support...conservative moralists tar an entire class of people...for the behavior of only some in this class” (293). While Macedo is approaching the use stereotypes or generics, he believes they are a fallback position, not the starting point. In labeling the generic as simply psychological comfort, Macedo misdiagnoses the conservative position and goes about trying to treat a disease that is not there. It is easy to dismiss New Natural Lawyers of engaging in a bigoted propaganda campaign, but to do so misses out on a chance for to actually dialogue or enact change. New Natural Lawyers, far from being unaware of non-promiscuous or virgin gays, are using a generic of gay identity as if it were *the* definition. In short, they are defining an identity from a position of authority.

Finnis himself, again in “Law, Morality, and ‘Sexual Orientation’”, characterizes gay sex:

In reality, whatever the generous hopes and dreams and thoughts of giving with which some same-sex partners may surround their ‘sexual’ acts, those acts cannot express or do more than is expressed or done if two strangers engage in such activity to give each other pleasure, or a prostitute pleasures a client to give him pleasure in return for money, or (say) a man masturbates to give himself pleasure and a fantasy of more human relationships after a grueling day on the assembly line (1067).

Finnis does not qualify that anonymous gay sexual acts are immoral, or that for the most part gay sexual acts are immoral, but gay sex is immoral, full stop. Finnis is not saying as a generic, “gay sex is immoral”, but rather as a definition, “*all* gay sex immoral”. So he, and others in the New Natural Law movement are making a fallacy of composition. I suspect that, like Hacking’s point, these philosophers have grown up hearing and using certain generics about homosexuals long before they adopted the more refined lexicon of New Natural Law. These generics, I believe, heavily influenced the formation of how these ethical positions were developed. Even if we assume that New Natural Law inherits the discussions of sexuality from Augustine and Aquinas, Hacking’s point still stands. Mark Jordan, for instance, documents in *The Invention of Sodomy* how sexual attitudes were discussed, argued, and above all *invented*, in early Christian theology. Perhaps the New Natural Lawyers can tap into some objective language and create their rich vocabulary of sexual ethics, but it is far more likely that this position and codex of beliefs arose through gradual and historical developments. By employing generics in the context of New Natural Law, philosophers take the generic and transform it, by their very position, into something that is accepted no longer as a folk definition, but as an actual definition. Once we accept that employment, the ethical positions of the New Natural Lawyers hold. The qualitative leap from generic to authoritative definition is perhaps the most important to discuss and challenge.

3 Issues of Authenticity

Authentic definitions are composed of generic statements about objects. Unlike folk definitions, however, authentic definitions build a kind of coercive or normative force into the definition. Authentic definitions hold that real x's have a trait y; x's that do not have y may still count as an x, but in some technical or disingenuous way. Counterfeit money, for instance, is still money, but the qualifier "counterfeit" signals that the money is worthless and not *really* money. In some cases, we use logical generics to construct definitions for social groups so that we give a model for members to be aware of what other members in the group are aiming at or striving to become. "Real men take responsibility", for instance, tries to impose a norm on the biological population of males. Men that shirk responsibility or do not accept the consequences of their actions—deadbeat dads or adult Peter Pans—are seen as somehow deficient by society or other language users. Authentic definitions, for better or worse, denigrate members who do not meet the traits deemed to be "authentic". Contrariwise folk definitions tend to treat members without the relevant generic trait as curiosities, rather than defective.

There are two kinds of authentic definitions: imposed authenticity and designed authenticity. Imposed authentic definitions are part of an essentialist conception of a community. Outsiders look at a community and assign traits that stand out and then define membership in that community on whether members have the traits or not. Usually, this generic conception remains fixed or static. Edward Said famously argues this position in his magisterial work *Orientalism*.

Europeans investigated the Middle East or South Asia and collected a set of traits that described the Orient—both people and geography. Orientalism fixed the people and the land as an underdeveloped and ignorant mass. The Orient existed as essentially pre-modern and mystical. Violent and unrefined, the Orient required Western scholarship, politics, and social norms to understand and define what it was—not just for the Europeans, but for the population of the Orient itself. Said’s criticisms set off shockwaves within Postcolonial discourse and it is hard to find contemporary work in the discipline unaffected by his ideas. While Postcolonial studies may be one of the most diverse and diffuse areas of academic discourse, a major unifying theme is the deconstruction of these Oriental myths and stereotypes. Postcolonial studies is designed to give a voice to those who were spoken for. Said’s observation, then, identified authentic traits in order to expel them.

Designed authentic traits are cultivated from within a society. Max Weber argues in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that Protestantism took thrift, industry, and hard work to be the traits of real Christians. These traits were not imposed on the Protestant community by Catholics or other religious groups to call the Protestants cheap, but rather were consciously adopted and internalized by the Protestant community itself. Protestants believed that such traits would reveal hints of God’s favor: commercial success might indicate that Protestants were predestined for heaven. Weber pinpoints that it was this overwhelming concern about the afterlife that spurred Protestant anxiety to constantly work: financial success was only a hint that God favored those who worked hard, it was not a

guarantee. To continue to assuage their anxiety, Protestants had to keep working while emphasizing the above mentioned virtues so that they could continue to see the next suggestion of God's favor. Thus, the Protestant work ethic was a temporary solution to the permanent problem of Protestant anxiety. The constant focus on resolving the question of who was predetermined by God caused the Protestant community to perpetuate the traits of industry, competition, innovation, and thrift onto future generations. Lazy or apathetic Protestants were scorned as not really Christian because they did not earn financial success and thus not being favored by God.

3.1 Warner

Despite the fact that gay generics and folk definitions were imposed, Queer Theorists have actually internalized some of the imposed foreboding generics as a kind of designed authenticity. Queer Theorists attempt to parlay the way traits that traditionally disadvantaged homosexuality into advantageous criticisms of social and moral values. History shows that the pejorative generics or stereotypes were forced onto gay identity. Gay identity became synonymous with these traits largely because gays were unable to resist: dismissed as mentally incompetent or muted by imprisonment, gays had no real agency to form their own identity. Now, when the asylum no longer binds and the jail no longer sequesters, it would seem almost natural for gays to purge the traits that society had branded onto them. Yet, curiously enough, this kind of self-exorcism has not happened. Philosophers like Michael Warner or Leo Bersani attempt to reverse the stigmas

associated with the linguistic markers of being gay. While segments of the gay community do their best to draw a *cordon sanitaire* between the demonized members and the rest of the gay community, Warner rightly points out that gays are perceived as a whole community; sub-communities are merged into one mass.

Pride or stigma belongs to us as a class, a recognizable kind of person, regardless of our deeds as individuals. Thus there always seem to be some gay people who are shocked, *shocked* to find that others are having deviant sex. They will have you know that their dignity is founded on being gay, which in their view has nothing to do with sex. If others are having sex—or too much sex or sex that is too deviant—then those people have every reason to be ashamed (31)

Hypersexual activity is not, according to Warner, something to be ashamed of because it reflects honesty about sexual identity. Warner posits a kind of false moral innocence in self-constructed gay images that try to decouple deviant sex from a more mundane gay lifestyle. The radical honesty and embrace of that honesty is what motivates Queer politics. Only when we reflect on and open up about what we really want as individuals, can we have a more inclusive and tolerant society. Such social honesty is, for Warner, the mark of progress.

Warner's observation is that the perceived group of gays has an almost irresistible binding power: the most deviant will stand on the same level of consideration as the most assimilated. Yet it is this binding power that leads to a sort of paradox. The two extremes belong to the same group, yet seem worlds apart.

Warner explains that the distance between the two breeds contempt rather than any kind of ecumenical exchange.

On top of having ordinary sexual shame, and on top of having shame for being gay, the dignified homosexual also feels ashamed of every Queer who flaunts his sex and his faggotry, making the dignified homosexual's stigma all the more justifiable in the eyes of straights. On top of that he feels shame about this own shame, the futility of which he is powerless to redress. What's a poor homosexual to do? Pin it on the fuckers who deserve it: sex addicts, bodybuilders in Chelsea or West Hollywood, circuit boys, flaming queens, dildo dykes, people with HIV, anyone who magnetizes the stigma you can't shake (32).

Warner's project, to be clear, is on the role of sex in relationship, not just the sex act, but how sex is performed in everyday actions. Wearing clothes that accentuate certain parts of the body, going to clubs that advertise certain behaviors, or even giving language to desires that would otherwise remain silent all contribute to a site of tension. Warner's point is that straight society cannot separate the two poles of "dignified homosexual" from "libertine homosexual"; the dignified homosexual turns on the libertine because the latter is unavoidably dragging down or besmirching the dignified attempts to pass as normal. The dignified homosexual may come across as polished and refined to a straight society, but the existence of this other group proves that the dignified homosexual could in fact partake in their

bacchic culture under the cover of night or a long weekend. In short, the dignified homosexual can never escape the libertine's stigma.

Warner is not just concerned about sexual identities, but also about how gays actually have sex. Warner makes clear that a Queer project is to undermine the taboo nature sex has taken on in polite society. Instead of strict regulation making sex dignified, Warner argues that it is that very regulation which is destroying sex by prohibiting it. A common accusation against libertine gay culture or Queer culture is that it does not appreciate the intimate power of sexual union between two committed people—a one night stand is simply immature sexual wanderlust. Yet Warner strongly rebuffs this accusation: “The most fleeting sexual encounter *is*, in its way, intimate. And in the way many gay men and lesbians live, quite casual sexual relations can develop into powerful and enduring friendships. Friendships, in turn, can cross into sexual relations and back. Because gay social life is not as ritualized and institutionalizes as straight life, each relation is an adventure in nearly uncharted territory” (115). The intimacy of temporary sexual commitment is in the ability of each participant to lay down what he or she wants out of their time together. In stipulating a limited or extended level of intimacy in these relationships, Queers are able to tailor relationships to individual needs and not preconceived social models. Each individual sex act holds the potential to be a site of Queer resistance to societal norms.

3.2 Bersani

Another Queer theorist, Leo Bersani, argues along similar lines to Warner: the contentious site of sexual morality and practice is not a site of punishment for homosexuals, but rather an opportunity to expand ethical considerations and practices. Bersani offers a more critical assessment of how gays ought to adopt a sexual ethics or what practices could even be ethical. In his work *Homos*, Bersani argues against Foucault's idea that Sadomasochism provides a new horizon for sexual practice, a way to liberate homosexual sex from heterosexual paradigms (77-112). Bersani summarizes Foucault's argument: "S/M, he is suggesting—partly due to the frequent reversibility of roles, partly as a result of the demonstration S/M is said to provide of the power to the bottoms, or presumed slaves—has helped to empower a position traditionally associated with female sexuality" (82). Bersani's conclusion, however, is that while S/M does present a new way to structure power in sexual relationships, it is, at bottom, a reordering of power, not a new power source. "Revolt allows for new agents to fill the slots of master and slave, but it does not necessarily include a new imaging of how to structure human relations. Structures of oppression outlive agents of oppressions" (174). Even though the roles of master and slave can be recast in every encounter, the roles nevertheless remain. Thus, by allowing the dominate or passive role to be played by either partner, all S&M does is free up the power structure; it does not replace or undermine it.

In a later work, *Is the Rectum a Grave?* Bersani offers a way to begin creating a new source for power in sexual relationships that erodes the paradigm he

assigns to heterosexuality. Bersani's proposal for how gay sex can offer a new way forward in terms of how we practice and conceptualize sex is not about the act itself, but rather the conditions in which we imagine the act to occur. Bersani himself says: "in *Homos*, I expressed my skepticism about the viability of S&M—a practice constitutively committed, it seems to me, to the idolatry of power—for such major relational shifts. In cruising, I'm proposing another sexual model...one in which a deliberate avoidance of relationships might be crucial in intimacy, or at least clearing the ground for, a new relationality" (59). Cruising, the anonymous engagement with strangers for sex, offers a way forward because it enables people to wipe away barriers of sexual, emotional, and psychological shyness. Cruising is not about regulating which actions occur in sex, but rather about how we practice sex at all. "Cruising, like sociability, can be a training in impersonal intimacy. The particularity that distinguishes it for sociability is, of course, that it brings bodies together...in cruising—at least in ideal cruising—we leave ourselves behind" (60), and in doing so, we are able to move closer to the person we are with, an exercise in self-awareness and desire. Bersani's argument comes down to the idea that promiscuity in gay sex is a good thing, and instead of being something to be ashamed of, it should be something that is celebrated because it offers personal development for those who practice it and may guide those who do not.

3.3 Authentic Identity

So what does this sexual challenge look like, if it is not just about who has sex and how sex happens? Recall that the Queer challenge is not just in the sex act,

but also in how sexuality is performed. A direct way people perform their sexuality is in their identity and their relationship to another person. Warner gives a brief cast of characters in the Queer community: “between tricks and lovers and exes and friends and fuckbuddies and bar friends and bar friends’ tricks and tricks’ bar friends and gal pals and companions ‘in the life,’ Queers have an astonishing range of intimacies. Most have no labels. Most receive no public recognition. Many of these relations are difficult because the rules have to be invented as we go along” (116). These identities are not just discrete sexual acts or relationships; they serve as a site of linguistic and political resistance. Linguistically speaking, Warner makes the point that “the impoverished vocabulary of straight culture tells us that people should be either husbands and wives or (nonsexual) friends. Marriage marks that line. It is not the way many Queers live. If there is such a thing as a gay way of life, it consists in these relations, a welter of intimacies outside the framework of professional and institutions and ordinary social obligations” (116). The absence of “straight culture,” and presumably “straight language” to classify these relationships allows Warner to articulate a Queer theme: Queers are not defined and can be creative and innovative in ways to challenge the social order. Note also the phrase “gay way of life”—what is Warner doing with this phrase? He is spelling out the way in which gays ought to live, the ways and stopping points gays should have in their journey of being “fully gay”. Thus, a definition based on authenticity is established as *the* normative definition.

The point of this challenge is to increase societal legitimacy and acceptance to all different kinds of identities and practices. If people are different and have different desires and practices that are not hurting anyone else, why should people conform to preconceived templates of relationships? Individuals know better than others in regards to what they want, so why not allow individuals to pursue their relationships on their own terms? The implicit next question is, of course, how do we recognize this new network of relationships? This new network of relationships is not merely a linguistic challenge, but, as Warner points out, a political challenge to marriage and a “straight way of life”. Insofar as these relationships challenge the political order, they are outside of the political order—they are not recognized by the legal, let alone social, structures of society. By not remaining monogamous, by being sexually on-again-off-again with people, by staying in touch with one night stands, Queers challenge the cultural and political supports for the marital model. The inability of “straight culture” to name these relationships means that “straight politics” cannot invest any power in these relationships.

In trying to create a language to document these relationships and bring them into legitimate discourse, Warner’s project inherently meets resistance from the older language. Non-Queer language users will question what benefits this new language will have? What practical value will it advance? What other changes will have to be made to accommodate this new language and these new terms? Language, to be sure, is not simply an innocent combination of words, but a representation of a variety of other factors. Fundamentally, language does not just

demarcate what is talked about and how it is talked about, but also what is *worth* talking about. How words gain entrance into language and how those words are used can be an explosive site of contention. A contributing factor to the American Civil War was how “property” and “person” were defined. The entire debate of gay marriage comes down to how the word “marriage” is defined. The debate over abortion hinges precisely on when something counts as a “person”. In fighting for a language that is equipped to talk about these new relationships, Warner is not just arguing for a new nomenclature, he is arguing for a new way of talking about, imagining, and structuring society. Thus, the project of language, how we call or name something, is not just intimately tied to politics, how we value something, because as Warner shows, language *is* politics.

The structure of language as a political tool shows how an “authentic” gay acts as the definition for what it means to be gay. To pursue his goal of getting the above mentioned identities in language, Warner most pose that these identities are precisely what language is supposed to talk about. If there is such a thing as a Queer language or culture, surely, Warner reasons, these identities and their corresponding names form the basic building blocks. Insofar as there are gays who do not participate in these Queer identities, Warner can charge those gays of being inauthentic. So how does one become an authentic gay? How is someone technically gay? Warner argues that it was the debate of marriage that separated the real gays—the Queers—from technical gays—the gays who would rather be straight according to Warner. The pursuit of marriage, as opposed to disestablishing

marriage or opening marriage up to a variety of experimental models is precisely the reason why gays were no longer cutting edge—gays were moving to the suburbs and were no longer interested in going to rallies, but were now interested in making sure dinner was ready for their boyfriend. The real “gays” were no longer gays, but were the Queers. Being gay became normal.

To be clear, it was not the desire to be normal that seemingly disqualifies gays from their revolutionary past, but rather their success. A fundamental point of being Queer is to challenge the very idea of what is accepted and what is the norm. Insofar as gay marriage menaced traditional family values and imposed the very question of what counted as a legitimate family construction to society, gay marriage was a Queer trait. What detached gay marriage from the Queer agenda was its success; because to engage with the marital model means some kind of assimilation must occur. So long as gays were outside the marital realm, their challenge was precisely that, a challenge. The moment gay marriage became another model for marriage was the moment that gays stopped being a challenge to the system they were resisting exactly for the reason that they were now a part of the system that had hitherto excluded them. To be sure, gays are nowhere near total societal inclusion, but the very fact that court cases have been decided in favor of gay rights, gays are allowed to live in the suburbs, and are allowed to be open in places of employment means that assimilation is occurring. The barbarians stopped fighting Rome when they were counted as Romans.

This assimilation is the most heated battleground for Warner because it signals nothing else than an about face of what was once a Queer vanguard. Gays had a kind of political history and force behind them; they had rioted, demonstrated, marched, and became a social and political force to be taken seriously. Other peripheral sexualities were not, and are not, nearly as well organized. S&M conventions lack serious lobbying groups and practitioners of bestiality have no significant war chest or organization to put said war chest use—in short, the political cost of losing gay organization was tremendous to the Queer movement. With gays becoming normalized in the legal battle for marriage, Queer politics have had much of the wind taken out of its sails; Queers were the ones who kept on pushing for more social change and societal openness to new models of morality and sexual practice precisely for the reason that they were not yet legitimate. This Queer pursuit of social change does not make such a clubbed claim that gays are totally normal, but rather that gays, for Warner, lack a certain kind of political appeal and are gay mostly in a technical sense, but not in a robust or exemplar status.

One of Warner's criticisms of the gay movement is that in the 1990s concerns of gay rights quickly became the concerns of the white gay community. A number of factors converged explaining this event, but largely the gay community became fractured by race, class, and location. The white suburban gays dominated the discussion for what rights were sought for by the rest of the gay community. Black gays, urban gays, Latino gays, and numerous other interests of the gay

community were muted in the pursuit of marriage and other rights that Warner assigns to the white suburban demographic.¹¹ We might take his observation as a genuine criticism so as to widen our moral and political awareness, but I think Warner's accusation of white suburban gays stealing the show is more politically motivated than he would let on.

3.4 Authentic v. Analytic

But what does it mean to say that someone is not really gay? Is Warner's normative account an entirely different project than my analytic account? To say that someone is "really gay" or "Queer" for Warner means they adopt a certain set of social or political attitudes or beliefs. In short, a community identity is projected. The description of authentic gay identity attempts to pose as a definition so it can have normative force; the "authentic definition" tries to coerce individuals to change their behavior to match up with the projected identity. To be a real gay, a man must do x, if he does not, he may be gay in some technical or boring sense, but not in a substantive or interesting sense. This exclusion is something like a linguistic sleight of hand—it smuggles in certain political or social expectations into the definition. Thus, the normative account is not a different project because it tries to coerce individuals into its definitional scope. Accounts of authentic individuals fall apart with the phrase: "not really an x". Something is either an x or

¹¹ Warner's criticism might be true, white suburban gays quit the political struggle when things started going well for them, but does this criticism equate to identifying treason *en masse*? An interesting question would be whether or not Warner would be willing to follow his criticism further: Jewish gays are often underrepresented, so are South Asian or Southeast Asian gays—why does he not include their voices in the tally of what the white suburban enclave eclipsed? What about gays of whatever ethnicity? They are often unmentioned in gay or Queer discourse, yet Warner is oddly silent about their absence.

it is not. When the phrase “not really an x,” is used as an actual definition, it is never quite adequately explained.

Additionally, even Bersani criticizes Warner for his Queer language and identity because it seems to misidentify people excluded from, the term “Queer”. “The anti-identarian politics of Queer theory risked erasing the specificity of homosexual desire by defining as ‘Queer’ that which resists the regime of the normal. This criterion, while accepting a large number of heterosexuals as Queer, implicitly denied that privilege to quite a few gays and lesbians” (Grave 66). Bersani’s point is that gays still have a long way to go in the normalization process: perhaps they have sold out, but they still are held in a sideways glance by straight society or, at the very least, treated as a model that is not (yet?) “normal”. Another concern is that if challenging a social order is what it means to be “Queer” than perhaps the net is cast too wide; any group or person who does not fit in with a given community is Queer. Blacks living in suburbia, Jews in the American South, Catholics in Northern Ireland would all be statistically Queer. By this logic, would conservative Queers, if such a term could exist, be the Queerest Queers because they challenge the movement from within the movement? Admittedly, the pint I am trying to make has a lot of moving parts. Queers are people who challenge social norms. By and large, the group that Warner is trying to identify is more or less the drag queens, the sexually promiscuous, the people who live a gritty lifestyle. But what about someone who is a drag queen, but also a devout Southern Baptist? Certainly this person fits the social model of Queer—he is challenging the social

norm in a way that Warner applauds, but what about his religious belief? Warner spends a lot of time in *The Trouble With Normal* criticizing religious moralizing as he calls it. Would the cross dressing Southern Baptist be too Queer or not Queer enough? Without linguistic rigor limiting the discussion, Warner's terminology runs the risk of applying to too many things to provide much headway in any kind of political or social reformation.

Linguistically, authentic membership is a vague concept; politically, it is not. Mary Bernstein documents in her article "Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity by the Lesbian and Gay Movement," which appeared in *The American Journal of Sociology*, the explicit ways gay and lesbian communities argued for what amounted to an authentic definition of what it meant to be gay or lesbian in terms of politics. She cites the practical value of the "strategic identity deployment," as it allows members of the community to know what other members, or the community on the whole, should be striving for (530-36). The function of a strategic identity is that "some sort of identity is necessary to translate individual to group interests and individual to collective action. All social movements require such a 'political consciousness' to create and mobilize a constituency" (536). Strategic identity is an authentic identity because it is the projection of what a member of the group in question should be doing or should look like. No doubt there is a huge pragmatic benefit in having this projection because it gives members a goal or model to look at. Additionally so, the model helps cement group cohesion because there is a recognized standard that members

know what other members are fixating on. Members who do not aim at achieving this strategic identity might be seen as uncommitted to the group, a free-rider, or a “bad member”.

While acknowledging the benefits of any strategic or authentic identity, there are several questions that need to be asked. For starters, who is projecting or defining this strategy? What goals are trying to be achieved and why? Who got to, and how did the group, decide on these goals? Not all of these goals are outwardly political—political insofar as they are trying to change policy. Some goals, Bernstein notes, are political insofar as they try to shape or mold the group identity in question: “Identity can also be a goal of collective action (*identity as goal*). Activists may challenge stigmatized identities, seek recognition for new identities or deconstruct restrictive social categories” (536-37). This formation of identity is not universal and may be localized to certain subgroups of a larger group. Bernstein points out how various gay and lesbian communities constructed different “strategic identities” for elections depending on the different regional, demographic, social, and political factors where the election would take place. Thus, the strategic identity of New York gays fighting for rights was much more pluralistic in terms of race, ethnicity, cultural background, social class, etc. while the gay rights movement in Oregon was much more homogenous in almost all factors. In both cases, a strategic identity was presented, not just to the gay community, but also as an ambassador of sorts to the straight community. The strategic identity summarized the demands, concerns, and politics that each

community sought (544-49). Thus, strategic identities acted as a way to know the community that they are trying to represent and a way to be known by those not in the community.¹²

Bernstein, though she does not have him in mind, seems to be describing Warner's project pretty accurately. To be sure, Warner is not some social strategic general, pouring over maps and charts plotting how to advance armies of arguments here or what literary strongholds need to be defended. But there is a politic in Warner's work and he is not really subtle about it. Warner's project is to reject preconceived notions about what things are: there are no "normal" people, but only perceptions, and false ones at that, about what being "normal" is. The Queer movement aims at keeping the rest of society honest, as it were, and tries to not only open up social spaces for people who are different, but to also allow them social conceptual space so as to experiment and give license to creativity and originality. The message, at bottom, is do not be who you are supposed to be, be who you are. Yet Warner's project seems somewhat odd, insofar as it overlooks that maybe people, and an apparently large number, simply do want to be normal, not in a robust or interesting sense, but just want to be somewhat innocuous in their

¹² Bernstein also raises the possibility that sometimes these strategic identities will downplay the differences between communities. In the gay rights struggle in Vermont, for instance, she points out that while "Vermont had a strong lesbian-feminist community with developed organizational and personal networks, it had not targeted the state about specifically lesbian or gay issues. Motivated by the religious right's attack on lesbian and gay rights, activists decided to work for passage of a statewide bill that would protect lesbians and gay men from discrimination" (549). The strategic gay and lesbian identity in Vermont, therefore, looked radically different from the strategic identity in Oregon or New York insofar as the strategic identity did not want to come across as "gay" or "lesbian" but rather as an innocuous citizen.

lifestyles. Hence, his charge of gay treason against a Queer community compels a question as to whether or not Queers are rejecting or replacing any given paradigm.

4 Definition and Defense

The definition I am proposing for “homosexual” is “to sexually desire someone only of the same sex”. On the face of this definition, I must first say that I am making a distinction between lesbians and gays. For my purposes here, lesbians are female homosexuals while gays are male homosexuals. I see no reason why “lesbian” could not also have the same definition. So, better phrased, someone is gay if he is a male and he sexually desires only males. Someone is a lesbian if she is a female and desires sexually only females. So we have a definition, now what? How do we tell how is lesbian and who is gay? To answer this question, we must first answer a more basic question: who is male? Who is female? I am not really concerned with defining “male” or “female”, so whatever definition we want to put forward is fine.

How is an analytic account of identity any different from an authentic account or a folk definition? Folk definitions lack a desire and ability to pick out all members. Additionally, folk definitions are dependent on a person or language community’s experience to gain currency. The result is that several generics may have currency in discourse, but not actually define what a thing is—generics may only define what a thing appears to be. Authentic accounts of identity are grounded in what people inside or outside the community in question want the population to be, not what it actually is. Additionally, any authentic account must presuppose an analytic account. In making the move from analytic to authentic definition, language users build more into a definition than is sustainable by the facts.

In terms of gay identity, authentic definitions or folk definitions foreground traits that are not always useful to increase political, social, or economic agency. Describing gays as promiscuous may put them in a unique social position to challenge sexual mores or social rules, but the opportunity cost is particularly high. One example is that in embracing this position, conservatives and many others have pointed out that gays, by their own admittance, are not fit for marriage—an institution that demands monogamy and fidelity. However hallow this criticism might or conception of marriage might be, it is nevertheless an argument that is genuinely believed to be true. Cheshire Calhoun notes in *Feminism, Family, and the Politics of the Closet* that marriage is not about the acquisition of rights, but of legitimacy. To be gay is not to be denied rights within a society, but to be denied even entrance to that society as a legitimate member.

Folk definitions also pose a kind of image problem to gay agency. Not quite as strong as authentic definitions, folk definitions list traits that are deemed essential to being gay. The implicit message is that if you want to be counted or recognized as gay, these are the traits that you should adopt. The “should” is a prudential should; it marks the most convenient way for members to be known. Insofar as these folk definitions or logical generics are based on experience, and not on argumentation, there is a difficult puzzle of trying to alter these conceptions by providing enough experiences to language users so that the generics of gays being fashionable, sassy, or artsy are true only relative to a certain sub-group of the overall population. One part of the puzzle is that not all members are known: the

closet provides a kind of barrier to being able to know who counts as gay. We cannot, then, simply say that all gay people should come out of the closet to get a full head count. Not only is this suggestion wildly implausible, but also dangerous depending on certain social conditions gays or lesbians find themselves in.

How do we alter the problems folk definitions pose? As a point of honesty, I should say up front that some people's conceptions will not change. Quine's notion of conservatism of belief describes this resistance quite well. People may have held a belief for a very long time and also may have linked it with other very important religious, social, or political beliefs. Some people, while being open to changing their folk definitions, might also have some kind of reluctance, if only from force of habit. Some people might be young enough or open minded enough to let change happen quickly. I imagine that most of us, in terms of retaining our folk definitions, fall into the group of people who are open, but somewhat resistant, to change. So how do we provide these experiences? We already ruled out the coming out *en masse* and I imagine that trying to corral a kind of gay ambassador program where gays go out to different communities to raise goodwill is equally implausible. The best way, I believe, to combat the negative aspects of the folk definitions is to offer counter or alternative models to the folk definitions of gay identity. To be most effective, these models should be present in popular and familiar culture and media. Gay and lesbian characters in sitcoms, shows, movies, and stories are all good ways to build characters that are relatable to people while still offering an example that challenges the generic conception. Shows like

Dawson's Creek, Modern Family, Glee, Happy Endings, Desperate Housewives, Shameless, Golden Girls, Friends, Will & Grace, Seinfeld, Rosanne, The Simpsons, Rescue Me, and many others depict gays in a somewhat different light than the folk definitions at the time conceived of what it meant to be gay. The result was that new generics were developed into the false definition and more and more models for gay and lesbian identity were recognizable.

Another way to challenge the negative aspects of the folk definition is for high profile celebrities or public figures to come out while still challenging folk definitions. Ellen DeGeneres is a good example. Prior to Ellen coming out, a common generic was that lesbians were butch, wore flannel, and played softball. Ellen was none of these, in fact she was so mainstream that J.C. Penny's, a clothing company, selected her as their spokeswoman. What is interesting about J.C. Penny's selection was that an action group, One Million Moms, posted several complaints about J.C. Penny's selection. One Million Moms protested that Ellen was an inappropriate choice because she would expose children and families to a gay agenda in a shopping area that was supposed to be politic free. The public's response was overwhelmingly in favor of Ellen and supporting J.C. Penny's decision to hire her. Even conservative pundit Bill O'Reilly came to her defense. His decision was not out of dedication to LGBT rights per se, but rather out of an urge to defend "The essential question is that a conservative group in this country is asking a private company to fire an American citizen based upon her lifestyle. I

don't think that's correct".¹³ O'Reilly's support for Ellen was particularly surprising, especially because two years prior, he had gotten into a very public spat with Rosie O'Donnell, an open lesbian T.V. show host.¹⁴ So what was the difference between O'Donnell and Ellen? To be clear, the nature of the both women's relationship with O'Reilly was somewhat different: O'Donnell openly criticized O'Reilly while, as far as I know, Ellen had little conflict with him. One other point of difference, and I think this point is particularly interesting, was that O'Donnell was very butch and embodied a generic conception of what a lesbian was. Ellen, however, publicized a much more low-key lesbian identity that challenged the generic of being lesbian by being socially innocuous. Aside from starring on a TV show where she tells jokes and dances, she really wouldn't stand out in a crowd. One moral we might take from this story is that the more socially neutral an identity is, the more likely it is not going to be challenged. In some cases, it may even be defended by people who would, and have, taken positions against it in the past.

Generics are far too important to how ordinary language functions to prose getting rid of them. The most realistic way we could apply an analytic account of being gay to ordinary language is to offer so many alternative models for what it means to be gay so that the only common factor uniting them is the same-sex desire. As a point of expediency, the more "normal" or close to what is socially common, the more effective we will be in eliminating the negative aspects

¹³ <http://popwatch.ew.com/2012/02/08/bill-oreilly-ellen-degeneres/>.
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/08/ellen-degeneres-one-million-moms-jc-pennyl>

¹⁴ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5im6Fc_478

of generics. To be sure, no one model will provide a breakthrough moment for re-conceptualizing gay identity, but every bit helps. The more relatable gays and lesbians are to the rest of the public, the less stigmatizing and magnetizing the generics will become. The upshot of diluting the logical generics is that ordinary language conceptions of being gay will become more neutral, as the definition “to sexually desire someone of the same sex” provides no grounds for the treating the generics or the authentic definitions as actual definitions. With this neutral conception as a starting ground, social and political policies are less likely to be discriminatory. Insofar as politicians, doctors, religious leaders, or other authorities draw their conceptions of what it means to be gay from ordinary language, we can only benefit from a more neutral account of what it means to be gay.

Why sexual desire? Why not simply say what we’re all thinking? Someone is gay if he has sex with other men. Someone is lesbian if she has sex with other women. Foucault’s analysis of how homosexuals differed from sodomites suggests that this definition will not work, but suppose his point is purely historical and we want to use the term “homosexual” or “gay” or “lesbian” now in the way that “sodomite” was used. I do not believe that this proposal will really be that useful. For starters, several teenagers would identify and be recognized as gay or lesbian, yet never have had sex. What about men who are raped by other men? Are both men gay, neither, or just the one who initiated? What about gays or lesbians who have taken a vow of celibacy? Additionally, how many times must one have sex to be counted as gay or lesbian? Do past encounters count

or does membership in this identity require renewal? These are just some of the problems with defining gay or lesbian identity on a purely sexual account.

So why desire over acting on the desire? Isn't action a kind of proof positive for the desire? Sexual desire works better than sex as a definition because it includes the people that we would intuitively count as gay or lesbian (virgins) while excluding instances where we would not intuitively count participants as gays or lesbians (rapes). To be clear, sexual desire does not mean simply recognizing someone of the same sex as attractive. People tell each other all the time that someone looks attractive, cute, or nice without any kind of sexual motivation for making the comment. So what do I mean by "sexual desire"? Sexual desire is a desire or affection that is sexually motivated. It necessarily contains an erotic element to it. At its base, it is purely sexual attraction to a member of the same sex. But what is sexual attraction? Is it simply physical or lustful? Does it require an emotional or psychological connection with another person? Countless people desire anonymous sex or one night stands with people of the same sex and have no intention of building any kind of emotional relationship beyond that. Clearly "sexual" does not require any kind of emotional commitment.

4.1 Conclusion

Here is, I believe, the definitional bedrock: to be gay is to be sexually attracted to someone of the same sex. Whether sexual desire should be unbridled or not is a different question for a different day. What I would like to say, however, before closing, is that yes, the folk definitions and generics are unfair to gays and

lesbians: a few loud and overt people and acts have defined how an entire kind of people is thought of. Yet those are the facts on the ground and to wish they were not so is simply not productive. So if we are to have a discussion about gay rights, we must first begin with how gays are thought of, however inaccurate, by society. Gays may not be afforded the same sexual liberties that straights are, but that is, for the moment, simply a linguistic and generic fact. In and of itself, this linguistic fact is neither good nor bad, but tells us how our actions will be perceived. Because of the folk definition, a gay person does not always have the luxury of being treated as a new person, sometimes he may be compared to, and incorporated into, another language user's folk definition of gay people. The benefit and point of my argument here is that gays and lesbians are not committed, in virtue of their being gay or lesbian, to any political or moral project. In absconding from this political commitment, gay and lesbian identity becomes a neutral identity. The accusations hurled at gays and lesbians by opponents no longer have rational ground to stand on. With this thin definition, there is no longer room or rationale for an adequate prohibition on gay political agency. By denying a fundamentally political identity, gays enable political agency.

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