As You Wish:

Why There is No Moral Duty to Come Out

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Abstract

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The goal of this dissertation is to examine the possibility that queer people have a duty to come out of the closet. This duty to come out has an impact on the morality of whether or not it is permissible for queer people to keep their identities to themselves. If it is the case that queer people have a duty to come out, then by hiding their identity, they would be acting immorally, and this affects their ability to protect their identities from individuals that may harm or discriminate against them.

This dissertation explores this question in five chapters. Chapter One focuses on defining queer identities. Furthermore, Chapter One also focuses on how queer people come out, why queer people come out, and why some queer individuals choose to remain in the closet. Chapter Two focuses on Dennis Cooley's argument for why queer people ought to come out. His argument focuses on the immorality of deception and the inability for queer people to flourish when they are in the closet. Both of these arguments fail to hold up to scrutiny.

Chapters Three and Four focus on addressing opposing reasons for coming out that stems from Cooley's initial position. These reasons are the internal drive to come out and an external drive to come out. Chapter Three examines how authenticity might serve as a potential internal drive to come out. I demonstrate that there are numerous hurdles that prevent us from grounding a potential duty to come out in the concept of authenticity. In contrast, Chapter Four examines how queer erasure can motivate a moral duty to come out. This stems from an external drive to help other queer people who are negatively affected by queer erasure. This chapter examines both historical and modern examples of queer erasure to reinforce this position, and argues that this external drive is more promising as a potential basis for a duty to come out.

Finally, Chapter Five explores whether there is a duty to come out in order to combat this problem of queer erasure. I identify a method of combatting this problem that I call "Lighthousing", which is the act of queer people acting as a visible representation of queerness to help closeted queer people understand their identity. While the impetus to engage in Lighthousing does not create a moral duty to come out, it does show that coming out for this reason (i.e. specifically to help other queer people) is supererogatory. Overall, there is no duty to come out, but coming out is a praiseworthy act in many cases.

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Acknowledgments

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Did I think I could finish this project after starting it at the worst time, in the middle of a global pandemic? It honestly took a miracle.

Opening:

As You Wish:
Why There is No Moral Duty to Come Out

"As you wish."

- *Westley, The Princess Bride*

Queer individuals often state that they feel like they have some responsibility to come out.[1] However, is this a genuine moral responsibility, or merely a personal sense of responsibility? On the thirtieth of April 1997, Ellen DeGeneres came out as a lesbian. She publicly came out on the Oprah Winfrey show in an interview conducted by the titular host. At the same time, Ellen Morgan, who was played by Ellen DeGeneres on the *Ellen* television show, came out as a lesbian. This was done through a gradual buildup, with several jokes referencing her coming out of the closet (Weaver, 2017). While she initially had no desire to share this private part of her life, the effort that Ellen had to endure to keep it hidden placed a tremendous strain on her, and the fact that she kept this aspect of her life hidden made it difficult to not feel like she was doing something wrong. As Ellen herself described it, "…I realized that as long as I had this secret that I worried about all the time that it made it look like something was wrong" (Weaver, 2017). This constant stifling of her queer identity was both denying her the chance to flourish, and the pressure to hide her identity reinforced the idea that something was wrong. One could even think of this as possibly deceptive.

Both versions of Ellen came out on that same April thirtieth. After her interview aired, her character came out in the episode of *Ellen* that first aired later that day. Part of the reason for this decision stemmed from Ellen's insistence that her character ought to share this feature of her identity. But at the same time, there was a hope that this well-known character could help to show a homosexual woman in a positive light, which existed in short supply in media of that era (Weaver, 2017).[2] While the pitch for the episode was initially rejected, eventually, Ellen managed to convince the executive to let the episode be filmed. Unfortunately, the backlash for such an open demonstration of Ellen's queer identity was rather harsh. The show received both praise and condemnation, with some individuals writing that it "[Was a] blatant

[1] The phrase 'coming out' (or 'coming out of the closet'), references the act of publicly declaring that one is part of the queer community. This will be discussed in depth in Chapter One.
[2] For more details on why there was a lack of positive queer media, see chapter four.

attempt to promote homosexuality" (Weaver, 2017). Further, Ellen's career suffered as a result of this coming out, with Hollywood reducing her opportunities for work after the episode aired. Within the year, the Ellen show was canceled due to fallen ratings. However, both Ellen and her titular character paved the way for future representation (Weaver, 2017).

Over 23 years later, in December 2020, Elliot Page came out as a transgender man. When speaking about his personal experience with his identity, Page stated that he had known he was a boy since the age of nine. He had an understanding that he disliked being seen as a girl and would often visualize himself as a boy when he was younger (Steinmetz, 2021). He would soon find, however, that his career as an actor would interfere with his desire to live as a boy. As he states, "Of course I had to look a certain way" (Steinmetz, 2021). His coming out sparked both a great deal of support, but also came with a great deal of backlash. His coming out came during a period of heightened discrimination against the transgender community, and his coming out made him one of the most famous transgender actors (Steinmetz, 2021).

Page, up until this point, had lived openly as a lesbian. He had already started to wear a more masculine wardrobe as part of an effort to feel more comfortable in his skin. But he found that even this appeal to a more masculine side of himself was not enough to feel authentic to who he was. "The difference in how I felt before coming out as gay to after was massive...But did the discomfort in my body ever go away? No, no, no, no" (Steinmetz, 2021). During the covid-19 pandemic, Page would begin what he felt was necessary to help him fell more comfortable in his own skin. This included both changing his pronouns as well as getting top surgery. The process of his coming out was something he described as a bit selfish, but he said that through it, he was able to live as his authentic self (Steinmetz, 2021).[3]

On the twenty third of July 2017, I realized that I was a transgender and lesbian woman. I am not a public figure, unlike both Page and DeGeneres. I had struggled with my gender identity all my life. However, on that day, I had reached a breaking point, and finally had to confront my situation. A close friend of mine, Jack, was an out transgender man. At that time, he was the only transgender person that I knew, and so I came out to him to ask for help in figuring out what I needed to do. Jack's visibility made it easy for me to ask questions that I did not feel like I could ask anyone else. After a difficult start, I publicly came out just after my 24th birthday, in mid-February 2019. While I certainly did not have to face the same public criticism as Page and DeGeneres had to, the process of coming out was by no means an easy one.

[3] See Chapter Three for a further look at authenticity.

Ellen, Eliot, and I all felt some kind of compulsion to make our queerness public knowledge. I came out because I felt I had no choice, and I would have found it difficult to have been gendered correctly if I told no one that I was a woman. Ellen DeGeneres came out because the act of remaining in the closet reinforced the idea that her queerness was something that needed to be hidden (Weaver, 2017). And Elliot came out because he had a desire to escape an inauthentic life and live freely as his authentic self (Steinmetz, 2021). On the surface, these seem to be separate and merely prudential reasons for coming out. However, were these individual reasonings supervening on some kind of moral reason? Articulated more simply, this line of thought leads me to the main question of this dissertation: do we have a moral duty to come out of the closet? And if we do have a moral duty to come out, what is the driving factor behind this moral duty?

This dissertation is solely focused on looking at what duty an individual has to come out. While there are other very similar topics, these will not be covered. For example, I will not examine if it is morally permissible to out another person. While such topics are important to look at, they are outside of the scope of this dissertation. Further, I will constrain my analysis to queer identities. While it is conceivable that other identities may share the experience of coming out, they are outside the focus and scope of this dissertation.

I am far from the only philosopher to look into this question. Dennis Cooley (2012) examined the same question. While his critics disagree with his position, his writing brings up important points to analyze.[4] I will argue, by the end of this dissertation, in contrast to Cooley's position, that we lack a duty to come out. I argue that positing a duty to come out is too demanding. The closest we can get to a putative duty to come out is related to the supererogatory act of Lighthousing, which is where one takes on the responsibility to serve as a visible representation of queerness to combat queer erasure. I argue that coming out in order to be able to help other queer people in this way is admirable, but that queer people are not morally obligated to do so.

This dissertation is divided into 5 chapters. The first chapter focuses on setting out definitions. There are two halves of this chapter. The first half of chapter one focuses on defining the concepts of queerness. This half discusses the labels included under the queer umbrella. Further, it defines the concepts of sexual identity, sexual orientation, gender, and how these concepts interact and influence each other. The second half discusses the reasons why queer people come out in the first place. This includes an explanation for the reasons why

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[4] For this analysis, see chapter 2.

an individual may choose not to come out, and what obstacles they may face when they do come out. This includes the kinds of oppression that openly queer people may face.

The second chapter covers the main argument that has been made in favor of classifying the act of coming out as a moral duty. Cooley (2012) argues that we ought to come out for two reasons. The first of these reasons is that coming out prevents us from being deceptive to those around us by hiding our queer identity, which is a necessary result of remaining in the closet. The second argument is that coming out allows us to flourish. Cooley argues that if we remain in the closet, we cut ourselves off from the queer community and thus are unable to flourish due to isolation (Cooley, Is there a Duty to be Out?, 2012). Therefore, we have a moral duty to come out. I argue against Cooley's position. I argue that his understanding of coming out is fundamentally flawed and is not representative of the actual experience of being in the closet. For this reason, he fails to successfully argue for a duty to come out.

Cooley does allow us to understand the dichotomy between coming out from a duty to the self and as a duty to others. Chapter three examines a possible motivation for a duty to come out that stems from a duty to the self. This is an argument from the need to be authentic. In this chapter, I lay out what authenticity involves, as well as the features we must account for to generate a duty to come out. These features include the fact that being in the closet makes one inherently inauthentic; that authenticity needs to account for the malleable nature of the queer identity; and that gender norms can (but not always do) influence the authentic self. Furthermore, I demonstrate how authenticity fails to serve as moral motivation to come out. This is due to the fact that authenticity is not an inherent moral good.

Chapter four, in contrast, looks at a potential outward pull for a moral duty to come out. This outward pull is the need to combat the injustice of queer erasure. This chapter looks at both historical and contemporary examples of queer erasure. These include the physical destruction of queer research and the effects of queer coding in modern cinema. These examples highlight how queer erasure is a form of hermeneutical injustice. This grounds a potential duty to come out as a method for combating these kinds of injustices.

Finally, chapter five examines possible solutions to this problem of queer erasure. This chapter focuses on the most promising solution, which is the act of "Lighthousing". Lighthousing is the act of serving as a visible beacon of queerness. I argue that an individual must come out of the closet in order to serve as a Lighthouse for other queer people. This being the case, if it is possible to argue that Lighthousing is a moral duty, this would mean that coming out is also a moral duty. However, due to how demanding the act of Lighthousing can be, I argue that we cannot justify a perfect duty to act as a lighthouse. If we instead consider Lighthousing to be an imperfect duty, then we must find a solution to what I call the pendulum problem. This problem focuses on the dilemma between the importance to Lighthousing and the danger of acting as one: I show that these things stand in an inverse relation. While we could argue that we queer people should not be obliged to Lighthouse in situations of extreme peril, it seems peculiar to say that they have the strongest duty to lighthouse in environments where Lighthousing is needed the least. This line of argumentation does lead us to an alternative position that is far more appealing: while Lighthousing is not a moral duty, it is a supererogatory act that will help other queer people to gain valuable aid in their journey of understanding themselves. Queer people are not morally *obliged* to come out in order that they may serve as Lighthouses, but those who nevertheless *choose* to do so merit moral approbation and praise.

One final point before I continue is that this dissertation references the film The Princess Bride. This is due to the fact that the initial idea for this dissertation stemmed from a quote from the movie.[5] There are quotes from the film that will be used to add a bit of humor to each chapter. Further, my dissertation uses some examples from the film in my arguments. However, knowledge of the film is not required for a full understanding of this dissertation. Rather, these serve as fun Easter eggs sprinkled through the paper.[6]

[5] The quote is “You keep using that word, I do not think it means what you think it means” (Reiner, 1987), and it is in reference to the idea of authenticity. This will be addressed in greater detail in chapter 3.
[6] I will also recommend watching this film if you get the chance. It is my favorite movie.

Chapter 1: Characterizing Queerness:

Exploring Gender and Sexuality

"Have you ever heard of Plato, Aristotle, Socrates? Morons."

- *Vizzini, The Princess Bride*

The process of coming out is incredibly important for queer people. In order for a queer person to be known as queer, they usually must reveal their identity to others, unless such knowledge becomes available by accident or through other unintentional means. Thus, we have some motivation to come out. However, coming out has serious implications for queer people. This can range anywhere from familial rejection to (in the most extreme case) homicide. For this reason, I argue that this is a worthwhile topic to interrogate. In this chapter, I lay out the definitions for the various aspects of queer identity that I will discuss in this dissertation, as well as explaining the importance of examining them. This should not be misunderstood as an attempt to create definitive and exclusive definitions of the queer experience and identities. Rather, we should understand the idea that the definitions that are laid out in this chapter are meant to serve as functional definitions for the purpose of my dissertation. In order to examine whether or not queer people have a moral duty to come out, it is important to establish a baseline understanding of what the term "queer" means.

This chapter begins with an examination of my own experience with my queer identity. This establishes my position regarding this topic. Beyond this point, this chapter can be divided into two halves. The first half will serve as a summary of the definitions I will use regarding the term queer and all the associated categories. This includes an examination of sexual and gender identities. Further, I break down various conceptions of gender. These sections are also not meant to be arguments for definitive definitions. Instead, these sections serve to provide working definitions in order to avoid confusion in later chapters.

The second half of this chapter focuses on the act of coming out and seeks to lay out a groundwork to explore the implications of a moral duty to do so. This half begins by explaining why coming out is important. It elucidates the ways in which someone can come out, what the purpose of coming out is, and why one may feel a need to do so. Later in this section, I look at reasons why we might find some initial plausibility in the idea that the act of coming out could be a moral duty. Further, I explain that we need to take into account the fact that the act of coming out will often affect the kinds of oppression that queer people will have to struggle against. For this reason, I will then examine the kinds of oppression that queer individuals face. This section of the chapter highlights the differences and similarities of the oppression that those with non-conforming gender modalities and those with non-conforming sexual identities face in their daily lives. These kinds of oppression help to highlight both the reasons why coming out can have negative consequences, as well as reasons why this question of whether or not there is a moral duty to come out needs to be examined.

I. Author's Experience

Before going any further into this topic, it is important to understand how I identify myself. Overall, I identify as queer, mostly as an umbrella term for my various identities. Second, I identify myself as a woman first and transgender second. Third, I would consider myself a lesbian. And finally, I am polyamorous. These separate but unified identities are all extremely important to me. However, it is important to know these identities in order to understand the positions that I take in this dissertation. These identities color my understanding of myself and my experience with the act of coming out. A queer individual (especially if they identify as transgender) often experiences a complete shift in their identity at one point in their life. Whether it is something gradual that they discover or a sudden jolt that rips them from what they previously understood (much like my personal experience), few queer individuals can consider their sense of identity the same as before they had this revelation. While there are distinctions between sexual orientation and gender identity, both are outside of the heteronormative paradigm and face similar obstacles of oppression. These traits influence the experiences that people with both identities go through.

One such example is the change that a transgender individual goes through when they reassess their sexual orientation. For myself, the fact that I identify as a lesbian was, to put it simply, a change in perspective. I had always had a sexuality focused solely on women, and this identity continued as I had a sudden shift in my gender identity. While my transition from my erroneous identity as a man to my real identity as a woman was done suddenly by recontextualizing my understanding of self, the change from being straight to being a lesbian happened without conscious effort. This was more akin to a change of category, rather than a change to the self. I had always had a sexual and romantic attraction toward women, and this part of my identity was merely recontextualized with my new understanding of my gender. In this way, we can look at gender identity and sexual identity as two similar, related, but distinct categories.[7] These changing experiences of queer individuals (particularly in my case of both my gender identity and sexual orientation) provide a valuable opportunity to view how a person's understanding of their sense of self can shift and change.

II. Understanding Queerness

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to have a general understanding of what the term "queer" means, as well as its associated terms. As stated previously, this section should not be taken as an unquestionable, universal set of definitions for these terms. Instead, these are working definitions that I will use for the remainder of this dissertation. 'Queer', in this context, can generally be thought to mean minority groups in both gender identity and sexuality. The term more commonly used is the acronym 'LGBT+', which can be broken down into its smaller subsections.[8] These are 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual', and 'transgender'. These subsections can be categorized into overarching kinds of identity. 'Lesbian', 'gay', and 'bisexual' are all terms that reference a sexual identity, while the term 'transgender' references a gender identity. [9] Finally, the plus references the identities that do not fit neatly into the previously defined categories, such as asexual and aromantic.

'Lesbian' and 'gay' refer to two sides of the same concept, an individual who only experiences sexual attraction to individuals of the same gender as them. While this is a functional definition, I feel that these labels can be made more inclusive by referring to them as "non-men attracted to non-men" and "non-women attracted to non-women" respectively. This is because these definitions allow for the inclusion of non-binary individuals into these categories. 'Bisexual' refers to someone who experiences sexual attraction towards individuals of multiple genders, with the term 'pansexual' meaning something similar. While these are the three sexualities that are referenced in the original acronym, there are many other sexualities that lie outside of these major three, which are included in the plus. This includes individuals who are asexual (individuals who do not experience sexual attraction) and

[7] We explore this distinction in depth in section 3.

[8] It should be noted that the term "Queer" is better known for its use as a slur against the LGBT+ community. It has been used in this fashion since the 1800s all the way into the present day. In the modern era, this term is used by the minority group in question in a positive manner, although it still clashes with this historical usage (Herbert, 2015, p. 132). A significant number of the terms referenced in this chapter, and in this dissertation as a whole, share this feature. My usage of these terms is meant to take control of this history and narrative; thus, it would be dishonest of me to shy away from them.

[9] One may be familiar with the term sexual preference, which is often used to describe the same phenomenon. I have a personal dislike of this categorization, as it frames this kind of sexual attraction as either elective or a matter of taste. As this kind of framing does not properly articulate the way in which someone's sexual attraction functions, the use of the term sexual identity is much more effective in articulating the way in which a person relates to this feature of themself.

aromantic (not experiencing romantic attraction). While asexual and aromantic are distinct, they are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, they could classify themselves as homosexual and aromantic, or as homosexual and biromantic. One's identity as it relates to one's sexual orientation is separate from one's identity as it relates to one's romantic orientation.

It is important to further highlight that these labels do not depend on the current relationship status of an individual. Even if a bisexual individual were to be in a relationship with an individual that would lead most people to classify that relationship as heterosexual (i.e. a bisexual woman in a relationship with a man), I would still define this relationship as a queer relationship, because at least one of the individuals within the relationship identifies as queer. While the majority of those individuals who do not identify as straight fall into either the bisexual category or the gay/lesbian category, a fair percentage do consider themselves to possess the less typical labels within the queer community.[10]

While these terms relate to sexual identity, there are also specific terms that relate to a person's gender identity. The term 'transgender' refers to an individual who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. In the same vein as the aromantic and asexual labels, there is a similar label for those who exist outside of the gender binary. A 'non-binary' individual possesses a non-conforming gender identity. In essence, they do not identify with the gender binary (man and woman). They exist either between or outside of these gender identities. Another important distinction is that a person can be both transgender and non-binary or can identify only as a single one of these identities.[11]

The nature of a transgender identity is one of shifting vantage points and changes in one's perspective. The term transgender is an inclusive term referring to individuals whose gender identity does not match the gender that they were assigned at birth. As an example, as stated earlier in this paper, I am a transgender woman. I am a transgender woman because of the fact this my gender (woman) was not the same gender that was ascribed to me at birth. I was assigned the gender identity of a man at birth based on my genitals. Later in my life, I came to the realization that I was not a man. After this, I identified as a woman. This change of identity is an important component that makes me a transgender woman.

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[10] "…one representative study estimated that 5.8% of sexual minority adults in the U.S. identify as queer and 6.7% identify with another non-traditional label…This compares with 46.9% of sexual minority adults who identified as bisexual and 40.6% of sexual minority adults who identified as lesbian/gay in the same study" (Timmins, Rimes, & Rahman, 2021, p. 599).

[11] This is also the case with non-binary identities. The reason for my focus on the binary transgender identity is due to my own personal familiarity with the relevant experiences. While I would presume that the same is true for non-binary identities, my lack of personal experience in this matter means that I will be focusing more on binary transgender identities.

However, I do not wish to argue that this is the universal transgender experience. While it took me a great deal of time to understand my gender identity, other trans individuals understood themselves for as long as they can remember. Furthermore, there are individuals who find themselves outside of a neat cis-to-trans divide. Some of those individuals identify as nonbinary, but not as transgender, because of the fact that they fall outside of this binary. While the term transgender can also apply to non-binary individuals (as they also do not identify with the gender that they are assigned at birth), we should not take for granted that all transgender people simply fall into another binary category. Individuals can be out as a gender without being out as transgender, as well as in reverse. I am such an example. While I will broadcast the fact that I am a woman, I am much more cautious about letting people know that I am transgender.

The application of gender-confirming surgery, hormones, visual presentation, etc. do not need to be tied to the gender of an individual. This means that a transgender woman is a woman, a transgender man is a man, and a non-binary individual possesses a gender identity that is outside of the binary, regardless of how they present (Bettcher, 2014). Florence Ashley (2021) offers an observation that is helpful here. She argues that we can solve the divide between the binary ideas of cis and trans by adopting the term “gender modality”:

> Gender modality refers to how a person’s gender identity stands in relation to their gender assigned at birth. It is an open ended category which includes being trans and being cis and welcomes the elaboration of further terms which speak to the diverse experiences people may have of the relationship between their gender identity and gender assigned at birth…
>
> (Ashley, 2021, p. 1)

Rather than being defined in relation to the change of identity that some individuals undergo (such as myself), gender modality focuses on the relation one has with their gender. According to this understanding of gender identity, a transgender woman and a cisgender woman are both within the category of woman and thus they share a gender identity. However, their gender modality is different, as they have a different relationship to the gender that they were assigned at birth.

One can view this concept of “being transgender” in multiple separate ways. One of the more common understandings of this situation is the “wrong body” model. In the essay *Trapped in the Wrong Theory* (2014), Bettcher lays out a definition for this model: “In what I call the “wrong-body” model, transsexuality involves a misalignment between gender identity and the sexed body…transsexuality is viewed as a problem of the body by transsexuals themselves (Bettcher, 2014, p. 383).[12] In essence, this is the classic way of understanding the idea that the transgender person possesses a physical form that does not match their internal gender identity. While this does not serve as a definitive understanding of the transgender experience, this view does provide some limited insight into some aspects of the way in which some transgender individuals navigate the world.

Bettcher is quite critical of this wrong body conception of the transgender identity. She argues that it fails to function in both directions of an individual’s understanding of themselves. On the one hand, if we need to correct for the misalignment of the body to the mind, there is an underlying assumption that a transgender person needs to undergo some level of medical intervention to count as properly transgender. Bettcher writes, “But at best, the genitally post-op trans person is admitted into the category woman only marginally, owing to a decision to take her self-identity seriously. Besides that, she’s actually very close to the border between male and female” (Bettcher, 2014, p. 386). One could use such a position to argue that the less intervention a transgender individual has, the less they qualify as the gender they identify as. One of the problems with this is that it creates a spectrum of transgender individuals. This could lead one to think that those individuals who only wish to change their social identity are “less transgender” than those individuals who undergo every possible procedure available to them (HRT, surgery, voice training, etc.). This is a view that I (as well as Bettcher) wish to avoid.

Further, Bettcher argues that the wrong body model could be used to argue for some level of intervention in one’s transition. If it is the case that there is a mismatch between one's body and mind, one could make the argument that it is the mind that we should treat, rather than the body. As Bettcher points out, genitals are not the only thing we associate with sex. There are also hormones, chromosomes, gonads, etc. (Bettcher, 2014, p. 386). While some of these can be changed, not all of them can be. Furthermore, some of those gendered features that can be changed require a great deal of time and effort, as well as surgical intervention.[13]

[12] The term transsexual was once used as a way to further categorize transgender individuals. This term refers to a person who has had surgical or otherwise medical intervention to align their physical sex to their gender identity (Heyes, 2003). In essence, all transexual individuals are transgender, but not all transgender individuals are transsexual. This distinction is important to highlight, but will not be relevant for this dissertation.

[13] One could use this line of thought to support conversion therapy. Conversion therapy is a harmful pseudoscience that attempts to change a person into not being queer. Unfortunately, any further discussion on this topic is outside the scope of this dissertation.

Thankfully, it has been shown that children and young adults who identify themselves as transgender are incredibly resistant to being forced out of these identities (Dembroff and Saint-Croix, 2019, p. 574). Even under the intense pressure against transitioning that such individuals are often forced to combat, it is shown that these groups of individuals are incredibly resistant to change. However, this good news should not be our only defense against the problems of the wrong body theory.

I also take issue with the “trapped in the wrong body” model of transgender identity for another reason: it puts transgender individuals in an innate conflict with their body, and therefore such an explanation places these individuals in an antagonistic relationship with it. A good example to illustrate this was provided by the illusionist Justin Willman. In his example, he used the analogy of peanut butter and jelly to represent gender identity. In his example, he described being transgender to be the equivalent of a jar of peanut butter being full of Jelly, and a jar of jelly being full of peanut butter. In this case, the peanut butter still “identifies” as peanut butter even though it is within the jar labeled jelly, and the jelly still “identifies” as jelly even though it is in a jar labeled peanut butter (Willman, 2016). I find this analogy to be preferable, as it does not force an antagonistic relationship between the body and mind. It places the importance on an individual's identity as opposed to their gender expression. In this model, it is not important whether the person's gender identity matches what's on the outside, but merely describes the case that an individual who is transgender is more concerned with the internal identity than the external state and the way it is socially labelled. It is often the case that transgender individuals (such as myself) wish to be viewed by society in the same way that they see themself (Overall, 2009).

In contrast to a transgender individual is the concept of a ‘cisgender’ individual. A ‘cisgender’ individual is a person who identifies with the gender that they were assigned at birth, in direct contrast with the concept of ‘transgender’. A ‘cisgender’ identity is considered a normative identity, and so falls outside of the queer community. However, being cisgender does not necessarily mean that an individual is outside of the queer community. A person can be cisgender and lesbian, gay, etc., which would mean that said person is still queer. Further, a transgender individual can also identify as straight without invalidating their queerness. Nevertheless, being queer is not a prerequisite for having a gender identity.

There is a single common unifying thread with all of these identities that places them inside the category of “queer”. This common unifying threat is the non-normative nature of each of these identities. This sense of non-normative refers to a state in which a thing is considered outside of the default settings of an object or person. However, what counts as non-normative will vary with time and place {footnote: We will discuss this in more detail in a later section}. In the sense of sexuality, the current normative state would be straight, and the non-normative state would be outside of the parameters of straight. In essence, non-normative is that which is unusual. The standard normative view of one's sexual attraction is to be heterosexual. The standard normative view of one's gender modality is to be cisgender, and so it is non-normative to be transgender. Queer sexual attraction and queer gender modality deviate from both these norms. This deviation is what makes them queer.

III. Distinguishing Orientation and Identity

A complication to our examination of queer identities is the distinction between the terms "sexual identity" and "sexual orientation". These two terms are often used interchangeably. Several authors have argued for various definitions of sexual identity and sexual orientation, with some in favor of distinguishing between them, and others arguing that there is no such distinction. In some cases, the question of whether or not to understand sexual identity and sexual orientation as distinct makes an important difference to how we will appraise a philosophical account. For example, Robin Dembroff argues that one of the issues with the common understanding of sexual orientation is the often heteronormative and cisnormative nature of these constructed categories. They argue that these categories leave transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex individuals out in the cold (Dembroff, 2016, p. 5). Dembroff also argues that the concept of sexual identity "refer[s] to an individual's self-identification with regard to sexual orientation. Because sexual identity concerns sexual orientation in this way, the concept of sexual identity is sensitive to the concept of sexual orientation" (Dembroff, 2016, p. 6). However, they do not discuss the concept of sexual identity except to say that it is dependent on sexual orientation. If we consider sexual identity and sexual orientation as being one and the same, it leaves open the possibility that (as an example) only women could be lesbians because of the fact that the gender identity of lesbian is focused on women who are attracted to women, meaning that non-binary individuals and women attracted to non-binary individuals among others could not be lesbians. Dembroff holds this to be an unappealing conclusion (Dembroff, 2016, p. 5), because a significant number of non-binary individuals and women attracted to non-binary individuals among others identify as lesbians, and I agree.

Dembroff argues that we should radically rethink this debate by reframing how we understand sexual orientation. We ought to move away from the cisnormative and heteronormative aspects of sexual orientation through what they call “Bidimensional Dispositionalism”. Bidimensional Dispositionalism focuses solely on one’s sexual orientation. This view captures the ways in which sexual orientation can remain fixed while other aspects of a person’s identity can change.

> By emphasizing only these dispositions, [Bidimensional Dispositionalism] understands sexual orientation solely in terms of the sex[es] and gender[s] of the persons one is disposed to sexually engage, without reference to the sex or gender of the person so disposed. Under this framework, for example, a cisgender man and transgender woman disposed to sexually engage only with cisgender women have the same sexual orientation, and so too for a cisgender man and gender-nonconforming female disposed to engage only with men. In emphasizing this shift in our categories of sexual orientation, BD rejects the idea that sexual orientation can be classified in terms of a relation between persons of the “same” or “opposite” sex or gender.
> (Dembroff, 2016, p. 19).

Within this understanding of sexual orientation, we center the people that a person is attracted to, rather than to the person that is feeling the attraction. Further, Dembroff argues in favor of the importance of understanding sexual orientation as something that is closely associated with the specific behavior of individuals. It is particularly important, in their view, that we account for deviations from the ideal perfect scenario, as there are many reasons why a person may lack an optimal environment to display these optimal behaviors (Dembroff, 2016, p. 6).

I find myself quite sympathetic to Dembroff’s position *provided* we understand it as referring to sexual orientation and not sexual identity. This is because my own experience with the change between my gender and sexuality seems well captured by their account. According to the bidimensional dispositionalism account, when my gender identity changed, my sexual orientation did not change. Before I transitioned, I was sexually attracted to women. After I transitioned, I was still sexually attracted to women. Thus, because the subject of my attraction remained the same, my sexual orientation did not change. However, bidimensional dispositionalism on its own is missing half of the picture. In contrast to my sexual orientation, my sexual identity did change. I was attracted to women before my transition, and that didn’t change, but what *did* change was how women related to me, and the social implications of my being attracted to women. Bidimensional dispositionalism leaves this change out, because it is concerned only with the subject of my desire. Because I am a *woman* attracted to women, I fall within the category of a lesbian, and bidimensional dispositionalism does not capture this feature on its own; it simply categorizes me as oriented towards women, along with straight men.[14] But being a lesbian is importantly different from being a straight man in terms of social experience and one's sense of self, so it is important to account for this. If we do not distinguish between sexual orientation and sexual identity, then bidimensional dispositional seems unsatisfying; but if we operate with this distinction, it seems like a good account of sexual orientation, while leaving space for a different account of sexual identity.

While Dembroff's account of sexual orientation is aided by distinguishing sexual orientation from sexual identity, they do not spend much time discussing sexual identity. By contrast, Matthew Andler does explore what the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity is. He argues that sexual orientation is the actual natural inclination of attraction that a person has toward other individuals (Andler, 2021, pp. 261-262). In contrast, sexual identity is a socially constructed set of definitions that can be used to define these acts of attraction (Andler, 2021, pp. 262-263).[15] He argues that some of an individual's sexual behaviors and desires are socially constructed, and thus we find it difficult to construct a simple "translation key" (Andler, 2021, p. 262) to fully map out one's sexuality on a scale from fully heterosexual to fully homosexual. From this, one is classified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. due to the fact that they have these properties that are based on their sexual orientation. These can either be identified by one's self, or by other people. He further argues that this self-identification about one's sexual identity allows for the possibility that one can be mistaken about one's identity (Andler, 2021, p. 262).

Andler's view provides an explanation for why there is a distinction between sexual orientation and identity. In this view, orientation is the important detail in one's attraction. A person has a sexual orientation solely from the fact they have an attraction to someone (including a lack of attraction in the case of asexual and aromantic individuals). Further, one's

[14] Esa Diaz-Leon argues that we should consider sexual orientation as relating to one's desires. "…My suggestion is that we characterize sexual orientation in terms of sexual preference, and sexual preference in terms of a disposition to have sexual desires of certain kinds, given certain manifesting conditions" (Diaz-Leon, 2022, p. 302). Essentially, the important feature for determining one's sexual orientation is to look at all of the possible conditions. By examining all of these conditions, we can gain full appreciation for all the possible worlds for a person to express their full identity.

[15] Andler uses this argument as a method to analyze the possible distinction between sex and gender. We will discuss this more in section four.

identity is built off of one's orientation. Because someone has an attraction, and thus an orientation, they then develop a socially constructed identity. Using myself as an example, I identify and am identified as a lesbian because of the fact that I am a woman who is attracted to women. Further, this way of viewing orientation allows for more flexibility in one's identity. Being a lesbian is not wholly dependent on my being a woman, and thus a nonbinary individual could also define their sexual identity as being a lesbian if they feel an affinity with that label. This view is also has the benefit of making one's sexual identity descriptive, rather than prescriptive.

This view of orientation and identity as being distinct features of a person is not a universal position. In contrast to Dembroff and Andler, William Wilkerson (2009) argues against this conception of orientation and identity. Wilkerson argues that the reason we differentiate orientation and identity is based on the "born this way" understanding of sexuality.[16] Our sexual orientation itself, in his view, is something that is constructed at least in part by an active choice and through levels of interpretation, and thus there is no real distinction between orientation and identity. He argues that because we interpret our sexual desires in order to understand our orientation, there must be some level of choice embedded within our sexuality (Wilkerson, 2009, p. 100). Thus, according to Wilkerson, we require some level of interpretation to understand our sexual orientation.[17] Therefore, we don't need to bring in the idea of sexual identity to serve this purpose.

I agree with Dembroff and Andler that there is a distinction between sexual orientation and identity, and it is a difference that deserves to be highlighted. It is often the case that sexual identity and sexual orientation are often used interchangeably. However, if Dembroff, Andler, and myself are correct, then these two terms should be thought of as referring to separate phenomena. For the purpose of this dissertation, I consider that sexual identity references the way in which an individual identifies as a member of a sexual group. This term is essentially the one that is used for the concept already. I am attracted to women, and therefore, because I am a woman, my sexual identity is lesbian.

[16] The "born this way" understanding of sexuality argues that queerness is not a choice. Rather, queer people are born queer and thus do not choose to be gay.

[17] Kathleen Stock (2019) argues against this interpretation of sexual orientation. She argues that sexual orientation should focus on the dynamic between the physical and genetic features of the individuals in question. Unlike Andler's position, Stock's position does not allow for the kind of separation between sexual orientation and sexual identity (Stock, 2019). Her argument has not been included in the main text due to various flaws that I do not have time to cover in order to properly show its implications. However, I feel that it is important to mention her position for the sake of thoroughness.

In contrast, sexual orientation should refer to the way in which I relate to individuals that I am attracted to. My own life provides a perfect example of this situation. Before I transitioned, I had a sexual desire towards women. After I transitioned, I still maintained this attraction. However, my sexual identity changed. I went from identifying as a straight man to identifying as a lesbian woman. However, the desire that I had towards the women that I was attracted to did not change. In the same way that we could flip a clock upside down while still maintaining the orientation of the hands to the face, an individual can change their sexual identity without changing their sexual orientation. If I was bisexual, then when my gender identity changed, neither my sexual identity nor my sexual orientation would have changed.

As I have shown, there are no agreed-upon and universal definitions for queer, its underlying categories, or its associated concepts. But my goal in this section is not to make any hard arguments, nor adjudicate between these possible interpretations. You do not need to hold these exact definitions for the dissertation to make sense. However, these definitions will at least let us have a common ground of my understanding for the remainder of this dissertation.

IV. Pre-Queer and Post-Queer

An important point is to not get so caught up on what each label contains that the *reason* for those labels is forgotten. While certain queer classifications may be relatively new, this does not mean that the features that these classifications contain did not exist prior to the usage of these classes. It is important to have a solid grasp of not just what queer means definitionally, but also to what queer refers to. If we view queerness as only being attached to a particular non-normative act, I argue that we lose something important about what queerness is and why it has meaning to queer people. Queerness is not just the way that people identify, or the way that they are situated in relation to social expectations. Queerness exists as a way that people live. If we only think of queerness as an identity that exists, we risk losing queerness as a class.

One can see this kind of problematic classification in the relation to the concept of *gay man.* References to what we would now call 'queer love' exist in writings from the ancient Greeks. One such example of this can be found in Plato's *Symposium*. The idea of romantic love is used to reference a male homosexual relationship in the same manner as a heterosexual relationship.

> Very different was the reward of the true love of Achilles towards his lover Patroclus—his lover and not his love (the notion that Patroclus was the beloved one is a foolish error into which Aeschylus has fallen, for Achilles was surely the fairer of the two, fairer also than all the other heroes; and, as Homer informs us, he was still beardless, and younger far).
> (Plato, 2012, p. 10)

This demonstrates the fact that not only were relationships that we would classify as homosexual known during the time that Plato was writing, but the practice was so common and so important that it was ingrained in one of the foundational myths in Greek society.[18]

There is some debate, however, if such a relationship could be defined as homosexuality. Is homosexuality merely one form of attraction, or do we need to place a concept of homosexuality within a cultural context in order to specifically differentiate it from something that was considered the norm? In other words, is part of being queer identifying with the cultural concept of "being queer", which would then place you into a different category from your "non queer" counterparts? In the context of Ancient Greece, romantic and sexual relationships between two men were considered part of the normative culture. The fact that Achilles had a strong love towards Patroclus would not qualify as a gay relationship according to this account because it was normative for two men to have this kind of sexual and romantic involvement. In essence, on this understanding of homosexuality, "being gay" is an entirely new and novel concept. This would imply that no one in distant history was gay (Ortiz, 1993, pp. 1846, 1848).

If we reserve the idea of queerness for cases of gendered attraction that are conceptualized as non-normative, however, we run into a modern problem with these classifications. In the modern contexts, there is evidence to signal that queer individuals are moving away from the more specific definitions of gender and sexual identity.

> A series of theorizations have emerged from this which circle around the idea that 'non-heterosexual' young people are increasingly 'post-gay', a term that encompasses two suppositions. On one hand, post-gay has come to signify sexual fluidity, a subject

[18] An interesting result of this kind of description of homosexual love is that it has a similar connotation to a giving and receiving partner in a relationship, which somewhat mimics a (modern) heteronormative kind of relationship of a top and bottom (giving and receiving) partner.

> position that moves beyond categories, and thus sexual divisions, as young people with same-sex attractions resist being defined as anything in particular. On the other, post-gay refers to the way nominally lesbian and gay young people reconsider the significance and meaning of a sexual label to their identity, as they come to see themselves as 'ordinary'.
> (Coleman-Fountain, 2014, p. 802)

This movement away from individual labels such as gay and lesbian signifies that these kinds of identities are becoming normalized. While some may have a particular term for their more specific identities, this cultural normalization of non-conforming sexual identities demonstrates a movement toward integration. In essence, the fringe is becoming part of the mainstream (Coleman-Fountain, 2014, p. 805). If we were to agree with the position that "being queer" and identifying as queer (in the sense of non-normative) are the same, then the concept of "post-queer" complicates the picture. If society reaches a point in which we no longer have a reason or need for the label of "being queer", this does not mean that queerness, in the sense I am concerned with here, ceases to be. The existence of the label or the existence of the concept is not what makes one queer; rather it is about experiencing sexual attraction that includes members of the same gender as oneself, whether or not society imposes any label based on this.

However, we should also be careful that we do not overcorrect in our understanding of historical queerness as having to map on to modern gender relationships. While the romantic relationships between men like Patroclus and Achillies might look quite similar to the relationships between modern queer men, such an analogy is not always as appropriate for queer women. Calhoun (2003) explains that the kinds of relationships that women had did not neatly conform to our understanding of modern queer women. "…Victorian wisdom held that women are not sexual beings. Thus, the first generation of New Women in the late nineteenth century who sought out romantic friendships with other women rather than marrying lacked a conceptual framework to envision their relations as sexual ones" (Calhoun, 2003, p. 62).[19] The often (although certainly not exclusively) asexual nature of historical women's relationships makes it difficult to properly classify historical queer women in the same way we might

[19] A further point of note is that the relationship between women would latter adopt a heteronormative aspect. Often, queer women would adopt a butch and femme dynamic, thus allowing them a more normative romantic dynamic (Calhoun, 2003, p. 62).

classify historical queer men. However, modern asexual individuals already provide a solution to such a problem of categorization. It is the importance of the relationship that matters, not simply whether or not people are having gay sex. These historical and non-normative relationships can still be understood through a queer framework even if it does not conform to every aspect of modern queer dynamics.

For these reasons, we should not limit our understanding of queerness to being a deviation from the norms of one's culture. If we limit our understanding of queerness to its standing in a society, we lose out on the *experience* of being queer. Thus, we should not limit queerness to this non-normative nature. I want the concept of queerness to include the acts done in history, even if they were not classified as non-normative. However, I want to have the breadth to include actions that do not just reference sex acts. We could view the story of Achillies and Patroclus as being a queer one solely because of the fact that two men were (presumably) having sex. But if we focus only on the act of having sex being what makes one queer, we miss the Victorian woman who may not have had a sexual relationship (not to mention the fact that we push modern asexual and aromantic people out of the picture). Thus, we ought to think of being queer in terms of acts *and* inclinations.

In a perfect world coming out may not be necessary, as being queer would be as normative as being non-queer. In such a perfect world, thinking of queerness as only being related to its non-normative nature would mean that it ceases to exist as a category. If queerness becomes normative, queerness would still exist. I am queer because of my gender identity and sexuality, not merely because of the fact that they are outside of the norm, but also because of what I do because of my identity and sexuality. For these reasons, we ought to think as queerness not just as a socially imposed category, but also as the acts and inclinations associated with that category.

V. On the Subject of Gender

Transgender, as a concept, relates to how we understand gender. For this reason, it is important that I discuss how gender relates to queerness as a whole. First, for the purposes of this dissertation, I consider gender to be distinct from sex. Sex references the biological features of the human body, while gender is a more social feature of an individual (Overall, 2009, pp. 11-12). A gender identity references the societal framework in which one wants to navigate the world. Non-binary individuals possess a version of this that rejects both the norms of men and women, whereas binary transgender individuals identify with a gender that does not conform to the one they were assigned at birth (Jenkins, 2018, 714). While someone might not have a conscious idea about their gender, or might rarely reflect upon it, the experience of gender is a part of almost every individual's life. We are gendered from birth, and societal norms are often forced upon us from that moment onward. This is a constant presence in our lives, as the outside world is constantly pressuring us to adhere to these norms. There is no single authority (not even ourselves) that forces these norms onto us (Butler, 2014).

In much the same way that the distinction between sexual identity and sexual orientation is a contentious debate, so too is the distinction between sex and gender. A number of authors have argued for conflicting understandings of how sex and gender are related. Dembroff (2016) distinguishes between sex and gender, arguing that they are two separate categories. In a similar view to the one that I have laid out above, Dembroff argues that we should understand gender as a social category, while we ought to understand sex as a biological category. Neither of these categories have complete influence over the other, but they are also not completely separate from each other (Dembroff, 2016). In contrast, Stock (2019) argues that sex and gender are simply different ways of referring to the same concept. According to her account, sex and gender are intrinsically linked, and the way a person presents socially is tied to their biological features. A masculine woman and a feminine man may look the same, but according to Stock, the reason we interpret their presentations in this way is because of the fact that in order to make sense of of an idividual's gender, we require an appeal to their sex to make sense of their presentation (Stock, 2019, p. 304). These two conflicting positions are just the tip of the iceberg in this debate. This is not a debate I have the time to fully adjudicate. Further, it is a debate that pushes us outside our discussion on queerness, and for this reason I am moving forward presupposing the distinction between sex and gender that I have laid out above. This is because the possible literature on this subject could fill a whole dissertation on its own.

In the same way that I do not wish to adjudicate between gender and sex, so too do I wish not to adjudicate what the correct concept of gender should be. Gender itself is an incredibly complicated idea on its own. That said, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is important that we have a working definition for gender. This is because of the fact that gender is linked with our understanding of sexuality and gender modality. Several authors have proposed different ways of understanding what gender is. One of the common features of the concept of gender is that the concept is hardly stable throughout time. Rarely will two cultures (and possibly even two people) have the same understanding of what gender categories entail (Haslanger, 2000, p. 38). While I do not have the time to examine or discuss all of the possible literature on the subject, I will give a brief illustration of some of the major concepts around the subjects in order to situate the way I will think about gender for the purposes of this dissertation.

While there are a number of ways that we can conceptualize gender, I want to focus on three of them. These conceptions are gender as class, gender as identity, and gender as kind.[20] Each of these conceptions of gender highlight different aspects of what gender is and how we can make sense of it. Gender as class argues that gender is structured around the power dynamic that exists between men and women. Put simply, the concept of "man" is connected to a position of dominance, while "woman" is tied to the position of subordination (Haslanger, 2000, pp. 39-40). While biology may play a part in giving reason and cause for this power imbalance, the imbalance itself is what constitutes these gender categories.[21]

In contrast, gender as identity focuses on the way a person understands their gender as a component of who they are, and how it relates to an understanding of themselves. Part of "being a woman" or "being a man" in the sense of gender as identity is experiencing oneself as complying with or violating certain gender norms (Jenkins, 2016, pp. 411-413). According to this conception of gender as identity, the way I experience the actions that I take as a woman are influenced by my sense of social expectations of what being a woman entails. When I wear a dress, this is done with an underlying sense that I am going along with what "being a woman" is supposed to entail. And when I choose to wear a suit, I experience myself as violating the expected norms of "being a woman"; I may feel that I am doing something transgressive. If I instead had a male gender identity, this would be the other way around: when I wore a suit, I would feel like I was aligned with the expectations for my gender,

[20] For the purpose of this paper, the use of Sally Haslanger's (2000) account of gender as class, Katharine Jenkins' (2016) account of gender as identity, and Theodore Bach's (2012) account of gender as kinds were selected based on the fact that they all articulate these concepts clearly. I am using their positions to help illustrate the concept of gender, and not trying to argue that these are the only ways of understanding gender. Further, I am not giving an account of their arguments, but rather of the concept of gender based on their positions.
[21] One of Haslanger's suggested possibilities is the complete removal and elimination of gendered categories. Thus, this would completely remove the need to categorize individuals by their relationship between domination and subordination (Haslanger, 2000, p. 50). I am not sympathetic to removing the concept of gender altogether. For example, the concept of lesbianism is entirely dependent on the concept of gender, as by its nature lesbianism is an exclusionary category removing men as the subject of sexual attraction. However, removing gender seems to make such a category incoherent. However, further analysis of this argument is outside the scope of this chapter.

because I’d be picking up on the expectations for men, and it would be wearing a dress that would likely feel transgressive.

One benefit of gender as identity is that one can have the expectations that one would associate with a certain gender, however this does not mean that one would have to accept them as part of our personal behavior (Jenkins, 2016). An example of this is that my being a woman entails the expectation that I ought to shave my body hair. My refusal to do this violates this norm. However, with the view of gender as an identity, I am both able to deviate from and violate these expectations without invalidating my womanhood. While other conceptions of gender do not necessarily exclude such a possibility, gender as identity simplifies such a mechanism (Jenkins, 2016, p. 411). Further, I feel that this captures my experience of being a transgender woman the best, such as with my style of dress or decision not to shave my body hair. My being a woman does not require that I actually fulfil the expectation, only that I accept that they are associated with being a woman and feel that they are relevant to me.

Finally, gender as kind considers gender as a set of linked properties. We can further use these properties to make inferences and predictions about a natural kind in a more general sense. If a set of properties lacks this kind of predictive power, then it would not be considered a natural kind. This means that a natural kind exists as an accumulation of its properties, and not as an intrinsic requirement to have those exact properties (Bach, 2012, p. 240). This line of thought places importance on the fact that there are selective pressures on the ways in which we think of gender. The concepts of man and woman are tied to the ways in which we have selectively categorized these concepts. While the categories of man and woman are not exclusive and exhaustive categories, they become real kinds by the way we begin to separate activities, attire, hobbies, etc. as masculine and feminine. These in turn solidify what it means to be a man or a woman into coherent kinds that can play a useful role in our inferences and predictions about the social world (Bach, 2012, p. 232).

This is but a handful of ways in which we can understand the concept of gender. Similar to what I have stated in the previous sections, I do not wish to answer the question of what gender is. My arguments do not rely on any one definition of gender being the correct one. Rather, the use of this understanding of gender is meant to streamline further discussions on coming out. This section has focused on laying out all of these possible definitions as a way of establishing how I proceed from here. As previously stated, the task of adjudicating between these conceptions of gender is a task that is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

VI. What We Come Out As

Now that we have discussed queerness in broad strokes, we can connect queerness as a set of definitions to the concept of coming out. Up until this point, I have danced around the question of what we come out *as*. The simple answer is that we come out as queer. However, tangled up in this idea is a complex web of overlapping identities. Coming out as queer is not all or nothing. First, coming out with one's sexual orientation or identity is separate from coming out with one's gender. Further, coming out with one's sexual identity and coming out with one's sexual orientation are not inherently linked. This section explains how these different parts make up the bigger whole of coming out. Each of these explanations will use my own personal experience to help explain these distinctions.

Firstly, revealing my gender identity is completely separate from my sexuality. When I came out to my mother as a trans woman, all I did was explain to her that I did not feel or enjoy the concept of being a man. Rather, I explained to her, I realized that I was a woman. In doing this, my mother deduced the fact that I considered myself a lesbian. However, this was done from a previous understanding of my sexual orientation. My mother knew that I liked women before I told her that I was a trans woman, and thus afterwards, she deduced my sexual identity from my orientation. If I had told a different person that I am a trans woman, they would have lacked this knowledge of my orientation. Thus, they would have been unable to deduce my sexual identity.

Secondly, sexual identity and sexual orientation, as discussed previously, are linked but not identical. The week prior to when I revealed my gender identity to my mother, we had a discussion about my sexuality. During that conversation, my mother asked me if I was gay. While I knew that I was a transgender woman at the time, I had yet to gather the confidence to tell her. Instead, I told my mother that I was certain that I like women. This led my mother to believe I was straight. While I had confirmed my orientation to my mother, I had not confirmed my identity. Because I am a woman who likes women, I identify as a lesbian. However, because my mother lacked this piece of knowledge, it means that she did not know my identity. Further, there was also a possibility that I could have been bisexual or pansexual, as saying I like women does not necessarily disclose the fact that I could like men as well.

For this reason, we also cannot be certain of someone's orientation based on knowing their identity. While it can lead you to a reasonable inference, it is not a certainty. For instance, a person can say that they are bisexual. This does not inherently mean that they like everyone. One could consider themself as being bisexual because they relate to the label better. However, they may find themselves drawn exclusively to masculine individuals. They may decide that masculine women, masculine men, or masculine presenting non-binary individuals are their orientation. While bisexuality does include such an orientation, one could not deduce that someone has this orientation just from knowing that they identify as bisexual.

Finally, one could conceivably come out as a gender modality, gender as kind, or gender as class. However, these ways of thinking about gender seems to be a less common practice. Coming out as a gender is more geared to explaining and communicating an identity rather than class or kind. However, in the same way that sexual orientation and sexual identity are distinct, so too are these conceptions of gender. For these reasons, we should not think of coming out as being one whole act. Rather, we should think of it in terms of separate but interconnected acts.

VII. Why Do We Come Out

Now that we have established a working definition of queerness, we can turn to the topic of 'coming out' with a view to understanding its importance. Coming out is the act of revealing some hidden detail about one's life. This could include religion, ethnicity, or one's sexual and gender identity. While these topics may share some overlap, for the sake of focus, as well as my own experience with the topic, this dissertation is limited to just covering the act of coming out as queer. Therefore, unless I state otherwise, any time I use "coming out" I use it to reference coming out as queer. This act of coming out is sometimes a difficult task.[22] However, the question I am interested in is whether or not there is a moral obligation to come out.

This is a question that I have grappled with since my own coming out in 2018. As a transgender woman, remaining in the closet as transgender can be a safer choice. Although I chose to come out of the closet publicly, it was not something I felt pressured to do. This dissertation as a whole interrogates whether or not we ought, ultimately, to consider coming out as a moral duty. Through the course of the dissertation, I look at several possible ways of

[22] The concept of coming out is linked to the specific nature of queer culture. George Chauncy (1995) describes the act of coming out as something that originated with straight women's culture of the 1920's and 1930's. Coming out was often used to describe the point in a woman's life where she would be formally introduced to society. This was in an effort to mark her entrance into adulthood and as someone who was eligible for marriage. In much the same way, coming out in the 20's and 30's queer culture was not about marking the change from being concealed to being open about one's queerness. Rather, coming out marked a queer person's (mainly men's) entrance into a broader queer society (Chauncey, 1994, p. 7). In the modern day, coming out has taken on the characteristic of revealing one identity to other people, adding on this feature of revealing that which was concealed to others, specifically the fact that a person is queer.

grounding a moral duty to come out. These include coming out as a way to avoid being deceptive, to avoid being inauthentic, and as a mechanism for helping others. But first, as a preliminary to this investigation, the remainder of this chapter focuses on why a person might *desire* to come out and why we might be sufficiently *tempted to consider* thinking of it as a duty for this possibility to be worth investigating.

Firstly, we must address the question of why it is ever *necessary* to come out as queer. Queer individuals can find themselves in a situation where they have never needed to examine their sexual desires, romantic desires, or gender identity, and thus it may not be obvious that they are queer. This lack of knowledge about ourselves can lead to rather obvious signs of something like queerness being glossed over. When we encounter new information about ourselves, it is often the case that we need to process this new piece of ourselves and incorporate it into the whole. Let us suppose that a woman named Samantha realizes that she finds a woman attractive. Samantha may not yet realize that she is a lesbian (or bisexual), but she may acknowledge the fact that she finds a woman to be pretty. Even while she identifies this woman as pretty, she may not process the fact that this feeling originates from her attraction to this woman. Díaz-León explains this distinction in their discussion of occurring and dispositional mental states.

> …occurring mental states (that is, conscious mental states that appear in the stream of consciousness), which can be known by means of introspection, so they are self-intimating (but not self-evident), and…dispositional…mental states, which are not always manifested, and only occasionally enter into the stream of consciousness, and therefore we cannot always introspect them.
> (Díaz-León, 2017, p. 235)

According to this framework, we can view Samantha's realization that "that woman is pretty" as an occurring mental state because it sits in the stream of consciousness. It comes up as a reaction to seeing the woman that Samantha finds pretty. On the other hand, the realization that she is sexually and/or romantically attracted to women is a dispositional mental state. This is because of the fact that Samantha will need to deliberate on her feelings and interpret them. Without the careful examination of her "the woman is pretty" feeling, Samantha may never realize that she possesses these kinds of attractions towards women. It may be the case that she never examines this feeling. While she has an unconscious reaction to women, she does not possess a process of understanding that allows her to discern that this is a romantic or sexual attraction. Lacking an understanding of this part of herself, she interprets this reaction as merely the platonic admiration of another person's fashion choice or some other similar interpretation. This process then brings about a false belief, that if it were to remain unexamined, would explain away this sapphic reaction to this external stimulus.

In this way, we can understand the fact that Samantha does not possess the awareness of the fact that she is a lesbian, even though she is reacting in all of the ways that one would expect a woman who has romantic or sexual feelings for other women to react in this situation. Compounded by the fact that depending on her situation and her upbringing, the very concept of being a lesbian might be completely foreign to her, and she may therefore not possess the systems in order to properly examine this aspect of herself (Díaz-León, 2017, p. 236). At a later point in time, though, Samantha may realize that she finds women attractive in a way that goes beyond simple admiration. Because of this realization, Samantha may come to think of herself as a lesbian.

This kind of process can be thought of as coming out to oneself. However, coming out to ourselves is very different from coming out to others. It is this coming out to others that this dissertation is concerned with. While the act of coming out to ourselves is merely a sorting out of conflicting ideas and senses of ourselves, coming out to others often requires a deliberate act of telling someone that “I am queer”. A better term for coming out to one’s self would be understanding or realizing one’s self. While it can be the case that we accidentally reveal the fact that we are queer to someone, more often coming out involves a process of revealing information as a deliberate choice. There can be several reasons why one might come out. One of the arguments in favor of coming out, as we shall see in the next chapter, is that coming out allows queer people to flourish when they would not be able to otherwise (Cooley, 2012. P. 45). [23]

Showing off one’s queerness also presents several difficulties to overcome. It is quite common for queer individuals to wear pieces of clothing that identify themselves as queer. As a personal example, I can point to the watch band that is sitting on my wrist as I write. This watch band is designed to simulate the colors of a rainbow, which is one of the most recognizable symbols meant to represent one’s queer identity. Such symbols are meant to help identify me as queer to other individuals, especially other queer individuals. But such

[23] I will discuss this argument in the next chapter.

indications only work if another individual picks up on these signals. An individual who refuses to recognize my queerness, either maliciously or accidentally, is denying my ability to be out as queer (Bierria, 2014, pp. 130-131). This kind of rejection is clearly illustrated by Dembroff and Saint-Croix (2019):

> Consider, for example, a young man deciding whether to come out to his parents as gay…having realized that he is gay, he comes to self-identify as gay…it is the choice to come out, the choice to make that private identity public and allow others to perceive him as gay…This relationship between self-identification and preferred public perception is at the core of [his] identity...If the young man's parents ignore him or tell him that he's confused, and then continue to ask after his girlfriend, they in effect refuse to perceive him as gay.
> (Dembroff, Saint-Croix, 2019, p. 576)

This homophobia and lack of acceptance directed at those queer individuals demonstrates the fact that in order for a queer person to be perceived as queer, the perceiver needs to know and accept that they are queer. A necessary part of this process is the act of coming out. Being "in the closet" (i.e. not out) makes it significantly harder (although not impossible) to identify someone as queer.

Further, there are many ways that a person can discover their queerness. Individuals may experience queerness in a way that isolates them from the community and denies them the opportunity to flourish.[24] Some may even discover their sexuality in complete isolation and believe themselves to be a new kind of sexual creation, disconnected from all other individuals, or worse, some aberration to be ridiculed and concealed. One of the more common experiences that queer people face is that they did not know they were queer until something allowed them to make this discovery. There are several scenarios in which one might not understand their queerness. One example of this is when an individual misinterprets their attraction. A woman might find another woman attractive, but rather than realize that they are bisexual, lesbian, etc., they may instead misinterpret those signs. Some lesbians will talk about how pretty women are, or how much they hate the idea of being married to a man, without recognizing that this is because they are lesbians. If a person was always aware of

[24] My own first experience with the concept was late into my young adult life. I did not learn of the concept of homosexuality until I was in my late teens, and this experience was a negative one.

every aspect of their identity, then it would be impossible for that person to not know that they are queer, as they would always have access to this knowledge. A queer individual's gender and sexual identity are things that might not be self-evident to them, and therefore, it is something that each individual must discover for themselves. It is often the case that queer people do not have instant access to their queerness and thus they remain in the closet.

The term "in the closet" refers to an individual who has discovered their non-heteronormative sexuality or non-conforming gender identity, but out of either fear of consequence, or simply a desire to keep it private, does not reveal this new orientation or identity to other individuals. Being in the closet is not a binary state. I can be in the closet to my family, while still having a girlfriend who I am out to in private. Some queer individuals may attempt to emulate heterosexual relationships in an effort to adhere to the social norms in order to fit in. Further, this is by no means something that only those of norm-defying sexualities face. A transgender or non-binary individual may face the same kind of pushback and may try to live as their gender assigned at birth in order to avoid the repercussions of socially transitioning. On the other hand, they may surgically transition, move away from their families, and then never tell anyone that they are trans. For this reason, queer individuals face a notable level of pressure to live in a manner that denies their queer identity (Heyes, 2003).

In contrast to this grim possibility, one example of how coming out might support our flourishing is the case of finding a relationship. As a lesbian woman, it would be difficult for me to date another woman without telling them that I am queer. While I could spend the rest of my life telling women that I like them, actually dating a woman would require me to tell that person that I am queer. Further, it would also be difficult for another woman to date me if they kept their queerness hidden. In a relationship between two queer women, it is a requirement that both individuals know that they are dating, and thus they would need to know that they are sexually or romantically compatible. One could argue that some individuals, such as a bisexual woman dating a man, can still enter relationships with some individuals without needing to disclose their queerness. However, this fact does not diminish the importance of coming out. A bisexual woman can still find coming out helps them to flourish for various reasons. As well as enabling them to have relationships with a greater range of people, some may find that they feel deceptive when keeping their queerness hidden, while others may find that it feels more authentic and allows them to "be themselves".

Furthermore, transgender and nonbinary individuals may find that coming out is a prerequisite for their identity to be respected. It is often the case that transgender and nonbinary individuals need to come out in order to be properly identified. It would have been quite difficult for even my closest and most supportive friends to gender me correctly and call me by my chosen name without knowing the fact that I was not a man. Thus, in one sense, a transgender woman like myself needs to come out to people *as a woman* in order for my identity to be acknowledged. In contrast, I do not tell everyone I meet that I am *transgender*. Now that I have moved away from home, I encounter individuals who have only ever known me as a woman. And there is a strong possibility that such individuals may never learn that I am a transgender woman unless I tell them. In such situations, coming out as transgender to a stranger who has only known me as a woman achieves a very different result than coming out did with my friends.

One of the distinctions that will be helpful in understanding the different reasons one might come out is the distinction between external drives and internal drives to come out. A "drive to come out" simply means that there is a motivating force that results in a queer person announcing their queer identity (or identities). The distinction between an internal drive and an external drive describes the place where the motivation to come out comes from. An internal drive is motivated by a drive directed to the self, while an external drive is motivated by a concern for others.[25] As an example, we could consider a drive to be authentic as an internal drive to come out, while a drive to not deceive other people would be an external drive.

But this leaves us with the following question: what reasons are there for believing that we really have a moral duty to come out? Furthermore, what is a moral duty? A moral duty is, at the very base level, the action we ought to do or to refrain from doing. Philippa Foot (1972) lays out a Kantian interpretation of moral duties as something we do not because it leads to good for some other purpose, but rather because it is inherently right. While moral duties are often associated with Immanuel Kant, for the purposes of this dissertation, I wish to use the term in a less specific sense. While a Kantian moral duty is focused on intention, other moral systems focus on consequences, some combination of the two, or something completely separate. For the sake of brevity, I will not be adjudicating between these conceptions of what motivates a moral duty. Simply put, for the sake of this dissertation, a moral duty is an act, set

[25] Immanuel Kant gives us examples of these kinds of drives. However, as they are rooted in his ethical system, his examples are based on his system of moral duties. One example of a duty to the self is to not commit suicide. While it is often the case that suicide impacts the friends and family of the person who commits it, the intention of committing suicide is focused on one's self. In contrast, an example of a duty to others is to be charitable. This is because the intention behind the act of charity is directed at other people (Kant, 1997, pp. 38-39). While the reasonings behind these categories are rooted in Kant's ethical system, these distinctions are helpful regardless of one's ethical framework.

of actions, or a feeling that we ought to do for moral reasons, as opposed to other reasons e.g. prudential reasons (what is in our practical interests). It is something we must do on pain of laying ourselves open to justified moral criticism.

VIII. Oppression

While there are a number of considerations in favor of coming out, which will be explored in more detail in the coming chapters, there are also a myriad of reasons why queer people might want to remain in the closet. Because of the fact that modern queer individuals fall outside the heteronormative and cisnormative nature of society, they often face a great deal of oppression. This stems from the fact that because of their nature as non-normative, they clash with the cis- and heteronormative nature of society.[26] This clash of norms is what causes the oppression of queer individuals. This oppression informs and changes the way in which they navigate the world.[27] For these reasons, we should not consider the question of whether or not we have a moral duty to come out lightly, as there are potentially lethal results if we reach a wrong answer, especially for queer youth. There are very real dangers in coming out, and thus we ought to carefully interrogate this question. In order to have a firm understanding of why queer people might not want to come out, it is important to examine the kinds of oppression that they face.

Queer and transgender oppression has a specific feature to it. It is borne out of the act of breaking the norms and expectations that a hetero- and cisnormative society forces upon queer people. These norms stem from the common understanding of marriage and sexual relationships being solely between men and women (in the case of sexual relationships, it is specifically between a man and a woman who are married). In particular, this breaking of norms, often in the case of religious norms, places those who break them into a lower social position. This can lead to a kind of social backlash (Haslanger, 2000, pp. 38-39). The AIDS epidemic demonstrated how the queer community can be persecuted by cultural retribution. By associating them directly with said disease, the socially deviant nature of homosexuality was weaponized. They were considered deserving of their pain because of this break from the norm. Thus, the culturally constructed nature of gender and gender roles can be manipulated into a weapon against queer minorities (Butler, 1999, p. 168).

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[26] See chapters two and four for a further breakdown of this reasoning.
[27] The same kind of explanation can be used for other minority groups, but that is outside the scope of this dissertation.

In addition, oppression is not something solely done by non-queer individuals to the queer community. Some of the oppression done to queer individuals is from the queer community itself. Bisexual women, as one obvious example, are sometimes unfairly excluded from lesbian spaces because they will engage in sexual and romantic activities with men, as well as be excluded from heterosexual women's spaces because they can be seen as predators, due to their attraction to women (Heyes, 2003, p. 1097). This kind of attack, both from inside the queer community and outside, is defined as biphobia. Biphobia is the general negative opinion for the bisexual community. Homophobia and transphobia operate in much the same way, although they focus on other kinds of identities. Homophobia references a general negative opinion that one has for those who do not identify with a purely heterosexual and heteroromantic attraction. Transphobia is general negative opinion of those in the transgender community. This general negative opinion can be a general dislike for the group in question, but it can also include forms of outright violence. These can be anywhere from verbal abuse to physical assaults, and even in the most extreme cases can result in the deaths of queer individuals (Bettcher, 2007, p. 46).[28]

Transgender individuals face all of these oppressive forces, but they do not necessarily share the same experience in this oppression as other parts of the queer community. While both queer cisgender and transgender individuals exist outside of the normative structure, transgender individuals face discrimination based on the fact that they are often perceived as existing within a deception, specifically that they are one gender masquerading as another. This is particularly noticeable in the case of a transgender woman. If they are not identified as transgender, they are oppressed from their perceived position as failing to live up to the standards placed on women. On the other hand, if they are perceived as a transgender individual, they are discriminated against based upon the fact that they are perceived as men in women's clothing, and thus are treated as social pariahs because they do not fit the mold of a man (Goldblum, et. al. 2012, pp. 470-471). By transitioning, one is placing oneself into a specific kind of oppressive position. While both those closeted and uncloseted transgender individuals will face oppression, being openly transgender invites a specific kind of oppression. In the case of a transgender woman, said individuals place themselves in that position of social inferiority, and may lack the skills to combat this, as well as place

[28] I feel it necessary to place a trigger warning on the remainder of this section, as it discusses violence and prejudice against the queer community. I feel it is important to be as thorough in this section as possible, however the subject can be quite distressing, and some readers may prefer to skip to the conclusion at this point.

themselves in mortal danger if this identity is discovered. On the other hand, one could argue that a transgender man seems to gain male privilege from their transition. However, this perceived privilege will always be questioned and tenuous, as he must constantly ensure that he shows no references to his transition (Overall, 2009, p. 14).

It is important to recognize that transgender women, especially those of color, of low economic class, and those who are sex workers, are in a particularly vulnerable state. Placed in such positions, they have an elevated risk of violence. Transgender woman can often face specific kinds of violence because of the ways that certain transphobic men can react to finding out that a potential sexual partner is a transgender woman. Often, this can result in violence. As one participant in a study by Nemoto et. al. puts it, "No one's going to kill a gay man if he finds a dick between his legs. No one's gonna kill a gay woman if he finds a pussy. But they will definitely put a knife through a tranny's throat if they see breasts and dick [sic]" (Nemoto et al. 2004, cited in Bettcher, 2014, p392). This elevated state of vulnerability is a constant threat for transgender women. This can even affect transgender women who have had sexual reassignment surgery. A transphobic individual can see the surgical removal and modification of a penis on a transgender woman as damning or threatening their masculinity (in the case that the transphobic individual is a man), justifying the destruction of the "perpetrator" to correct this "slight" on his masculine identity (Bettcher, 2014, p. 391).

This kind of attack on presentation can also be used in a manner that denies an individual their gender identity. A transgender individual might not put extra emphasis on normative aspects of their gender identity, but this does not mean that that aspect is less important. Returning to the example of Samantha, who is a lesbian, if she were to be accosted in a public space for wearing a suit, and the accoster in question referred to Samantha in a masculine manner, such as calling Samantha "him" or referencing her by a masculine name ("hey, it's Samuel!"), they are misgendering this individual.[29] The act of misgendering is not respecting the subject's ability to self-identify, thereby disrespecting said person and their identity. Further, this act of misgendering is not just a social effect, but it is also affects one's legal position. One may find themselves being misgendered in every official interaction, such

[29] Considering that the individual I refer to as Samantha is a cisgender woman in this example, describing this kind of name-calling as *misgendering* may seem out of place. However, I take it that cisgender people can be misgendered, and that this often happens in queerphobic ways. The transgender equivalent of this is by referring to someone's deadname, which is the name that they were given at birth. Often, as names end up with a gendered connotation, such as in the case of Samantha and Samuel, replacing one's dead name is a way in which a transgender person can continue to reject the gender they were assigned at birth. When someone deadnames a transgender individual, they demonstrate an obvious example of misgendering. But a cisgender person can also be misgendered through the use of a gendered name.

as hospitals and courts (Kapusta, 2016, p. 505). While it is true that any person can be misgendered, the intentional act of misgendering is often used against transgender individuals as an attack on and refutation of their gender identity (Jenkins, 2018, p. 718).

Another way that this opposition manifests is through the narrative of a trans individual being deceptive. According to such an account, a transgender individual is adopting the identity of a gender as some way to get into spaces reserved for the other gender. While this narrative can also apply to transgender men, it is more often associated with transgender women, as the fear of predatory men entering women’s spaces can be used to create the division in a way that women sneaking into men’s spaces is not. This narrative of deception is particularly insidious. Overall (2009) points out that Raymond (1979) tries to argue this point, claiming that transgender women are simply men trying to deceive women into gaining their companionship and company. In other words, she claims that men are masquerading as women in order to enter women's spaces (Raymond, 1979, cited in Overall, 2009, p. 14).

The perceived deception of transgender individuals has even been described as a form of rape (Raymond, 1979), although such an extreme narrative is far less prevalent than the narrative of deception. Janice Raymond (1979) makes the claim that by stealing and copying the form of women, transgender women rape cisgender women by the theft of the physical form (Raymond, 1979, cited in Bettcher, 2007, pp. 55-56). By framing the very existence of transgender women in this way, Raymond perpetuates the idea that transgender women, by their very nature, are predatory individuals. The very category of being trans becomes intimately linked with the same type of predatory behavior that terrible people often display. All this is not the same as saying some transgender women could be predators in a literal sense. Rather, it is intrinsically linking these two categories together. When these two categories are so intrinsically linked, it comes to seem as though the only way to protect cisgender women is by oppressing transgender women in a way that separates them from the category of woman, thus creating a divide between cisgender and transgender (Heyes, 2003, pp. 1100-1101). In essence, by Raymond’s definition, a transgender woman is not a woman, but rather a threat *to* women and a thief of womanhood.

Such a narrative is easily disproven. Transgender women are constantly subjected to scrutiny and oppression because of the constant questioning of their identity. They will often face hardship in entering spaces that are granted to women, such as a homeless shelter, and will face constant ridicule and pressure about something as simple as using a women's restroom. If it was the case that a transgender woman was actually a man masquerading as a woman, then the difficulty made by entering women's spaces, as well as the heightened scrutiny that they would have to face, seems to negate any of the positives of masquerading as a woman. The fact that men only lose power in this way demonstrates the fact that it is not an effective way to gain access to women's spaces. In addition, there is no magical barrier preventing men from going into women's spaces without medical transitioning, and thus predatory men do not need to undergo the process of medical or social transition to enter women's spaces. There is nothing that prevents a cisgender man from ignoring the woman sign on a bathroom door if he wished to cause harm. All a man who is interested in harming women would need to do is put on a high visibility vest and pick up a clipboard, which is a much quicker process than transitioning. Therefore, there would be no benefit for a man pretending to be a woman in order to enter women’s spaces (Overall, 2009, p. 22).

Violence against transgender women is often dismissed if not outright accepted by the legal responses to such instances. This includes the "trans panic defense", where the perpetrator argues that the supposed deception that they were subjected to during the lead-up to sex causes a sudden outburst of violence at the discovery of the woman’s genitalia. Transgender individuals as a whole are often placed in a no-win scenario when it comes to sex and dating. They may admit to their potential partner that they transitioned, and thus face discrimination because they "are not a real man or woman". Or they may decide not to disclose that information because of the reason above, and fear being outed and thus subjected to violence for the perceived deception (Bettcher, 2007, pp. 47, 50). We can see that most of the oppression that transgender individuals face originates from a perceived deception. This deception comes from a supposed inauthenticity about their gender identity (Bettcher, 2007, p. 50). One way to think of this is that the very clothing that we wear is meant to demonstrate this identity to others. In the case of the trans panic defense, this argument is presented in response to a “revealed falsehood” about said transgender person’s identity.

One of the most dangerous and concerning features of this oppression is the incredibly disproportionate number of suicides in the queer population. Suicide is one of the major causes of death among adolescents and young adults (DeCue, Lynch, 2018, p. 363). This danger posed to this age group is more pronounced for queer individuals. One specific example of this is that bisexual women are over twice as likely to die by suicide as their heterosexual counterparts. This statistic almost doubles in regard to lesbian women (DeCue, Lynch, 2018, p. 363). The transgender community has an even more troubling statistic. In the case of trans women, one out of every four individuals will have attempted suicide, with trans men facing a statistic of 30% (Goldblum, et. al. 2012, p. 471). These numbers are worth noting, and it is important to understand why these numbers are so high.[30] One possible explanation is that queer individuals are more likely to receive abuse. This abuse can stem either from a person's immediate family or from their normal peer group. Statistics show that a significant number of heterosexual suicide attempts can be linked to this cause. With nearly half of individuals reporting sexual abuse, and 45% reporting physical abuse, this cause may point to the triggers of attempting to end one's own life (DeCue, Lynch, 2018, p. 364).

It is for these reasons that we should not consider the question of whether or not we have a moral duty to come out lightly, as there are potentially lethal results if we reach a wrong answer, especially for queer youth. There are very real dangers in coming out, and thus we ought to carefully interrogate this question. For this reason, I argue that a thorough examination is warranted.

IX. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out a strong foundation to explore the question of whether or not we have a moral duty to come out. I have set out working definitions for various queer identities. Further, I have explored what it means to be queer. Rather than considering queerness as merely an identity being based on being outside the sexual norms, we should also focus on the fact that queerness is based on one's relationship to oneself and others. I have also explained the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity, the distinction between sex and gender, and the various understandings of gender.

Most importantly, I have laid out both the reasons why we ought to explore the question of whether there is a moral duty to come out, and also why we must not be too swift to settle on an answer. While it may be true that coming out as queer may facilitate a queer person’s flourishing, coming out can also lead to many potential harms. In the worst case, they can be lethal. However, this desire to be known points to something that underpins a motivation to come out. It is important to find out if this is strong enough to be considered a

[30] ‘[Our research indicates] that the climates of American middle and high schools are largely antagonistic, unwelcoming, and unsafe for trans students. Almost half of the 290 participants (44.8%) in this study reported that they had been victimized by peers, teachers, or school administrators as a result of their gender identity or expression (60.5% of trans men and 38.8% of trans women). In comparison, 19.9% of high school students in the general population report victimization in school… Furthermore, transgender students were even more likely than LGB students to report feeling “unsafe at school because of their sexual or gender orientation.”’
(Goldblum, et. al. 2012. P. 469)

moral duty. For this reason, I argue that this search for a moral duty to come out is both a worthwhile question to interrogate and one that desperately demands an answer.

Chapter 2: Refuting Cooley:

On the Isolation of Remaining in the Closet

"The pit of despair! Don't even think about trying to escape."

- *The Albino, The Princess Bride*

In order for us to interrogate the possibility of a moral duty to come out, it is best to start by addressing an argument in favor of this position. This will allow us to narrow down some avenues for our inquiry. In his paper *Is There a Duty to be Out?,* Dennis Cooley argues that there is a moral responsibility for a queer individual to come out of the closet. This chapter argues that Cooley's characterization of queer people who are 'closeted' suffers from two separate problems. These problems undermine his overall argument. The first problem is that Cooley assumes that an individual who remains in the closet is cut off from the queer community. For this reason, they are unable to secure their own happiness, or, to use Cooley's more specific terminology, they are unable to flourish. In essence, Cooley's concept of being in the closet has similarities to being trapped in a 'pit of despair' from which one cannot escape without coming out. The second problem with Cooley's argument is his claim that being in the closet forces an individual into a state of permanent deception. According to Cooley, a person in the closet deceives everyone around them, as they are not forthcoming with that part of their identity.

I will argue that both aspects of this characterization of those individuals who choose to remain in the closet are false. I argue that this comes from a genuine misunderstanding of the nature of coming out. I further argue that this false characterization fatally undermines Cooley's argument for a duty to come out. While I will be as charitable as possible, my goal in this paper is to demonstrate that Cooley's argument for this claim is not salvageable. I begin with explain Cooley's account before I examine other accounts around the morality of coming out. this will allow us to highlight why his position is the standout one that I am addressing.

I. Examples

Before we examine Cooley's argument, it will be helpful for us to have a practical understanding of what it means for an individual to come out. The choice of coming out is often a difficult decision for individuals. While I illustrated why one might come out, and what one might come out as, in the previous chapter, I did not offer concrete examples. This section will introduce some examples in which an individual may have to ask themselves whether or not they should come out, with the intent of grounding our inquiry in some real-world examples. While these are stories from my own life, they nevertheless help to highlight these instances where the choice to come out was not a simple decision. This does not necessarily mean that the act of coming out was hard, but rather that the choice regarding if I *ought* to do so was not straightforward. The goal of these stories is to help highlight that queer individuals will constantly face challenges about their identity and will constantly have to decide when to come out to another individual.

Coffee Date. The first example has to do with an individual who is seeking companionship. I once went on a coffee date with an individual. We had an excellent conversation during this coffee and agreed to set up a second date. Between these two dates, I became anxious about whether or not I should have told this individual that I was transgender. The fact that I was a lesbian was known to this individual. They also identified as a lesbian, as the topic had come up in our conversation. However, at what point should I tell her that I am trans? My intuition leads me to believe that this kind of information is private and requesting it would be invasive. If one views being trans as something that we ought to reveal then what is the particular property that requires the disclosure of one's transgender identity, and when should one disclose this information?

Necklace. A second scenario is in the case of continuously coming out. As I am writing this, I am wearing a necklace, the pendent of which consists of the twin Venus symbol. This symbol is often used to represent an individual's lesbian identity. I wear this necklace with the explicit intention of signaling to other lesbian and bisexual women that I am a lesbian. This piece of jewelry serves the purpose of constantly outing me as a lesbian. Essentially, everyone who sees this necklace and understands its meaning is someone I am now out to as a lesbian. However, is the act of not wearing a similar piece of clothing or jewelry that demonstrates my transgender identity hypocritical? Furthermore, if this is not the case, what difference between these two queer identities makes them distinct?

Flatmate. In another example, while in shared accommodations, one of my flatmates (who also identified as queer) erroneously identified me as cisgender and straight. Of these two identities, I took the misidentification of me as a cisgender woman as a compliment. To this individual, I appeared to be as much of a woman as any cisgender woman. In contrast, I jokingly told them that I was disappointed that they had identified me as straight. This scenario leads to the question: should I have corrected them in either of these cases?

Moreover, should I have informed them that I was trans in the same way that I informed them that I was a lesbian?

Jack. My final example is a much older one and does not revolve around something that *I* had to make a decision about. Instead, it focuses on another queer friend of mine, Jack. When I realized that I was transgender, I was stuck in a situation where I did not know how to find answers about what I was going through. Thankfully, I knew an individual who identified as transgender. Jack was quite open about the fact that he was trans, and thus I went to him for help. The fact that he had chosen to be out allowed me to benefit from his advice.

These four scenarios help to illuminate the ways in which an individual may wonder whether they have some impetus to come out as queer. These scenarios are by no means an exhaustive list. Rather, these scenarios helped to highlight particular aspects of coming out where the question of what one ought to do may arise. We know that the decision to come out is not an arbitrary choice, such as if one were to decide whether to tell a friend what one ate for breakfast. It seems obvious that it is often difficult to decide whether or not to come out, and there are many factors involved in this decision. However, if there is some kind of moral obligation, and thus (in a given situation) we *ought to* come out, then this seems to override any other factors. Keeping these scenarios in mind as we proceed will help guide the path that we must take to understand what an obligation to come out might look like.

II. Cooley's Account of Obligations to Come Out

In his paper 'Is There a Duty to be Out?', Dennis Cooley answers this question in the affirmative, summing up the justification for his view in a single sentence. "Therefore, there is a duty for each homosexual - and I assume, non-heterosexual - person to be out for the betterment of the oppressed group as a whole" (Cooley, 2012, p. 43). Cooley's primary justification for this view is that a queer individual who is out can serve as representation for the queer community.[31] In doing this, they can positively impact homophobic individuals by changing their perceptions of the queer community for the better. In addition, he provides specific empirical evidence supporting the fact that if an individual knows a queer person, they

[31] Cooley does not use the term queer in his paper. He either uses the term homosexual or non-heterosexual for this purpose. Non-heterosexual references any individual that does not identify as straight. I will be using the term queer to reference these groups.

are more likely to be supportive of queer identities. More specifically, those individuals who knew queer people were more likely to support same-sex marriage (Cooley, 2012, p. 44).

While Cooley argued that queer individuals in general have this universal requirement for coming out, he does carve out an exception for certain individuals. Cooley argues that the main individuals who have no general moral duty to be out are individuals who would be severely and negatively affected by coming out:

> The potentially excessive burdens of outing oneself override any prima facie duty to be out. The reason why should be clear: we know that it is unjust to the innocent and disrespectful of individuals to require them to pay severe costs in their own person merely to maximize utility for society as a whole, or to improve people's perceptions of homosexuals…It is here that we see the benchmark by which we can measure if an injury or potential harm is significant enough to preclude any duty to self-out. If the potential injury suffered is undeserved and it is reasonable to believe that it will prevent or terminate the outed gay, lesbian, or other non-heterosexual agent's life flourishing, then there is at least a prima facie justification for the claim that the agent has no duty to be out.
> (Cooley, 2012, p. 46)

In this matter, Cooley argues that an individual has no obligation to come out if there is a possibility that coming out would result in the queer individual being socially, physically, or even mortally harmed by doing so. For Cooley, we cannot expect a person to out themselves in a way that would put them in physical, mental, or emotional danger. Such a scenario would essentially demand that queer people place themselves in potentially harmful situations for the benefit of other people. Even in the case where an individual's coming out could help another queer person, we would still not demand that they do so if their situation is life-threatening (Cooley, 2012, p. 47). In a utilitarian fashion, we can measure the amount of harm that an individual would receive by coming out, such as discrimination in the workplace, compared to the amount of benefit that they could provide for the queer community as a whole, such as providing a real example of a queer person to combat the boogeyman that a homophobic person has created in their head.

Cooley uses the term flourishing to reference this positive calculus. For him, individuals flourish when they are able to fully live out their lives, providing for themselves the most happiness available (Cooley, 2012, p. 48). Coming out, in this case, would provide the greatest amount of flourishing, as coming out allows a person to fully be themselves and interact with their community. However, if their coming out would cause a life-threatening situation, they do not need to come out. He argues that if an individual does not damage or hinder their flourishing by coming out, and if coming out means that they can better benefit other people, they have an obligation to do so (Cooley, 2012, p. 48). Cooley does not intend to use flourishing in the Aristotelian sense, but rather in a utilitarian sense. Essentially, Cooley makes a utilitarian calculus with an individual's decision to come out. The benefit that an individual can provide for other people needs to be weighed against how much such an action will hinder their own flourishing. If, for example, someone lived in an area that was significantly homophobic, they would face a much more difficult calculus in coming out, as they would potentially be doing extreme harm to their own flourishing for potentially minimal benefit. Nevertheless, this calculus becomes a much easier and more one-sided affair for an individual living in an area where homosexuality is entirely accepted (Cooley, 2012, p. 48).

Cooley also argues that we should be out not just for the benefit of others but because by remaining in the closet, we are doing direct harm to ourselves. In other words, an individual's flourishing can be restricted by remaining in the closet as well as by coming out in a hostile context. In essence, Cooley argues that queer individuals are forcefully separated from their community by remaining in the closet:

> In many cases, being out will enhance the person's flourishing by allowing her to create and nurture caring relationships that would otherwise be denied to her whilst she is closeted. For example, finding a significant other or other partners who are compatible with an agent's sexual orientation can enhance the person's web of personal relationships in a positive way that being closeted cannot… In addition, being out allows an agent to share an important, if not essential, characteristic with others so that true friendships and other positive relationships can be built on the trust and communication that is denied to those who are closeted or veiled. Instead of having to disseminate [sic] and deceive those for whom the person cares, he can be honest. (Cooley, 2012, p. 48)

Cooley frames this sort of view of coming out as an individual choosing between being deceptive to everyone or being out to everyone. According to his view, in order for a person to properly come out, they must have disclosed their queerness to everyone around them. He further elaborates on this idea of being deceptive. He argues that by ending this deception by coming out of the closet, an individual is more capable of flourishing.[32] The overall impression of Cooley's view that emerges is that he thinks that the act of remaining in the closet is comparable to holding onto a delicate web of lies and deceit (Cooley, 2012, pp. 48-49).

Cooley's final concern regarding an individual not coming out is that such an individual will be separated from the queer community at large. In essence, by remaining in the closet, they remain undetectable to other queer people and thus lose out on the ability to interact with them:

> …being able to show publicly who one is and the relationships the person has, instead of hiding them out of fear, allows an individual to be more of a community member, who can receive the full benefits of being in a community. Closeted individuals are always a bit of the Other because they have to be so careful not to reveal something that is damaging to them…There has to be a perpetual distance that does not allow the closeted individual to share his narrative as non-closeted people can, and do share. (Cooley, 2012, p. 49)

Cooley argues that by being in the closet, one strips oneself of resources and community that one would be capable of receiving if one were not closeted. An individual who maneuvers about the world in this covert manner makes themselves incapable of even reaching out to the broader queer community. Because of this reason, an individual is strongly stunting their ability to flourish, as they lose access to the resources that are necessary for doing so. Cooley's view implies that being closeted is like being trapped in a pit of despair: as long as they do not

[32] Cooley seems to hold a particular disdain for individuals who refuse to come out and use this obfuscation of their identity to pursue their own ends, such as a closeted politician who supports anti-queer policies. "In this case, the closeted politician has a moral duty to out himself, even though it will severely restrict his ability to flourish in his chosen career. The injury to his flourishing is part of the punishment he deserves for illicitly destroying others to further his self-interests" (Cooley, 2012, p. 48). But Cooley's argument is not about the flourishing of the politician. Rather, Cooley is concerned about the flourishing of the individuals that are affected by the policy choices of said closeted politician. While this may seem harsh, within Cooley's framework of remaining in the closet being deceptive, the politician is acting deceptively so as to gain an advantage on what would otherwise be a disadvantageous position. In essence, he is sacrificing his queer kin for his own benefit. This sacrifice can help facilitate the flourishing of those queer individuals that he disadvantaged from his position of privilege.

come out and receive the aid of other individuals, a closeted person will be stuck in a state of permanent suffering, unable even to communicate this suffering to another individual.

III. On Transgender Identities

Throughout his argument, Cooley focuses on what he calls 'non-heterosexual individuals', which covers the vast majority of the queer community. However, there is a noticeable gap in his analysis. The experience of transgender individuals is noticeably absent from Cooley's position: it is not clear whether Cooley believes that the duty to come out to which he is committed ought to apply to trans people. On the surface, this does not present an issue. Cooley was focused on non-heterosexual people. For this reason, as being transgender is usually separate from one's sexuality, it is not something that Cooley spends time on. However, I am also interested in the question of whether Cooley's view also applies to transgender individuals. Coming out as transgender is still within the framework of coming out, and thus we would expect that an account of coming out as transgender would be mostly the same as an account of coming out as a lesbian etc. This raises the question of whether the experiences of trans people around coming out as trans should be included as part of the basis for my criticism of Cooley. I argue that it should, as these two "kinds" of coming out possess enough similarities that they can be examined as the same phenomenon. While Cooley may not have intended for transgender individuals to fall within his argument, I argue that we should include transgender individuals within his position when we evaluate its plausibility.

There are three reasons why I argue that it is essential to include transgender individuals within this discussion of Cooley's overall view of coming out. The first of these is that the experience of remaining in and coming out of the closet is the same experience for transgender individuals as it is for the other parts of the queer community. A transgender woman (such as myself) exists in a state in which Cooley would consider me "in the closet." I interact and act in my day-to-day activities in a way that would not highlight the fact that I am transgender. To an outside observer, I act in a manner that they would expect a woman to act, and their default assumption is that everyone is cisgender. Cooley's position highlights how an individual such as myself could be cut off from the queer community.[33] His argument for

[33] It should be noted that I am also a lesbian, and I am quite visible and open about this. It is unlikely that I would be isolated from the queer community, with this being the case. If I were straight/heterosexual, this would not be the case. Furthermore, by passing as a cisgender woman (if one were to extrapolate from the previous arguments that Cooley presented), it seems reasonable to presume that I am isolated from the trans community by nature of my lack of openness about my trans identity.

alienation seems to be just as pertinent to passing transgender individuals as it would for gay cisgender individuals.

It is important to note that there is a distinction between being in the closet and passing. If an individual remains in the closet, they are deliberately deciding not to reveal themselves as queer. This could be in the case of a bisexual woman who is married to a man. Perhaps she has not come out because she is worried about what her husband will think of her if she comes out, or perhaps she has not found a need to tell anyone. Nevertheless, she remains in the closet and does not reveal that she is bisexual to anyone. In this case, she would fall into the classification as being closeted.

In contrast, passing does not reference an individual attempting to hide their queer identity from others. An individual passes when they are identified as part of a group that they are not, specifically when they are not deliberately attempting to do so. Kapusta (2016) argues that passing is a kind of privilege, as a non-passing individual (in this case a transgender woman) is further marginalized from womanhood than a passing transgender individual. This is because of non-passing trans women's perceived failure to fit into the neat categorization of womanhood, as well as the fact that passing trans women are unlikely to be misgendered (Kapusta, 2016, pp. 514, 515). One example is that I pass as a cisgender woman. This is because I do not attempt to demonstrate or reveal that I am a transgender woman. This is highlighted in the *flatmate* case. In this case, there is not a deliberate attempt to conceal myself from other people. It is simply the case that I am acting identically to a cisgender version of myself and I am assumed not to fall within the category that I in fact occupy.[34]

However, coming out as a transgender woman means different things to different transgender individuals. For instance, when I come out, I come out as trans: based on the way I dress and the mannerisms I adopt, most people will assume that I am a woman before I even consider telling them that I am trans. For some transgender women, it is not this simple. Before I had "begun my transition", in the classical sense, coming out would have entailed both that I come out as trans as well as coming out as a woman: the fact that I was a woman would not have been evident before my coming out.[35] In this case, being transgender emphasizes the sense of alienation that Cooley argues for.

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[34] Although Cooley does not entertain the possibility, passing may be the kind of flourishing that trans people desire. If passing is deceptive, in the way Cooley describes it, then an individual could not flourish if they pass.

[35] This classical sense of "starting my transition" entails understanding a linear timeline of events as part of this transition. The beginning stages might include hormone replacement therapy (HRT). While I disagree with this view of what it means to transition, this discussion is outside the scope of this chapter.

The second reason that one should not disconnect coming out as transgender from coming out as queer in the broader sense is due to the fact that the two are often linked together, as I discussed in the previous chapter. An individual (such as myself) who identifies as a transgender woman and a lesbian, often finds that one identity is often influenced by the other. By this, I do not mean that an individual cannot identify as a lesbian without identifying as a transgender woman. Rather, it is because of the fact that I am a transgender woman that I identify as a lesbian. Before I realized that I was a transgender woman, I identified as straight. This change to my sexual identity was not something that I consciously decided. Instead, it was brought about because of the way in which my relationship to my own gender changed, and thus the nature of my sexuality changed. As I was now a woman, being attracted to other women, I could no longer use the term straight to accurately identify myself. By the nature of being a woman, my attraction to other women immediately took on a different definition (i.e., Lesbian). It is because of the fact that my gender changed that my sexual identity changed.[36] In this case, as one can come out as both in the same action, it makes sense to apply Cooley's argument to both kinds of coming out.[37]

The third reason that I argue against separating coming out as transgender from coming out as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or pansexual person is the fact that this separates trans people off from the broader queer community, which is politically dangerous. Some organizations, such as the LGB Alliance located in the United Kingdom, are deliberately attempting to remove transgender individuals from the wider LGBT+[38] movement. Within their mission statement, the LGB Alliance states that:

> We uphold the legal and scientific definition of homosexuality as sexual orientation towards people of the same sex, and of bisexuality as sexual orientation towards people of either sex…We recognize that sex is binary, female and male, and that (for the vast majority of people) sex is determined at conception, observed at birth (or in utero), and recorded. We reject the co-opting of rare medical Differences in Sexual Development

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[36] This should not be taken as a universal experience. For example, a bisexual person may not attach their sexuality to their gender identity in the same way. However, the importance is not that it is universal, but that the effect is present.

[37] Although not every act of coming out necessary requires coming out as both one's sexual and gender identity, the fact that they are linked and influence each other is what is important.

[38] While it is the case that "LGBT+" and "queer" is used synonymously in this paper, using the former here is to avoid confusion.

> (DSDs/intersex conditions) in order to cast doubt on the binary nature of sex. (LGB_Alliance, 2022)

Separating the transgender community from the greater queer community in considering the question of whether there is a duty to come out is not just an unnecessary decision (as both share many similarities) but also supports arguments for the complete separation of the transgender community from the overall queer community. In other words, conceiving the coming out experience of transgender individuals as entirely distinct from queer individuals as a whole could lead to a more general shift towards emphasizing this distinction. As highlighted above, coming out for a transgender individual has so much in common with gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc., individuals that there is no reason to exclude them from the LGBT+ community or treat them as entirely distinct categories.

Because of these three factors, I think it is a disservice to transgender people to try to exclude them from the conversation of whether or not there is a moral duty to come out. Although Cooley seems not to have intended to include transgender individuals in his conception of coming out, coming out as transgender is such a similar experience to coming out as non-heterosexual that attempting to create a distinction between them is not just unnecessary, but it is also a disservice to both identities. More particularly, it is vitally important for a transgender individual to have a strong understanding of this question. Especially for a transgender individual who has not begun their transition, they are put in a position where they are entirely unable to pass, so unless they tell someone directly, they are always in the closet.

So, this leaves us with the question of how we tackle this lack of trans inclusion when it comes to evaluating Cooley's argument. I argue that if someone were to criticize Cooley for deliberately excluding transgender individuals from his argument, they would be engaging in a straw man against him. The exclusion of transgender people within Cooley's argument seems like an issue of focus more than one of deliberate exclusion, especially considering the time in which it was written. In 2012, when Cooley was writing, the cultural focus in the United States was placed predominantly on LGB individuals, as the debate around gay marriage was in full effect. While transgender individuals were not given equal prominence and focus at that point, this is not the case today. I therefore argue that the most charitable way to read Cooley's work is to simply take transgender people to be included within his argument. By including trans individuals alongside non-heterosexual individuals, I am thus both being as charitable to

Cooley as possible, and framing the question in the way that will be most productive for the broader discussion.

This said, it is important to note here that even if I did not include transgender individuals within the scope of the question, and solely addressed Cooley's original position on non-heterosexual individuals, all of my arguments would still fully apply. In terms of my critique of Cooley's argument, nothing hangs on whether or not we consider transgender individuals to fall within the scope of that argument.

IV. Literature Review

Before I begin to deconstruct and argue against Cooley's moral duty to come out, it is important to situate his view in relation to other scholars. The difficulty with doing this is that while a fair number of authors have discussed coming out, they examine coming out in relation to outing other individuals. While such a discussion is outside the scope of this dissertation, their arguments are still important for this project. By understanding the moral dimensions of outing other individuals, we can at least inform why we might consider coming out to have some moral importance.

We begin by looking at Richard Mohr's (1997) arguments in favor of outing other individuals. To Mohr, the act of outing others can be a targeted act. In the most extreme cases, this act of outing focuses on drawing the bigotry and hatred of homophobic individuals to cause harm to the outed individual who are deserving of such ridicule, such as the attack on homophobic gay politicians (Mohr, 1997, p. 281). Acts of outing also take less obvious forms. Individuals may be outed on accident or without an intentional motive. These kinds of outing still harm individuals by revealing information they would like to keep to themselves (Mohr, 1997, p. 282).

However, Mohr argues that even if there are harms associated with outing others, these are relatively minor. According to Mohr, and in opposition to the common wisdom of the queer community, we ought not be opposed to the act of outing. Mohr is in favor of outing everyone and anyone. In fact, his argument in favor of this position is strikingly similar to the second component of Cooley's position.

> … the chief problem with the closet is that it treats gays as less than human, less than animal, less even than vegetable-it treats gays as reeking scum… each time a gay person finds the closet morally acceptable for himself or others, he degrades himself as

> gay and sinks to the level of abjection dictated for gays by the dominant culture… the openly gay person, in order to live morally, must not play along with the convention of the closet…
> (Mohr, 1997, p. 283)

The main similarity between Cooley and Mohr is that they agree that being in the closet harms the closeted person. They disagree, however, on the effected feature. For Cooley, closeted queer people are denied the opportunity to flourish. For Mohr, the closet causes a degrading effect on queer individuals. This affects both those in the closet, as well as those outside of the closet who help those remain in the closet. While Mohr does not use the term in the text, he is concerned that being in the closet strips queer people of their dignity (Stramel, 1997, p. 286).

In contrast with the common intuition, Mohr argues that the concept of the closet is inherently harmful. The existence of the very concept, according to Mohr, marks queerness as being something shameful and something to be hidden. It is not merely bad because of its causes. The ability to be in the closet is an innate harm. Rather than treat the act of protecting those in the closet as if it is some sacred oath of secrecy, people ought to talk about it in the same way as any other piece of trivia about a person. We should talk about it when it comes up, and as if it is nothing special (Mohr, 1997, p. 282). While Cooley does not argue in favor of outing others, his position that we should always out ourselves is very similar.

Mohr is the most radical of the authors that I am discussing. While Mohr is not just in favor of outing but morally demands it, the remaining authors are against such an aggressive position. In contrast, James Stramel (1997) argues against such a position of outing. He argues that the act of outing others turns those individuals that have been outed into mere means for the progress of queer people (Stramel, 1997, p. 284). Even if we were to accept Mohr's position that being in the closet strips us of our dignity, forcing others out of the closet does not grant this dignity. Rather, it takes away a closeted person's dignity. Stramel further states that "…as long as homosexuality is stigmatized in ways that heterosexuality is not, being publicly gay will be personally dangerous and politically volatile. Except in unusual circumstances, individuals should have the freedom to decide for themselves whether to join the social political fray…" (Stramel, 1997, p. 288). Thus, by allowing those in the closet to have a say in their own coming out, their dignity is preserved.

Where this relates to our inquiry is where this appeal to dignity stems from. Stramel appeals to the concept of privacy to ground the source of this dignity. Queer identities, and thus individuals' ability to remain in the closet, are a private matter, much in the same way that one's medical records are. Outing others and pulling them out of the closet denies an individual's ability to choose when the keep their privacy or surrender some of that privacy to another (Stramel, 1997, p. 285). Thus, by outing others, we deny them this dignity because of the fact that we steal a choice from them. This choice is the decision to share private information with others.

Outing others deny them autonomy over their own identity and takes away their ability to decide who has access to private information. Stramel uses a theoretical rape victim as a parallel to being queer. Being raped carries certain stigmas that can cause those individuals who have been victims of such violence to experience prejudice. If a person decides to out themselves as a victim of rape, they are not degrading other rape victims by not outing those other victims, nor are they acting immorally by keeping the fact that they are a victim of sexual violence as a private matter (Stramel, 1997, pp. 287-288). One could argue that such an analogy is flawed because of the fact that advocating for other queer people requires being out in a way that being a victim of rape does not. However, I argue that they are analogous because of the fact that both identities are stigmatized. One does not need to be queer to advocate for queerness, in the same way that one does not need to experience sexual violence to advocate for its victims. A queer activist can still fight oppression through acts that does not oppose their queerness. Further, being in the closet does not prevent or completely hinder a person's ability to oppose their own oppression (MacLachlan, 2012, pp. 313-314).

Stramel's appeal to privacy avoids Mohr's concern about the vileness of queer identities. If a queer person chooses to stay in the closet, this has the same moral weight as keeping any other piece of one's identity to themselves. Furthermore, if outing can be used as a weapon against people, then it is not the closet that makes gayness vile. Rather, the act of revelation is what makes gayness vile by turning it into a weapon to be used against queer people, and thus treating those queer people as mere means to the end of queer liberation (Stramel, 1997, pp. 286-287).

Claudia Card (1995) explains that there are some positive aspects to outing. In a similar vein to Cooley, she argues that outing can be used as a way to demonstrate that gay people are not an insignificant minority but can be used to show that "they live amongst us". Further, the more that people are outed the less of an impact that it has because of the normalization of queerness, at least theoretically (Card, 1995, p. 195). As we discussed with Cooley, knowing queer people helps to alleviate some of the negative impacts of the closet.

Further, Card explains that the concept of outing is innately connected to the concept of passing, which we discussed in the previous section. By passing, individuals protect themselves from oppression. But this protection results in a loss of culture. Passing, in such instances as cultural or religious identities, can result in the full assimilation and destruction of minority groups. While queer people are protected from the destruction of queerness (and by this I mean being queer) as a result of assimilation, queer identities and cultures can be lost in such a scenario. Passing thus can result in assimilation. For this reason, the act of outing can be used to fight against this loss of culture (Card, 1995, pp. 198-200).

Unfortunately, the result of this understanding of the closet is that being in the closet can be seen as an acceptance of an indignity. However, this is not the same type of indignity that concerns Mohr. For Mohr, the indignity of the closet is that it causes queer people to be seen as “lesser than” (Mohr, 1997, p. 283). For Card, this indignity is tied to the fact that queer people are denied an independence of their identity. By being in the closet, one is being complicit with their own oppression. Thus, if one accepts such an understanding, we may have an obligation to come out to prevent our own oppression, or at the very least to help prevent the oppression of others. However, I find such a position unconvincing. As we discussed in relation to Stramel’s rape analogy, the fact is that a queer person who is in the closet can be just as effective in fighting oppression as a non-queer individual.

What Card provides for us is an explanation for what the main difference is between coming out and outing. This distinction is in the person who bears the cost of the action. In the former it is paid by the individual who chooses, in the later it is an external agent who has not been given a choice, or one who has had that choice taken away. The choice to take both the responsibility of fighting oppression and the consequence of that activism is one that ought not be forced upon someone. As we discussed in the previous chapter, the dangers of coming out are often severe, and for this reason we should not make that choice for other people (Card, 1995, p. 206). While being in the closet and passing may place queer individuals in a position to potentially be assimilated, it is done for very good reasons.

In contrast to our previous authors, Alice MacLachlan (2012) is focused on the ethics of coming out as opposed to the ethics of outing that our previous authors have discussed. According to her, being in the closet is at least prudentially bad because it requires a person to hide. Part of the concept of being in the closet references the act of concealment of one’s identity, and physically references how being in the closet hides something from sight. This hiding can be stressful and unpleasant, as a person has to put in some effort (even if it is a small effort) into this act of hiding. If someone needs to keep themself hidden, they must at least make sure that they do not accidentally reveal that information in error. Furthermore, by being in the closet, there is some agreement with an incorrect narrative about one's identity and limits queer visibility more broadly (MacLachlan, 2012, pp. 308-309). Thus, there is a benefit to coming out, as it requires less effort to be out than to be in the closet.

However, MacLachlan argues that while coming out may be a moral good, the act of coming out is not a moral duty. Individuals might benefit from coming out. One may have a duty to improve their life, which coming out would then facilitate (MacLachlan, 2012, pp. 303). In a similar way to Cooley's argument for flourishing, a person in the closet has some level of isolation that would at least hinder them in some way. If one is in the closet, one may find it harder to form relationships. Further, even if they have managed to form a relationship, both partners now have the difficulties associating with not only hiding their sexualities but hiding the existence of the relationship as a whole. Thus, the choice to come out cannot be made in isolation, as there are other factors. As we discussed before, housing, income, and friends that may be negatively impacted by the choice to come out (MacLachlan, 2012, p. 315)

Returning to our discussion of Cooley, he received criticism for his overall views on the idea of being in the closet. Specifically, published alongside his initial article was a response paper titled *Complicating "Out": The Case of Queer Femmes*, written by Alice MacLachlan and Susanne Sreedhar. Specifically, McLachlan and Sreedhar reference the experience of femme lesbians to help support their claim that coming out is not solely within the control of the individual in the closet.

"Femme" references a queer person who embraces the concept of femininity but molds it to emphasize their queerness while maintaining the trappings of the mainstream concept of a woman (i.e., makeup, dresses, etc.).[39] This can serve as a way to "…retain rights to the trappings of femininity (expressed through fashion, comportment, modes of embodiment, sexual roles, voice etc.) while stripping them of whatever patriarchal meaning they might hold— in particular, messages of submission, weakness, and the status as object (and not subject) of desire" (MacLachlan & Sreedhar, 2012, pp. 53-54). This manner of presentation contrasts with "butch," which references a queer individual who eschews femininity and will often present in a traditionally masculine style for much the same purpose. A queer woman who presents femme may be much harder to identify as queer. The lack of being visibly at odds with heteronormative stereotypes of femininity, such as in the case of a butch woman,

[39] While any queer person can identify as femme, MacLachlan & Sreedhar focus on femme women.

makes coming out as queer difficult for a femme woman. A femme queer woman may therefore face the dismissal of her identity by others as she lacks the stereotypes associated with lesbian identities.[40] She may also find that her attractions to women are written off as casual flings or a distraction between male partners (MacLachlan & Sreedhar, 2012, pp. 55-56).

Another issue that the femme lesbian encounters is that she will need to come out constantly. This unintentional passing serves as a cloak of invisibility that one may neither ask for nor intend to put on themselves. Lacking "clockable" traits of a stereotypical lesbian, she will have to announce to individuals that she is, in fact, a lesbian.[41] This constant coming out is a permanent state that the femme lesbian will contend with in every social situation (MacLachlan & Sreedhar, 2012, pp. 56-57). MacLachlan and Sreedhar illustrate this point with their story about a time when one of them was shopping for furniture. As she was trying to acquire a new chair for her home, an individual that she was talking to presumed that her spouse was a man.[42] There were no outward signs that would indicate that this was not the case, given that she presents as femme. And while she was frustrated by the assumptions that were placed on her in that position, "she was left feeling guilty and complicit for not once again clarifying what she had originally stated" (MacLachlan & Sreedhar, 2012, pp. 58-59). I would argue that to some individuals, only witnessing sex with another woman may be enough to convince them that a femme woman is queer, and even this could be dismissed as just begging for the attention of a man.

As you can see, Cooley's position seems to touch on several points of all of these authors. This appeal to concepts related to flourishing and to helping to show queerness as normal are all integrated into his account. Cooley (2012b) even responds specifically to MacLachlan and Sreedhar's criticisms. Specifically, he does this by appealing to the concept of guilt. To Cooley, the guilt of not properly coming out to the sales individual demonstrates that the person in question (MacLachlan or Sreedhar) desires to be out and that her guilt over lying (according to Cooley) highlights her inability to be happy if she is not out. "Since she has decided to be out, then the situation ended when she was not authentic to whom she is as a

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[40] This can include erasure by other queer individuals. For more on erasure, see chapter four.
[41] "Clocking" is the act of identifying a queer person (whether they are transgender or homosexual) based on outward appearance. This can have either a positive or negative connotation depending on context. A negative connotation is being identified as trans without my intended disclosure. A positive connotation is another lesbian identifying me as a lesbian.
[42] It was not stated which of these two authors experienced the events related in this story.

person, and hence, interfered with her own flourishing. Being out is, in my view, one of the more important life goals a person can choose" (Cooley 2012b, pp. 60-61). In this situation, Cooley points out that the guilt that the person feels for not coming out demonstrates her lack of flourishing. She is visibly, and almost intentionally, preventing herself from achieving her flourishing self by hiding who she really is. The guilt that she is feeling from this action can be directly related to not only her own lack of flourishing, but the lack of flourishing of the shopkeeper. She has prevented this by acting deceptively in not correcting the mistake that the shopkeeper made. According to Cooley, by remaining in the closet, an individual is not just preventing themselves from flourishing. He endorses a much stronger claim about such situations.

> …in situations in which it is unnecessary to pass, then remaining veiled, even if it is the result of other's misinterpretations, assaults the very identity of the individual passing, if it is allowed to go unchecked. The person feels as if she has betrayed who she is as a person. Being out allows people to be authentic and to act and think in ways that satisfy their basic needs as the persons they are, even if it costs them something to do it. There are many ways this openness enhances their flourishing as a species being and an individual, but the most important might very well be that they are not deceivers.
> (Cooley, 2012b, p. 61)

Cooley is stating that an individual who remains in the closet is acting in a way that is deceptive to both themselves and other people. Even the act of passing also causes a person to act in this unintentionally deceptive manner. This act of deception, even if it is not intended, demonstrates the fact that an individual who does not come out is denying themselves the opportunity to be themselves and hence to flourish. Thus, by not coming out, they are doing direct harm to both themselves and to other people.

This view has some incredibly strong consequences. Cooley points out some of these in his original paper.

> Hence, if coming out is beneficial enough to the agent, there is good reason to do it on the grounds of ethical egoism and utilitarianism. There can still be adequate reason to require being out even in particular situations or in general in which a person's overall

> flourishing is reduced as a result…*If we take a more Kantian perspective, then outing oneself and living "out" allows an individual to respect himself and others as each truly deserves to be respected. When a person tries to pass, then he is performing an action of deceit. As Kant states, a lie is "an insult to the person to whom it is made, and even if this were not always so, yet there is always something mean about it" (1989: 229). Being closeted insults not only other people, but the person who is closeted.*
> (Cooley, 2012, pp. 48-49, emphasis mine)

Cooley's position entails that an individual who is not out of the closet is an intentional deceiver. This deliberate deception would be in the same vein as a compulsive liar. An individual who remains in the closet will continually lie to individuals around them. Regardless of whether an individual is simply passing (as is the case for many transgender or bisexual individuals) or whether they are firmly in the closet, they are always placed in a position where their simple act of existing is an intentional lie.

I find this implication of Cooley's position troubling, as it seems to put undue pressure on closeted queer individuals to come out. In the rest of this chapter, I will argue that we should reject Cooley's claim that "non-heterosexual" or queer individuals have a duty to be out. There are two separate disagreements that I have with Cooley's position. The first concerns his view of the deceptive nature of remaining in the closet, which I believe is incorrect. I target this view specifically to ensure that we do not automatically place queer individuals who are in the closet into the same category as those who engage in immoral deception. If we accept Cooley's position as stated, it leads to the conclusion that remaining in the closet is categorically immoral. For this reason, I first show that Cooley's position can and should be modified to remove this implication. This criticism does not target Cooley's overall position on the existence of a moral duty to be out in the absence of specific threats to wellbeing that would result from being out. However, my second objection does, as it concerns his overall understanding of what it means to be in the closet. This is a more fundamental objection to Cooley's position on the duty to come out which shows that the overall position should be rejected. I will treat each of these objections in turn in the next two sections.

V. A Case Against Queer Deception

In this section I will argue that Cooley is wrong to think that the act of remaining in the closet is inherently deceptive. However, before I make this argument, it is vital to demonstrate why this point is so important in assessing whether there exists a duty to be out at all. The significance of deception depends on the moral framework that one follows. Cooley appears not to prescribe to any particular ethical system in his paper, nor does he require that his reader have a particular preference for an ethical system. However, he does address the possibility of his reader following either a Kantian or Utilitarian framework. While he does focus heavily on the concept of flourishing, one also does not need to be an Aristotelian to justify this focus. But ultimately, he does not endorse any of these ethical systems. However, this non-committal stance creates potential problems, because each system treats deception differently.

For the utilitarian, deception is not something particularly problematic. As long as the deception creates a greater level of utility, or minimizes a level of disutility, then the fact that an act of deception is taking place is entirely unproblematic. Cooley even articulates this in the situation where an individual will be highly disadvantaged by coming out. One example of an instance where it is better to not be truthful about one's identity is in situations where one could be killed for coming out as queer (Cooley, 2012, p. 46). However, when looking at a deontological framework, we see several problems that begin to show when examining Cooley's position.

For a Kantian, the charge of being deceptive is particularly damning. As pointed out in Cooley's paper, for a Kantian, deception is always wrong regardless of circumstance or outcome (Kant, 1997, pp. 33-34). If one were to attempt to act in a way where one's universal principle would be self-contradictory, then one would be acting immorally. This is the reason that lying (or, more broadly, deception) is always immoral within this framework. The maxim of one's actions in deception is that one wishes to pass a falsehood as truth. If it were the case that everyone acted with this maxim as their intention, it would be impossible for anyone to trust another person. This impossibility to trust is not because the act of trying to pass a falsehood as truth would make everyone hesitant to believe another person. Instead, by everyone acting with the intention of passing a falsehood as the truth, the very concept of trying to pass a falsehood as a truth breaks down (Kant, 1997, pp. 33-34).

If an individual who is in the closet or passing is acting deceptively, then this has an unfortunate repercussion for queer people. Since acting deceptively is always acting immorally, any individual who falls under the criteria of passing or being in the closet is also always immoral. Therefore, if not being out is deceptive in the way that Cooley claims it is, Kantianism implies that an individual who is queer and is not out is always acting immorally. In addition, as Cooley stated earlier, an individual must be open about their queerness with everyone. This implies that if you are not out to everyone you encounter, then you are acting deceptively and therefore immorally, according to Cooley's position when combined with a Kantian framework.

It is important to note that transgender individuals, and especially transgender women, are placed in extreme peril when their existence is framed as deceptive. By framing transgender individuals in this way, such individuals are presented as constituting an innate justification for their own murder. Even for transgender individuals who have undergone various surgeries to alter their genitalia, they are not safe from this violence. By modifying those parts of their body, those same individuals who would kill them for finding "the wrong genitals" would also kill them for finding what might be considered "mutilated" genitals (Bettcher, 2014, pp. 399-400). Framing transgender or other queer individuals in this way places them in a dangerous position where the threat of violence is almost continuous.

While it may not necessarily be the case that Cooley intended to accuse closeted individuals of acting in an inherently immoral way, this is the result when being in the closet is framed as something inherently deceptive and we adopt a Kantian perspective. In the *Flatmate*, the *Necklace*, and the *Coffee Date* examples given above, by labeling my lack of coming out as a deliberatively deceptive act, Cooley positions my behavior as immoral from a Kantian perspective. This analysis places any queer individuals who have not come out (especially passing transgender individuals) into a problematic situation. This situation is one where an individual must come out to everyone, even when it could result in one's injury. Such an example would be coming out to one's homophobic parents. They could cut you off from financial support, or simply make you leave home. I argue that it is wrong to demand someone to come out regardless of the situation, and Cooley agrees with me (Cooley, 2012, pp. 46-47). But this is the end result of combining Cooley's view of coming out with Kant's position on deception, which Cooley does not rule out. Because of this, there is an internal tension in Cooley's position.

Even if we adopt a background ethical view according to which deception is not always immoral, and so closeted individuals are not necessarily acting immorally, framing the act of remaining in the closet as deceptive still creates its own problems. Queer individuals should not be classified as deceivers when they do not feel that it is the right moment to come out. This is the case even when we combine Cooley's position with another ethical framework (such as Utilitarianism) where it is often the case that the end justifies the actions taken. In this case one could argue that it is ethical to be deceptive under many circumstances that queer people often face. But even though this may be the case, I argue that conceiving of remaining in the closet as a deceptive act creates problems regardless of whether or not it is deemed unethical. For example, if I (a woman) were to enter a women's locker room, say to use the shower after I had just finished working out at the gym, I would be engaging in an act of deception within Cooley's framework by not immediately and explicitly identifying myself as both trans and as a lesbian. This need to come out is applicable even when such information is not requested. If I did not disclose this information, Cooley's position entails that I acted deceptively. Accusations of deception are often levied against transgender individuals who are just using the bathrooms and locker rooms that align with their gender identity (Bettcher, 2007, p. 47). By characterizing the way in which queer (and more specifically transgender) individuals interact with others as innately deceptive, we place those individuals in a position that their mere existence allows for detractors to use such a situation as ammunition against them.[43]

Many queer people exist in a position where they are "damned if you do, damned if you do not", as Bettcher (2007) highlights. While her argument focuses on the plight of transgender individuals, it does provide an excellent example of the kind of decision that queer people more generally must make when coming out.

> Consequently, some transpeople [sic] may find themselves shifting from the invisible to visible on a regular basis (and in a way that affects an "exposure" or "revelation"). Indeed, in order to avoid this "exposure" effect and the attendant representation as "revealed deceiver" it appears that a transperson [sic] must either constantly pass, fail to pass, or explicitly (and repeatedly) come out as trans in order to prevent such shifts from occurring.
> (Bettcher, 2007, p. 51)

[43] Furthermore, while Cooley almost certainly did not intend to place closeted people in this predicament, the fact that queer people need to reveal themselves in order to not be deceptive also creates a connotation that being queer is wrong in some way. If my queerness was not a threat or something problematic, why would I have any reason to announce it? However, as Cooley almost certainly did not intend this connotation, this shall be left outside the scope of this discussion.

Again, my act of being a woman is not a deliberate act of deception. However, because I have traits that do not conform to the traits that a cisgender woman is expected to have, if these traits are revealed, an individual would presume that I am acting deceptively. Their identification of me as a ‘cisgender woman’ is erroneous, as I fall within the category of a ‘transgender woman.’ Even though my goal is to be identified simply as a ‘woman,’ and thus, I dress and act in ways that are in accordance with this, I am labeled as deceptive because I am presumed to be a ‘cisgender woman.’ However, this leads to the question: what is the cause of this presumption?

We can understand the cause of this perceived deception by examining the distinction between *the normal* and *the abnormal*.[44] The automatic presumption that an individual is heterosexual or cisgender, as opposed to homosexual/bisexual/etc. or transgender, has to do with how society views the concept of both categories, as Cherney explains:

> It is incorrect to assume that anti-homosexual sentiment is an aberration of dysfunctional individuals. As it ignores the fact that anti-homosexual sentiment arises from the hegemonic nature of heterosexuality in cultural and social life, giving rise to the presumption of heterosexuality. The conscious awareness of the assumed nature of heterosexuality - that sees homosexuality subordinated - provides a cognate basis upon which lesbians and gay men must negotiate their public and private lives. Hence when they experience anti-homo-sexual sentiment lesbians and gay men are witnessing the dominant heterosexist value system at work.
> (Cherney, 1998, pp. 127-128).

In essence, the fact that an individual makes the automatic presumption that a queer individual is within the standard norms – i.e., not queer – is not the fault of the queer person. The stigmatization of the queer community, and the longstanding discrimination against them, means that an individual who is classified as queer is also classified as someone inferior.[45]

Within this framework, being queer, whether gay or trans, functions as the abnormal to the straight and cis normal. The *Flatmate* case is an excellent example that highlights this. The fact that I was misidentified, specifically by another queer individual, shows that the norm of

[44] I am using ‘normal’ in the context of cultural norms.

[45] I should clarify here that I do not intend to insinuate that a non-queer individual is overtly and intentionally being queerphobic. I am saying that the longstanding biases against the queer community lead to a presumption of heteronormativity.

being heterosexual and cisgender is heavily ingrained into our way of interacting with others. The fact that we are automatically presumed to be within these norms is not the fault of the person who has been incorrectly identified. Simply put, it is not my fault that another individual fails to identify me correctly. Rather, the person who identifies me as cisgender and heterosexual has made the error. The cause of this misidentification is the fact that in our current social circumstances any individual is considered to be straight and cisgender until proven otherwise.[46] The perceived normality of these categories forces individuals into erroneously identifying queer individuals as not queer. It is not that I am being deceptive, but that the other individual is attempting not to place me into what they think of (whether consciously or subconsciously) as an inferior category.

When we alter Cooley's position by removing the assumption that queer individuals who are misidentified are acting deceptively, we remove the danger of categorizing queer individuals as deceptive when they do not come out. This innate deception was the reason why combining Cooley's position with a Kantian framework had the implication of positioning any queer individual that remained in the closet as intrinsically immoral. As we saw, for a Kantian, any act of deception is always immoral, regardless of the reason (Kant, 1997, pp. 33-34). Therefore, if we label the act of remaining in the closet as deceptive, a closeted individual must always reveal themselves to everyone. If they fail to do this, then they are automatically immoral. However, by placing the blame for misconceptions about whether a person is queer on the cultural norms that queer people encounter, we demonstrate that the fear that closeted queer people are deceptive is entirely unfounded. The presumption that a queer individual is heterosexual and cisgender is not the fault of the queer individual. Rather, the blame for the misconception is laid squarely on the shoulders of the individuals misidentifying a queer person as not queer. This is caused by the perceived non-normal nature of queer identities. In the same way that it is standard not to presume that a person may be hiding a third arm, for many people it is standard not to presume that a person may be queer. In other words, queer individuals who are not out of the closet to everyone are not acting deceptively.

With this point clarified, where does this leave Cooley's initial claim that the majority of queer individuals have some moral duty to come out of the closet (2012, p. 43)? Removing the characterization of not coming out as deception does not undermine Cooley's main

[46] This is similar to how one is considered innocent until proven guilty, as one must demonstrate or prove their queerness to other individuals.

arguments for the importance of coming out. His view that a person does not flourish when they remain in the closet remains intact. Even if remaining in the closet is not deceptive, Cooley can still claim that it inhibits people's ability to flourish. According to Cooley, by not revealing their queer identity, an individual is unable to form meaningful friendships, as they will not be able to share aspects of their life. They may, for instance, be unable to find a partner, as this may require them to reveal that they are queer. Cooley could acknowledge that not coming out is not always deceptive, and still continue to argue that queer individuals still have some moral duty to come out of the closet that is based on securing their own flourishing and that of those around them. However, this view is still reliant upon the notion that queer people only have the options of coming out to everyone or coming out to no one. In the next section, I will argue that this is not a position that stands up to scrutiny.

VI. On Coming Out

Unfortunately for Cooley, the position that one can only come out in this binary fashion is a view that is not reflective of reality. Even though it can survive the extraction of the deceptive element of remaining in the closet, there is one major flaw within his argument that makes his position implausible: Cooley’s view of coming out positions it as a single, binary choice. To Cooley, either one is in the closet, or one is out of the closet. An individual is either completely open about the fact that they are queer to everyone they meet, or they have revealed this information to no one. The fact that they are in the closet is made to seem as if it isolates them from any support from outside themselves (Cooley, 2012, p. 48). As previously discussed, one could think of this position as being trapped in a pit of despair that the person cannot escape. The exits are hidden from them, and there is no ladder to help them climb out. Coming out allows other individuals to drop that ladder down for you. However, as I shall show, Cooley is wrong on this point. Remaining in the closet is not just this single binary choice and coming out allows for a level of selectiveness that is impossible within Cooley’s framework.

The act of coming out is an active and individual choice that a queer person makes with every person they encounter. As previously discussed, it is most often the case that individuals will be presumed to be straight and cisgender. In such circumstances, coming out is a requirement for a queer person to be correctly identified. In contrast, a queer person at a gay club will not have this same requirement placed upon them. In most cases, such a person does not need to come out since their environment illuminates their identity. However, even this comes with some nuances. An individual who identifies as a lesbian and as a transgender woman may not have the opportunity for both of their identities to be revealed at the same time. Whether this is a positive or negative is also individually determined by said queer individuals. My ability to pass as a cisgender woman is helpful in some situations. Whether I inform an individual that I am transgender is entirely separate from whether or not I inform an individual about the fact that I am a lesbian. In a situation such as a gay club, the fact that I am a lesbian is presumed, while the fact that I am transgender is not.[47] Thus, I would still have the opportunity to come out as a transgender woman.

In addition, the queer experience is incredibly varied. A bisexual woman who is in a relationship with a man will have a different impetus to come out than a bisexual woman who is in a relationship with a woman. Someone who is asexual will have to come out to individuals in different ways depending on whether they are in a relationship or not. Furthermore, non-binary individuals will often have to come out in response to being misgendered. This is due to the fact that if the default is man or woman, a nonbinary individual may never be correctly gendered, as they fit into neither “normal” category. All of these different aspects of the queer experience help to highlight the fact that each act of coming out is usually an isolated choice from other acts of coming out, and this choice is heavily dependent on the situation. Cooley’s argument fails to hold up, as categorizing the experience of coming out of the closet as an all or nothing binary choice is not reflective of the queer experience.

From personal experience, I have the unrestricted ability to choose the individuals that I make aware of this intimate part of myself. While I might not share the fact that I am trans with an individual who is bagging my groceries, I am able to reveal it to a close friend. I am not cut off from the queer community because I have not revealed myself to the grocer. Coming out is something that must be done individually and on a selective basis. Referencing the *Coffee Date* example, it is an active decision whether or not I come out to someone that I am trans. The individual I was interested in became privy to that knowledge because I made the active choice to tell them, not because I was in the binary category of being out of the closet. Cooley’s conception makes it sound like there is a neon sign hanging over our heads

[47] It should be noted that the usual presumption that I have experienced in gay clubs is that individuals attending such a place are homosexual. While this presumption is not necessarily wrong, it does tend to leave out members of the queer community who are asexual or bisexual (or otherwise queer without being gay or lesbian).

that announces to everyone when we are out of the closet, but this fundamentally mischaracterizes how coming out works.

In the *Necklace* example, my wearing of the twin Venus symbol has a desired function that wearing a transgender symbol will not. I choose not to advertise myself as transgender in day-to-day life because of the fact that it does not fulfill a similarly positive function. I wear the twin Venus symbol to help me find partners, which is not something that would be directly facilitated by wearing the transgender symbol. By not wearing this symbol, I allow myself the ability to share this aspect of myself selectively. Part of the reason for this is that I do not want to be perceived as transgender first, woman second. By withholding the fact that I am transgender, it gives me the power to manage how other people perceive my identity. In a similar vein, if I no longer had the desire to find a potential partner, I might stop wearing my twin Venus necklace. At that point, I no longer have a reason to advertise my sexuality in this way.

The final point that we must cover is the argument that Cooley presents about the isolation of remaining in the closet. At the start of this essay, I used the metaphor of a pit of despair to describe the way in which a queer individual is left unable to ask for help when they remain in the closet. To Cooley, an individual is incapable of communicating with members of the queer community when they are not out to other people. Further, within Cooley's all or nothing framework, an individual who remains in the closet does not have the ability to selectively communicate their distress. This is because, as previously demonstrated, Cooley's argument depends on an idea of coming out that is entirely binary, that one can only ever come out of the closet to everyone. But as I have argued for and I have demonstrated within this section, this is not an accurate picture of what it means to come out. In the same way that I have this selective ability to come out as a lesbian or a transgender woman to select individuals, I have the capacity to come out as queer to other queer people. In addition, a situation could exist in which the only people that I ever come out to are other queer people. The *Jack* example that was presented at the start of this chapter is a perfect illustration of this. At the time that I told Jack I was both a transgender woman and a lesbian, I was the only other person that had any access to this knowledge. A queer individual is not prevented from flourishing as they have the capability to come out to only individuals that will be supportive and affirming of their identity. And for these reasons, Cooley cannot fall back on the fear of a lack of flourishing that he based his position on.

It is for these reasons that I argue that Cooley's position fails to hold up when confronted with real-world scenarios. The *Necklace* and *Coffee Date* examples help to emphasize the fact that a queer person's coming out is an isolated decision. By this I mean that every time a queer person chooses to interact with another person, they are presented with a new opportunity to come out. While I may be out to my family, I do not have to come out to the grocer. In addition, an individual can be out to no one except other queer individuals and can thereby receive support and share community. For this reason, Cooley's conception of being in the closet as being isolated from other queer people is not reflective of reality, and ought to be rejected.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the view of coming out that Dennis Cooley argues for within his original paper is not reflective of reality. The fault within Cooley's view is due to two factors. The first of these faults concerns Cooley's view that remaining in the closet is innately deceptive. Cooley does not explicitly state within his arguments that this act of deception is inherently immoral. However, by framing queer individuals who remain in the closet as deceptive, Cooley unintentionally categorizes them as acting immorally according to a Kantian framework. While this is an important reason to argue against Cooley's position, there is another reason that is just as important. By describing queer individuals as deceptive, you place those individuals at risk. As pointed out by Bettcher, labeling queer (and especially transgender) individuals as inherently deceptive places them at greater risk for violence and death, even if deception itself is not conceptualized as necessarily immoral. Moreover, framing closeted individuals as deceptive overlooks the fact that their mis-identification as non-queer may well stem from the assumptions of other people, and not from their own actions. For these reasons, we should reject Cooley's characterization of not coming out as deceptive.

Cooley's second fault is due to his fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to come out. His view assumes that those individuals who remain in the closet are cut off from the queer community, and that this isolation denies those individuals a chance to flourish. This binary conception of coming out is flawed: in fact, the act of coming out of the closet is something that must be done continuously and selectively throughout an individual's entire life. This misconception makes Cooley's entire position unsalvageable. As I have argued, a closeted individual is not cut off from the queer community. Rather, an individual is fully able to flourish from the closet, as they have the ability to inform only those individuals that would help in their flourishing. Coming out is not a neon sign that alerts everyone to a queer person's existence. Instead, it is an individual act that a queer person will choose to do to another individual. For this reason, a queer individual is not trapped in the pit of despair simply because they have not come out to the grocer.

Chapter 3 Authenticity and Coming Out:

Against a Moral Duty

"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

- *Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride.*

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Cooley's argument for the existence of a duty to come out is unsound. Demanding that a person ought to come out because an individual is deceptive when they remain in the closet and maintaining that such a person cannot flourish unless they leave said closet is not an effective or convincing argument. In contrast, MacLachlan & Sreedhar highlighted the fact that coming out is a way of living authentically, and this authentic life is the one that is most fulfilling. They further highlight the fact that coming out may be difficult, and a queer individual might remain in the closet even when they desire to escape it, often due to outside pressure. Deciding not to come out is not always caused by a lack of desire. Rather, one might find difficulty in communicating the fact that one is queer to other people (MacLachlan & Sreedhar, 2012, p. 51). While we could look at other avenues for our search for a duty to come out, authenticity seems to be a promising grounding for this duty. This is because we can find an intense emphasis on living authentically within the queer experience. While Cooley's duty to come out focuses both on an inward pull (the need to flourish) and an outward pull (the need to serve as a good example of queerness and not deceiving other people about one's queerness), a duty to come out that was generated from the perspective of being true to the authentic self would be a solely internal drive.

Many queer individuals often feel this sentiment applied to their journey of coming out of the closet. When a queer individual announces to friends and family that they are at least one if not multiple varieties of queer, there is a common reaction that such an individual will often hear in response to this news. This response usually revolves around the idea of celebrating this person for the act of coming out and congratulating them for finding and living their authentic self. When such an event happened to me, my first thought was similar to the phrase often used by the character Inigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride*: *They keep using this word, 'authentic', but I do not think it means what they think it means* (Reiner, 1987). It seemed to me that people's idea of living as the authentic version of myself has been tied into my identity as a queer individual, but that the question of whether or not I was authentic before I came out was far from straightforward. I wondered: before I knew that I was queer, was I even capable of being authentic? I was not sure how to answer this question. In the context of coming out, often one is encouraged to exit the closet in order to live as their "authentic self". However, these questions about my authenticity highlight the fact that we should not jump too eagerly to such a conclusion.

This chapter seeks to establish whether or not a moral requirement to be authentic can motivate a duty to come out. In other words, is it the case that queer people have a moral obligation to come out because (a) we must come out in order to be authentic, and (b) we have a moral obligation to be authentic? This chapter starts by laying out a foundation for what authenticity is. Following this groundwork, I examine four hurdles that stand in the way of an authenticity-based duty to come out. These hurdles (authenticity as a moral good, the authenticity of the closet, the importance of malleability, and the relationship between authenticity and gender roles) would each require a whole dissertation to answer, and we would not be certain that this analysis would be fruitful. My aim is not to prove that any of these hurdles is insurmountable, but rather to show that, together, they constitute serious obstacles to the line of argument I am considering. By the end of this chapter, I will argue that because of the many hurdles between authenticity and moral duties, authenticity does not seem like a productive avenue for generating a moral duty to come out.

I. Being Authentic

This leads us to the question at the center of this analysis: What is authenticity and why ought we examine it as a potential reason to come out? I will start with the second question, as it is a much simpler answer. MacLachlan and Sreedar (2012) present us with a stong reason why we ought to start our exploration here.

> The value of coming out lies partially in its purported connection to authenticity-in disclosing her queerness, the individual reveals some significant part of her 'true' self that was previously hidden; that is, she comes out of the closet as the person she 'really' is.
> (MacLachlan & Sreedhar, 2012, p. 51)

MacLachlan and Sreedhar both agree that authenticity is important to the act of coming out because of the fact that the act of coming out represents a person demonstrating or displaying their queerness to other people. These kinds of acts are meant to reveal some internal truth about a person, and thus reveal a part of their authentic selves. This appeal to authenticity seems incredibly vital to the view that Cooley has as well. According to Cooley, by remaining in the closet, an individual is not just preventing themselves from flourishing. He endorses a much stronger claim about such situations. "I would say that passing when a person is out is linked to being authentic to who the person is" (Cooley, 2012b, p. 61). Both of these authors appeal to authenticity as a motivator to the act of coming out, so it seems worthwhile to investigate how a moral duty to come out for the sake of authenticity might function.

Now that we have explored the why of authenticty, we can return to the what. More specifically, what is authenticty, and what does it mean to be authentic? In the simplest of terms, authenticty is being true to some inner self or some inner essense (Davies, 2020, pp. 105-106). Authenticity is a matter of one's actions, emotions, concepts, or thoughts coming from one's own internal self and being free of outside interference. In contrast, being inauthentic is "… a kind of dishonesty with respect to one's self...At the very least, inauthenticity is a matter of not giving enough attention to aspects of one's identity that are central" (Oshana, 2007, p. 425). In essence, inauthenticity is ignoring the nature of one's self and trying to be an "other". However, stopping at this simple definition misses out on the complexity of the philosophical liturature on autheticity. The remainder of this section will look to explore this liturature.[48]

A common position with authenticity is the idea is that the things that make us authentic it is out of our control. Dworkin (1979) argues in favor of this point. Authenticity is not a matter of individual choice. We lack the ability to choose aspects of our identity. This lack of choosing is caused by the fact that we live in a time, place, and environment that denies us the ability to choose from alternatives (Dworkin, 1979, p. 25). In the same way that an archeologist works to build context for an artifact, so too is the authentic self built by the context around it. Our authentic selves are products of our environment.

Acting authentically is a bit more complicated. Knowing our desires and acting on our desires are not always synchronized. Dworkin uses the example of a skier to highlight this distinction.

[48] One of the features of the liturature on authenticity is that it is often involved with the discussion of autonomy. Most of the following authors focus on autonomy as their primary concern. As autonomy is outside of the scope of this essay, I will not be discussing it or defining it.

> A person might desire to learn to ski. He might believe he has no further motivation than this straightforward and simple desire, or he might believe that what causes the desire is to wish to test his courage in a mildly dangerous sport. Suppose he is now led to see (correctly) that he desires to ski because he is envious of a brother who is always excelled in sport. Having recognized the source of his desire, he can now either wish he were not motivated in this way or reaffirmed the desire. If the latter, then he is acting authentically in that he identifies himself as the kind of person who wants to be motivated by envy.
> (Dworkin, 1979, p. 25)

If a person acts according to their wishes, or how they wish to be, then they are authentic. If one were to act against these wishes, then they are inauthentic. To identify with an aspect of yourself (such as the skier who identifies with his motivation of envy) is to be authentic (Dworkin, 1979, p. 25). If the skier refused to acknowledge that they are motivated in this way, then they would be acting inauthentically.

Meyers (2004) presents us with a similar concept of authenticity. She argues that authenticity rests on two features inherent to a person: "Now I know what I *really* want" (emphasis from author) and "Be true to yourself". The first references desires that stem from one's inner self, and these desires are genuine to the subject; they are real in a tangible way. The second argues that being authentic is morally better than being inauthentic. In other words, the authentic life is morally good (Meyers, 2004, p. 21).

Further, Meyers argues that being authentic is not a static thing. An individual must continually improve their understanding of their authentic self (Meyers, 2004, p. 39). In this understanding of authenticity, there is an inner true self that we are always seeking to uncover. Again, to use the archeologist, we slowly excavate what the true self looks like. We may find that information we have previously discovered about our selves has changed or has been recontextualized with further digging. This will cause continuous change within the subject. This continuous change occurs because of the conflict between who you are and who you are often forced into becoming because of the outside world (Meyers, 2004, p. 39). My being transgender is an example of such a change and conflict. I realized I was transgender because of the conflict between the expectations of being a man and my intense discomfort when I tried to conform to these expectations. My authentic self was revealed when I finally determined where this conflict originated from.

There is a benefit to this understanding of authenticity. This view of authenticity allows for the ability to lack a solid conviction about some act or idea. If it is the case that we hold ideas in a state of tension, we do not need to form an opinion on something until it becomes relevant. We can make it up as we go along (Meyers, 2004, p. 41). An analogy of this is pineapple on pizza. I can be aware of the contentious debate on the topic without taking a side. Once I have tried this topping, I will have the information needed to form a conviction on the subject.

Christman (2009) shares Dworkin's understanding of authenticity. He argues that authenticity has a social and interpersonal component. Being authentic, in his view, exists "in relation to external factors, such as one's relation to a tradition, a set of social practices, particular relationships and so on" (Christman, 2009, p. 148). Further, he shares similar ideas with Meyers. He argues that the authentic self is not a stable thing. Rather, our understanding of ourselves, due to its social aspect, are intertwined with our relationships. Thus, when our relationships are broken or changes, so to can our understanding of our authentic selves (Christman, 2009, p. 148).

Further, Christman argues that authenticity is not just something internal to us. Being authentic is also embodied in our physical presence.

> A person who claims to be unafraid but shivers and cowers at the same time is not expressing an authentic self-judgment. Consider also the way one's gender, one's overall physical abilities, one's race, sexuality, and so on, may shape one's perspective and hence one's reflections. As we have noted, embodiment is a part of our self-understanding, self-presentation, and self-schema that cannot be eliminated and should not be minimized.
> (Christman, 2009, p. 151)

Being authentic is thus not just the way that relate to some inner self, but it is also our physical presence. The way we react to things, the acts that causes us disgust or joy, etc. are all components of our authentic self. Individuals are made up of the intersection of all of our identities. This intersection is where we find our authentic self.

Further, self-reflection is also important to our sense of self. As we live our lives, we encounter experiences that cause us to reflect on who we are. This reflection allows us to change our behavior or preferences closer to our inner selves. Further, this allows us to eventually fully understand this inner self. “The idea is that when a person reflects on a trait over time and in a variety of settings and contexts, always yielding neither alienation nor rejection, such reflection indicates the kind of settled character that autonomous agency manifests” (Christman, 2009, p. 153). In essence, we find who we are through the constant struggle against ourselves. Our self-conceptions are always tested and reframed in light of new experiences, and this is resolved when we no longer experience this rejection.

Being authentic does not always demand that we adhere to our current state. Velleman (2009) argues that we can fake it until we make it into being authentic. If I wish to be a painter, but lack any artistic skill, it would seem erroneous to think of myself as authentically a painter. However, according to Velleman, if I continually think of myself as a painter, I can become a painter through changing my character. However, that act of believing is not sufficient, I must also perform the act of painting (the behavior associated with being a painter) in order to actually be a painter (Velleman, 2009, p. 92).

Determining what is a component of our authentic self cannot be done from a first- or second-person analysis. Velleman describes this process of self-analysis as being “from the backstage”. This means that the act of examining our actions, behaviors, and thought for if they are authentic to ourselves. But separating ourselves in this way, or compartmentalizing as Velleman describes it, we are able to review our action and confirm their authenticity. We are both the actor and director of our own stage play (Velleman, 2009, p. 93)

This idea of a stage play is also helpful to understanding Velleman’s concept of character. In the same way that the actors in a play are performing a character, so too are we all performing a character of our authentic self. This analogy is not perfect, however. Unlike an actor, we are playing a role that is an aspect of our whole self, rather than some external script. This character that we play are in fact real to us, they are not a kind of deception. Thes characters are still us. The caveat to this is that we can be deceiving ourselves into believing a falsehood about who we truly are. And if this character we play is built on a falsehood, then it cannot be authentic to who we are (Velleman, 2009, pp. 102-103).

Bialystok is also skeptical of accounts of authenticity. She argues that there really is no method that one could create that would be capable of measuring whether or not a person is being authentic.

> [Authenticity] need not apply to all facets of personal identity or to every type of human experience; it is very plausible that the majority of human life is immune to

> questions of authenticity. But it ought to be able to say something confident about when and how we can reliably distinguish between authentic and inauthentic parts of ourselves. Whether the 'true self' is understood in terms of feelings, convictions, dispositions, or something else, there seems to be very few elements of selfhood that are remotely susceptible to such judgments. Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that the elements that somehow constitute my true self are the same ones that constitute yours.
> (Bialystok, 2014, p. 295)

This lack of tangible method of measuring whether or not a person is being authentic further highlights the problem with trying to find a way of making authenticity into this moral demand to come out. Being authentic, according to Bialystok, is doing the thing that "feels right to me" (Bialystok, 2014, p. 296).[49] Such an account cannot be measured by outside agents because they lack the ability to tell that a person is feeling that they are being inauthentic.

She defines authenticity in relation to the common (or non-philosophical) conception of it. She does this through three examples: authentic as original, authentic as real, and authentic as honest. Authentic as original refers to the version of authenticity in the historical sense. We can say that a particular stone tool is authentic when it was created during the proper period of prehistory. An inauthentic stone tool is one that I created in my backyard over the weekend. While I may be able to claim that I made it, it would not be considered an authentic stone tool. This kind of authenticity requires that the object be created at a specific point in time. It must coincide with *when* it should be, not just *what* it should be (Bialystok, 2014, pp. 275-276). This means that the stone tool I made, while it might be indistinguishable from prehistoric stone tools, is not authentic because it was not made where or when it was supposed to be.

In a similar vein, authentic as real revolves around the idea of a subject being the true version of that subject. This kind of authenticity exists in contrast to the inauthentic subject. If

[49] She defines this ability to determine one's authenticity as being between the hard case of authenticity and the easy case of authenticity. The hard case revolves around a situation in which a person realizes something they have been doing is not an action that is reflective of who they are. They might have once been authentic in doing this action, or they may have *never* been authentic in doing said action, and they only now have just realized the incongruence. The easy case, on the other hand, focuses on the feeling of "rightness" that certain actions have. For instance, Bialystok uses the example of philosophers discovering philosophy. Such an example is something that I can relate to. When I took my first philosophy class, the sudden realization that I was doing what I ought to made me feel this sense of authenticity, which is supported by Bialystok's view (Bialystok, 2014, p. 272).

I were to create the stone tool for the purpose of passing it off as the genuine version, I would be trying to pass off an inauthentic version as an authentic version. This distinction in both the creator and intention of the creator is what is important in the authentic as real case, and not of when the subject was created. In contrast to authentic as original, authentic as real requires that there is a possibility of a contrasting fake conception or version of the subject in question. The authentic version is often considered to be valuable specifically because it is the genuine subject, in contrast to the valueless inauthentic subject, which is often worth less because of its falsity. The authentic stone tool is valuable because of what it tells us about the period of time in which it was created. The inauthentic version does not possess these features, and therefore it does not contain this value (Bialystok, 2014, pp. 276-278).

Both authentic as original and authentic as real are mainly ideas we associate with objects. But Bialystok argues that such categories do not have much usage in relation to persons (Bialystok, 2014, p. 277). Rather, the way that persons are often thought of as being authentic is to do with authentic as honest. This is the version of authenticity that is applicable to individuals, and, as Bialystok argues, this is a version of authenticity that is harder to properly conceive of. If a stone tool is inauthentic because of its relation to either the historical time period in which it was created or to the method by which it was manufactured, then a person is inauthentic in relation to itself. If I lie to myself and say that I am something I am not (such as if I had refused to accept that I was a transgender woman), I am being inauthentic. The stone tool, in contrast, cannot lie to itself.

One could argue that I can pass myself off as something I am not. For example, I can try to pass myself off as a doctor, and one could argue that I am being inauthentic. Specifically, one could argue that I am being inauthentic in the authentic as real sense. However, if I know I am not a doctor, and yet am trying to be one to gain access to an area of a hospital I should not, then I am merely being dishonest and deceptive to those around me, and not actually inauthentic. Bialystok's conception is deliberate in stating that the reason that authenticity becomes so hard to pin down in relation to persons is that a person can only be inauthentic when specifically compared to their own internal conception of their self (Bialystok, 2014, pp. 278-281). This is why my attempt to pass myself off as a doctor is merely deceptive and not inauthentic. I know I am not a doctor, and it is everyone else that I am attempting to fool.

At this point, we run into a problem for examining this moral duty to come out. While this is not an exhaustive account of authenticity, each of these views presents a level of nuance to the concept that must be settled on. If it is the case that authenticity is an unchanging center that we slowly unearth, then it means that being authentic is something that static for us to find (though our understanding of it may be changed over time). If it is the case that our sense of authenticity is something that is built through trial and error, with no "true self" but what we build, then the authentic is but a mere process. In the former case, coming out means being authentic, while in the latter, we could argue that being in the closet could be authentic at certain moments in time. Thus, we need to settle on a specific position of authenticity for our enquiry to go anywhere. Such an endeavor could be its own dissertation.[50]

However, this indecision alone is unconvincing. At previous points in this dissertation, I have not let an unsettled matter stop my inquiry. However, this indecision on a definitive concept of authenticity is not the only obstacle to this examination of the duty to come out from the demand to be authentic. There are several other questions that we would need to find in order to begin answering this question of a duty to come out. The remainder of this chapter examines four different hurdles that we must overcome in order to make an authenticity-based argument for a duty to come out.

II. Authenticity as a Moral Good

The first hurdle that we must overcome relates to how authenticity can be a moral good. If it is the case that being authentic is morally good, and we must be out to be authentic, then it follows that to be morally good we are obligated to be out. However, the idea that we must be authentic to be morally good is not a universal position. If it is the case that being authentic is not morally good (or worse, morally bad) then this poses a problem for the argument stated above. Again, this section is not looking to find a solution to this problem, as this would also take its own dissertation. Rather, I am merely highlighting that there is a problem that we would need to solve to have a chance at a moral duty to come out.

If we look at the previous section, I highlight the fact that Cooley links authenticity and flourishing. As Cooley argues, flourishing is one of the reasons why authenticity is important. (Cooley, 2012) However, we do not always have the option of being both authentic and flourishing. Sometimes there is no good option for a queer person, as they must choose between their safety and being authentic. Tessman (2005) argues for such a no-win situation in regards to the concept of political resistance:

[50] In my case, my agreement with Bialystok's positions means that I have gotten of the ride at this point.

> Thus the virtuous are vulnerable in several ways…they may have virtuous dispositions that, because of adverse circumstances, they are unable to express through activity. In either of these cases their virtues endure, but these virtues are unable to help their bearers to flourish. The virtuous may respond to these experiences with regret, sorrow, shame, guilt, remorse, or a loss of a sense of themselves as honorable. If these responses or other effects of bad experiences are serious enough, they will be incorporated into character, in which case one will want to say that not just the possibility of flourishing, but also excellent character itself has been diminished. (Tessman, 2005, p. 111-112)

I believe that such an explanation helps to illuminate the difficulties queer people often come across when choosing to come out. If we posit a scenario where a queer person comes out to unsupportive parents, we can often see a scenario where authenticity reduces one's flourishing. A queer child being homeless from being kicked out and without support is a scenario in which a person loses parts of their ability to flourish, as the dangers associated with poverty and homelessness restricts an individual's ability to live a full life. For this reason, we should not link authenticity and flourishing too closely. It is an all too familiar experience for queer people that they must choose their own safety over their happiness and for the sake of their future flourishing, and thus they may be forced to stay in the closet even when they do not wish to.

The constant pressure of this expectation to be authentic can be harmful, but it can also cause physical exhaustion, as Tessman argues. "The struggle itself requires character traits that may strain if not wreck psychological health, and presumably such health is part of the good life imagined to follow an end to oppression; after all, oppression itself has been portrayed as psychologically harmful" (Tessman, 2005, p. 108). Being queer and understanding one's queerness is not an easy task, and it often requires a journey to reach. If one is denied the ability to understand what is possible, then one should not be morally condemned for not being completely authentic. And it is for these reasons that we ought to account for this queer journey of self-discovery when considering the possibility that there may be an authenticity-based duty to come out.

Simon Feldman (2015) also believes that the pursuit of an authentic self is not an innately moral pursuit. In other words, there is no moral significance to one's authentic identity. This is because, as Feldman argues, the authentic self is not intrinsically good (Feldman, 2015, p.

188). We could think of an authentic murderer as such an example of an authentic self that would be bad. If an individual finds that they feel most authentically themselves when they are in the act of ending a life, we would not praise them for such an authentic self. Instead, we would want them to not act on their authentic self. It is for this reason that we should not consider all authentic selves to be morally good.

Again, I am not looking to argue that Tessman, Feldman, and other philosophers who are skeptical of authenticity are wrong. Rather, I simply want to highlight that we cannot label authenticity as morally good without further exploration. If it is the case that being authentic is morally good and being inauthentic is morally bad, then I would need to argue against Tessman, Feldman, etc. In contrast, if it is the case that authenticity is not a moral good, then I would need to demonstrate how to preserve the line of reasoning between coming out and authenticity, and how they both relate to goodness.

III. Authenticity and Being Out

The next hurdle in our path is to establish whether or not a queer person in the closet is automatically inauthentic. We are searching for a moral duty to come out based on the notion that *not* being out is inauthentic. If one can be authentic while remaining in the closet, then there is no need to come out in order to fulfil the duty to be authentic, and so the argument I am considering would not succeed. To see whether or not this is the case, we must investigate the relationship between coming out of the closet and authenticity. We have a few possibilities that will elucidate the nature of this relationship.

We could posit a version of this duty where being in the closet, and thus not being out, is innately inauthentic and therefore morally wrong. Let us say that a queer woman named Samantha decides that, due to her environment, she has no desire to date or marry, and she decides that acting on her queerness is too stressful of an endeavor. She refuses to wear anything to signify that she is a lesbian (such as jewelry or clothing) and decides not to share this fact that she is sexually and romantically attracted to women with anyone. And importantly, she does not intentionally identify herself with an alternative identity. Under one interpretation of coming out, an interpretation that takes the state of *being* in the closet as the point of tension between her authentic interior self and her exterior presentation, we would say that Samantha is being inauthentic. By not doing anything to be perceived as a lesbian (or at least as queer), we would say that she is inauthentic. This is because of the fact she is refusing to demonstrate her queerness.

However, it seems that this conception of coming out, one which demands that a queer person always be visibly queer to qualify as being out, is far too demanding. If it is the case that a person is failing to be authentic because they do not show off a certain part of themself in every situation, it would seem incredibly difficult to act in accordance with a duty to come out where the demands of fulfilling this duty are so strict. We would not say a world-renowned chef is inauthentic because she is not currently cooking for us or wearing a chef's attire. If we demand that we must always demonstrate our true self in order to qualify as being authentic, such a demand feels incredibly restrictive. We should not demand that the authentic self is always something shown off to other people, on pain of being unethical.[51] Therefore, being in the closet cannot be considered an automatic failure to be authentic.

A Kantian might argue that our moral duty to be authentic is identical to the moral requirement not to lie. As Kant argued, lying is always morally bad, and thus we ought never lie (Kant, 1997, pp. 33-34). However, I argue that a potential obligation to come out for the sake of authenticity is not something we can establish by appealing to a Kantian moral duty not to lie. Rather, this possible duty of coming out is motivated by the need to resolve a tension between an exterior presentation and an interior reality that is in contradiction with that presentation. An example will help to demonstrate this distinction. If a queer individual were asked if they were queer, and then they said no, then this would be a lie. In contrast, if this queer individual was a lesbian (such as in the Samantha case) and she was aware of the fact that she was a lesbian, and then proceeds to knowingly marry a man, then she would be experiencing a contradiction between her internal authentic self and her exterior presentation. The existence of this contradiction is not inherently deceptive, and therefore, we would not judge this person on the fact that their marriage is a lie. There could be a number of reasons for this situation. Perhaps Samantha has never given her now-husband a reason to believe that she is *not* a lesbian. Perhaps he has just never felt a need to ask. It is also the case that she is not required to share the fact that she finds other people attractive. Further, Samantha could have considered herself bisexual when she got married, but her understanding of herself could have changed (more on this in the next section).

As I have demonstrated, there is no clear answer to the question of if being in the closet is inherently inauthentic. We cannot appeal to the fact that being inauthentic requires doing something wrong. Inauthenticity is not necessarily a lack of correct presentation.

[51] I will further point out that this is the same problem that I addressed in chapter 2, and the reason why Cooley's position failed to hold up to scrutiny.

Further, we cannot appeal to the idea that being in the closet is a kind of lie against the authentic self. For this reason, this second hurdle of establishing whether or not being in the closet is really inauthentic stands in the way of our search for an authenticity-based moral duty to come out. As with the previous hurdle, I do not propose to explore this further; my aim is simply to identify a challenge that would need to be overcome in order for the argument I am considering to succeed.

IV. Authenticity and the need for Malleability

The next hurdle that we would need to overcome relates to the importance of malleability when discussing queerness and authenticity. Coming out of the closet often requires a queer person to wrestle with and adjust their ideas about themselves. They may undergo numerous changes to their identity in finding their true authentic selves. This ability for queer identities to shift and change as one develops further understanding about themselves is a feature I call malleability. The worry here is that in how we understand authenticity if we fail to account for malleability, it would be unreasonable for us to expect queer individuals to follow a moral duty that is in tension with (if not antithetical to) this common feature of their existence. In other words, if we were to base an argument for a duty to come out on an understanding of authenticity that does not allow for malleability, queer people might turn out to be be justified in rejecting the ideal of authenticity that underpinned this argument on the grounds that it overlooked a key aspect of the queer experience. So we need to investigate much more closely the relationship between queerness, malleability, and authenticity.

Queer identities often remain unfixed and in a state of constant change. The understanding that a queer person has of their own identity is not fixed throughout their lives, such as when a person who at one time thought they were straight realizes that they are bisexual, for example. When such a revelation about one's understanding of one's identity occurs, and in some cases when it is incompatible with an old one, it may completely replace the previous one (Lance and Tanesini, 2000, pp. 43-44). For these reasons, the authentic self should not be thought of as a fixed or unchanging version of a person. If a theory of authenticity argues that the change to a person's sense of self demonstrates a lack of authenticity, then it is not reflective of the queer experience, as it innately invalidates many queer people's identities.[52]

If this malleability entailed inauthenticity, it would be impossible for anyone, including the queer individual, to ever be authentic except for when they reach the end of their self-exploration. If this is the case, then the changing nature of queer identities leaves us with a problem. If a queer individual first thought that they were a bisexual man, then a bisexual woman, followed by realizing that they were in reality a heterosexual woman, then is it the case that they were only authentic at the last stage of their journey? And if they later decide that they are nonbinary or have a different sexual orientation (such as asexual, or returning to identifying as bisexual), then were they ever authentic when they identified with any of their previous identities? Such questions highlight the importance of understanding authenticity in a way that makes it compatible with having a malleable identity.

If we were to argue that an individual failing to be authentic entails failing in a moral duty, such an individual would only ever be (at best) moral at the very last step of their journey. This entails that a person is (possibly) never authentic, and hence (possibly) never moral, at these midpoints of their life. Further, we could never be sure that a queer person is ever currently being authentic. This is because a queer person could later change their understanding. While I may feel that now (while I am identifying as a lesbian trans woman) I am authentic, if I discover that one of my identities is not accurate (such as if I realize I am bisexual or non-binary), then I would have to say that I was never authentic while I was identifying as I do now. This leaves me in a position of (possibly) never being able to say I am authentic, as my future identity could be a refutation of this current identity. Allowing for this feature of malleability to not interfere with the authentic self allows for this flexibility of the queer identity. If authenticity is compatible with malleability, then I can authentically exist as a lesbian trans woman today, and authentically as something else tomorrow.

Another way of articulating this is through the "Schrodinger's Cat" analogy. If we imagine the cat as being our authentic self, then if we do not account for malleability, we only ever get to open the box when we know that the cat inside is already dead. If we discover that we have a change in our understanding of ourselves, then it means that our previous state of understanding was not the truly authentic version of us. So, by finding out that we were not in

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[52] What I do not wish to argue is that malleability is something exclusive to the experience of queer people. As a friend pointed out to me, their experience with religion was much the same. They at one point identified themselves with their religious upbringing, but after realizing they no longer believed, they changed their identity to reflect this change.

the authentic state, we know that we were being inauthentic and thus (if we assume authenticity is morally required) immoral. The problem is that we only get to check in the box after we undergo this shift, and thus we can never know if we are authentic now, only that we were inauthentic previously. This means that if we do not account for malleability, we can never know if we are authentic. Therefore, by failing to know if we are authentic, it is impossible to know if we are acting morally. If we think of the authentic identity as malleable, so that someone can be authentic even if their identity is going to undergo a shift in the future, then we would not have to categorize people as inauthentic and potentially immoral simply because certain important features of their self-understanding are in flux or outside of their current understanding. This way of understanding the nature of the authentic self avoids this unappealing Schrodinger's Cat version of authenticity.

For this reason, this need to account for the concept of malleability is the third hurdle that a moral duty to come out for the sake of authenticity must account for. This is because failing to account for this feature leaves us all in a constant state of not knowing if we are authentic, and this is particularly troubling for queer people given the ways in which queer identities often evolve over time. If we are only authentic at the last stage of our understanding, then we are automatically inauthentic at all other points. Further, if our present understanding is overturned at some point in the future, then our current selves (ones that we might consider authentic at the time) are now no longer authentic. Thus, we can never know if we are currently being moral, and we are always in danger of being made retroactively immoral by a future change in our identity. This means that we can never actually be certain that we are being our authentic selves. An account of authenticity that was compatible with malleability would avoid this problem. So the third hurdle is to elaborate such an account of authenticity. As with the other hurdles, I will not pursue the prospects for doing this further, but will move on to consider a fourth and final challenge that faces arguments for an authenticity-based duty to come out.

V. Queer Authenticity and Gender Norms

the way that the relation between gender norms and authenticity impact the issue of grounding the moral duty to come out in authenticity.

The final hurdle I want to discuss is the relationship between authenticity being innate and being externally imposed. On the surface, this seems like a contradiction. However, this contradiction, as Rowan Bell (2024) explains, is related to the concept of a "gender norm".

Thus, to address this hurdle, it is important to explain what gender norms are. This section will highlight why this poses a problem for our inquiry. Again, my goal is not to find a solution, as it would require its own multi chapter analysis. Rather, I am highlighting why it needs to be addressed in our exploration for a duty to come out for the sake of authenticity.

Bell explains that "…gender norms are the evaluative standards associated with gender: they are the expectations, constraints and enablements, and spoken and unspoken rules which apply to individuals in virtue of their position in gendered social space" (Bell, 2024, p. 4). Essentially, gender norms are the gendered rulebook that people live by. These are not rules that are necessarily made explicit, but they do influence the possible behaviors that we are allowed to exhibit. On the surface, gender norms appear to be outdated and useless, and the best thing we can do is discard them. Bell points out that there are many harmful repercussions to these gender norms. One such example is the demand that men should not cry and that they must be stoic and emotionless. One of the outwardly harmful results of this type of normative requirement is the demand for men to uphold a misogynistic personal attitude. These normative requirements have the result of pushing men to uphold patriarchal standards and encouraging them to continue to oppress women. And Bell argues that this is often handwaved away with the truism that "boys will be boys" (Bell, 2024, p. 2). Women are also influenced by the restrictive nature of these gender norms. These gender norms oppress women by reinforcing the patriarchal standards that women are inferior and deserve to submit to men. Further, these norms injure the mental health of both men and women, but in differing ways. Men are directed to simply suck it up and bury their emotions, while women are bombarded with unachievable stereotypes of femininity. In short, gender norms have differing effects, but still affect everyone, largely in negative ways (Bell, 2024).

Further, these gender norms are ingrained into the fabric of everyday life. As one walks down the street, one may see an advertisement for perfume or cologne. The perfume is displayed next to a woman, while the cologne could be displayed next to either a man or a woman. Often, the perfume focuses on the beauty of the woman in the advertisement. In contrast, the cologne advertisement focuses on the manliness of the wearer. Both are pushing a norm that the product wishes to highlight. On their own, these displays seem unproblematic. But they hold harmful underlying assumptions. While a desire for beauty or manliness is not explicitly harmful, there are underlying assumptions behind those ideas that do make them harmful. Often, these underlying norms put cultural pressures on us. "The gender norms with which we have formative experiences are, very often, not expansive, inclusive, and open to exploration, but restrictive, exclusionary, and coercive. As such, authentic self-understanding often requires reckoning with the power these experiences can have over who we are" (Bell, 2024, p. 7). For example, while the idea of manliness in a vacuum can be morally neutral, there are negative and positive versions of it. Some would praise manliness as an expression of protectiveness. In contrast, it may be hard to see anything positive in manliness when it is expressed through an individual who is controlling and tyrannical, or when it endorses a violent attitude against one's loved ones. The restrictive nature of these roles is part of the harm that results from these roles.

Gender norms as such therefore seem like they could be a barrier to authenticity. If authenticity were to find itself in opposition to gender norms, then it would follow that we should seek to abolish all gender norms for the sake of authenticity. However, such a position may be short sighted. As Bell points out, "many trans and GNC [gender non-conforming] people have not been trained and habituated to follow the gender norms which feel authentic for them…many (though by no means all) trans and GNC people experience some harmful gender norms as authentic" (Bell, 2024, p.3). The fact that some gender norms can be experienced as positive complicates our view of authenticity. For some queer individuals, certain of the oppressive gender norms of society can feel liberating. Acting upon these gender norms can fuel an individual's acceptance of themselves and make a person feel authentic, or at least closer to their authentic selves. This is at least some evidence that gender norms and authenticity may not always or inherently in conflict with each other.

Furthermore, some expressions of gender norms can be empowering. This empowerment can be a form of resistance against the demands of one's situation, especially for queer people (Bell, 2024). My own experience as a transgender and lesbian woman helps to highlight this. The fact that I wear what would be traditionally considered men's clothing, particularly when I wear men's suits, is something that takes on different meanings because of my transition. Before I transitioned, the fact that I wore men's suits was a gender norm that one would have associated with me. In other words, the act of wearing a man's suit would have been accepted as normal. However, after I transitioned, wearing a men's suit would be considered transgressive and against the gendered norms of being a woman. In contrast, when I wear a dress, this also breaks with gender norms. While the act of wearing a man's suit would also be considered to transgress gender norms for a cis woman, wearing a dress is transgressive for me because of the fact that I am a trans woman.[53]

In such a case, the fact that I wear both suits and dresses even though it transgresses gender norms is due to the fact that it makes me feel authentic to who I am. This appeal to doing something because of authenticity can serve as an effective way of justifying my actions. For queer individuals, an appeal to authenticity can serve as a way of supporting their dress and mannerisms.

> This is one reason authenticity claims have wielded such rhetorical power in discourse about queer and trans rights. If I say that I am coming out as queer because it is "who I really am" or that I am following some gender norms because they reflect my "true self," that provides an explanation of my reasons for doing it that calls for no further justification. An understanding of sexuality or gender identity as a part of a person's authentic self has lent legitimacy to a movement for social acceptance—precisely, I think, because we understand that authenticity gives us powerful normative reasons. (Bell, 2024, p13)

An example of this is the way my attire influences the ways in which I am being authentic to myself. For example, when I wear a suit, I feel authentic to myself because I like wearing suits. I feel attractive in that attire, and it reflects certain aspects of my identity that I feel comfortable with, specifically the butch lesbian part of me. In contrast, wearing a dress is no less authentic. However, by wearing a dress, I am adhering to the gender norm that is associated with women, which highlights a different but no less important part of my identity. In a hypothetical world where I disliked wearing dresses, there would still be a gender norm that would support me wearing one. This is because by following the gender norms associated with women, such as wearing a dress, I am more likely to fit the common conception of a woman.

This leads us to the problem that places gender norms and authenticity in tension. As we discussed earlier, the common conception of authenticity appeals to the idea of an inner self. The fact that external gender norms can sometimes, but do not always, align with a

[53] Bell uses a similar example to highlight how gender norms and authenticity can interact. "I know that I am supposed to wear a gown to this event, but wearing a tuxedo just feels more like me" (Bell, 2024, p.4) while their experience is the reverse of mine, we both feel authentic dressing some ways, and not others.

person’s sense of their inner self seems to place us in a difficult position. Bell highlights this problem. We might think that “…gender norms feel authentic because they are the social expressions of deep, essential gendered features of individuals”. If behavior or preferences that align with gender norms is taken to come from deep within a person, then there seems to be no obstacle to saying that they really are authentic. But should we be willing to grant that such behavior/preferences really do come from deep within people? This seems odd, given the many ways in which gender norms are enforced and policed. As Bell puts it, “if authenticity is wedded to essentialism, and gender is not essential, authenticity claims about gender norms either point to a truly remarkable pattern of coincidence, or they seem straightforwardly false” (Bell, 2024, p. 6).

In essence, the tension between gender norms and the authentic self is that gender norms seem to be externally imposed while authenticity comes from an inner self. This means that gender norms and the authentic self ought to be considered antithetical to each other. But then we would have to say that queer people are wrong when they say that certain gendered ways of being are authentic for them. A person’s sense of their authentic self can be in step with gender norms, such as a cis woman wearing a dress, or in conflict with them, such as a cis woman wearing a suit. Further, it does seem that gender norms are not incidental here: it can feel like it is precisely the relationship between our behaviour and the norms that makes us feel authentic – such as when I, a trans woman, wears a dress. So whatever we say on this point seems problematic.

One solution to this could be to argue that gender norms are innate. Rather than argue that gender norms are based on time, place, and culture, one could argue that these gender norms are in part or in whole built into a person. As an example, we could point to the gender norm of women in dresses as being some kind of innate feature. Thus, when I feel authentic when I wear a dress, this feeling of authenticity stems from an appeal to the internal gender norm of dress wearing. This internal gender norm thus corresponds to my authentic self. Because of this fact, the tension between gender norms and my authentic self is solved because both come from some inner cause.

However, this is a solution that creates more problems than it solves. The most obvious problem is that it conflicts with the observable feature that gender norms change depending on cultural contexts. As an obvious example, it seems odd to say that a Scotsman would be inauthentic in wearing his kilt because, as a man, he does not have the gender norm of wearing a skirt.[54] In this case, we would not be able to appeal to a cultural norm of kilt wearing, because if gender norms change from culture to culture, they cannot be a reflection of an internal truth or inner self. In addition, if gender norms are an innate part of individuals, harmful gender norms such as the dominance of men and submission of women would be supported as just the natural order.[55] If the idea that women are innately inferior to men is hard coded into our inner self, then there is nothing that can be done to resolve this power imbalance, as it is just an inherent part of who we are. Further, I would be forced to argue that these and other harmful gender norms are rooted in something real. This position would conflict with arguments that I have discussed above, and for this reason, I cannot argue that gender norms are innate.

In contrast, I could argue that authenticity is socially constructed.[56] This position allows us to avoid the problem of why authenticity and gender norms can sometimes be in conflict and other times be in accordance. If it is the case that the authentic self is socially constructed, this explains why it is sometimes the case that gender norms and the authentic self are in alinement with each other but are not universally so. If it is the case that our authentic self is constructed by our interaction with others, then we have the ability to choose the parts of us that are important. By choosing the ideas that are important to our authentic self, we have some authority over our identity (Taylor, 1991). Thus, when we adhere to the gender norms that make us feel authentic, this is based on a choice (although this may be unconscious or outside of our control).

One problem with this is that if there is no "inner self" for authenticity to appeal to, it seems like authenticity does not have a way of being grounded in something innate. As Bell argues, the inner self that authenticity often appeals to as an anchor is thought of as "innate, immutable, and socially unmediated" (Bell, 2024, p. 6). We can see such a problem highlighted in regards to queer people. One of the common responses given for why a person is queer is that they were born this way. The born this way argument is an appeal to the authentic self as being rooted in an inner nature. If it is the case that queer people are born with queerness as part of their metaphorical DNA, then this means that nothing can alter this

[54] Of course, a kilt is not a skirt, but to an outside observer who lacks the context of Scottish culture, this may be the impression that they have from their perspective. For the sake of simplicity, I am ignoring the argument of whether or not a kilt is a kind of skirt.
[55] See chapter one for more on gender as class, and its relation to subordination and domination.
[56] Bell does argue for such a position in their original paper (p. 8). However, I will not be arguing for or against their position. Rather, my aim is to explain that this is not a settled matter, and that there is a potential flaw in this maneuver.

innate feature. In this case, being queer is authentic to who they are because of the fact that they had no control over that they are queer. In the same way that we cannot remove the letters from a word and have it be the same word, so too can we not remove queerness from a queer person and have them be the same person. If it is the case that authenticity is socially influenced, then the "born this way" argument falls apart. If the queer authentic self is something that was imposed on said queer person, then it is conceivable that queer people could (at some point) have been made to be non-queer. Thus, by allowing for the possibility that authenticity is externally imposed, queer people are made vulnerable to the possibility that they can be turned straight. While this is not the only concept grounding the "born this way" argument (as well as a number of other examples, such as the subordination of women one previously discussed), this maneuver is far too costly to make. Therefore, I cannot argue that authenticity is entirely externally imposed.

More importantly for my purposes, the fact that gender norms can influence our authentic selves complicates the task of trying to construct an authenticity-based argument for a duty to come out because it exacerbates the difficulties of overcoming the other four hurdles. If it is the case that performing in accordance with a gender norm makes us feel authentic, then (as Bell points out) authenticity cannot truly be "an inner self" because of the external nature of gender norms. Accepting this consequence would mean that we cannot ground a duty to come out in authenticity because the reason why the appeal to authenticity as a moral ideal makes sense at all is because it is considered safe from external factors. So taking the second option for resolving the tension that Bell identifies would make it very difficult to show that authenticity is a moral ideal, which was the first hurdle I considered in this chapter.

Thinking about gender norms also complicates the task of showing that authenticity require coming out, which was the second hurdle. If I were to argue that authenticity exists as a social construct (even only partially), it would not be possible to say coming out is always the authentic action, as cultural norms could influence this. Moreover, there is also a connection to the third hurdle, malleability. If we are to look for a moral duty to come out, we need to accommodate for the shifting importance of gender norms. It can be the case that gender norms influence what parts of our identity feel authentic.

This leaves me with a dilemma regarding how to resolve this issue. I will not argue that gender norms are always authentic, as this line of argumentation leaves us in the position that even the harmful gender norms are unavoidable. In contrast, if I were to argue that authenticity exists as a social construct (even only partially), it seems to become a lot harder to find a conception of authenticity that can clear the other three hurdles and serve as a good basis for a duty to come out. This is why the relationship between gender norms and authenticity presents such a serious obstacle to an authenticity-based argument for a duty to come out. Perhaps there is a way to square this circle. Perhaps there is a way to avoid this clash between innate authenticity and external gender norms. However, in order to explore this topic it would require a separate dissertation to do justice to this issue. Further, because of all of these hurdles that I have highlighted, this endeavor may not even reach this point before we are thwarted.[57] For this reason, I conclude this exploration of authenticity here.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, due to the numerous hurdles that we would need to overcome, authenticity is not an avenue that I find appealing to pursue in search of a moral duty to come out. In order for authenticity to be a viable avenue for this search, we would need to overcome all four of the previous hurdles. The first of these is the hurdle of authenticity as a moral good. We would need to both establish that authenticity is a moral good and explain why it is a moral good. Without this feature, our inquiry hits a dead end before it even really starts. The second hurdle is to show that someone is inherently inauthentic if they remain in the closet. If we can demonstrate that one can be authentic while remaining in the closet, then it means that we cannot be immoral for choosing not to come out, so the argument we are considering will fail. Our third hurdle is the need to account for malleability within our theory of authenticity. If a theory of authenticity cannot allow that people can be authentic even while their identities are evolving, then it seems to be a bad fit with queer experiences. While this seems the least complicated of our hurdles, it is yet another restriction on the account of authenticity that we would need to locate in order to make the argument work. Finally, we must find a solution to the contradicting effects of authenticity and gender norms. The fact that some gender norms reinforce our authenticity while others alienate us from our authentic selves means that we must find some mechanism to resolve this problem, and it must be one that is compatible with our solutions to the other three hurdles.

While it is certainly possible that all of these hurdles could be solved, there are two reasons why I shall end this enquiry here. The first is because of the fact that in order to do justice to each of these hurdles, I would need to write a dissertation to find a solution to each of them. To try and answer just one of these would be a task unto itself. The second reason is

[57] As I have already pointed out, I got off this ride at the beginning with Bialystok.

the attempt to create a moral duty to come out for the sake of authenticity seems to me unlikely to succeed. Each of these hurdles poses a serious obstacle, and all would need to be overcome in order for the argument to succeed. I think the chances of out being able to overcome them all are low. For this reason, I will not take this line of argument further but will instead look at an alternative.

Therefore, the investigation I have pursued in this chapter leaves us with an answer and another question. Regarding a duty to come out from the inward pull, we have examined how authenticity presents too many hurdles to be a promising method to generate a duty to come out. While we could seek out another feature for this inward pull to revolve around, I feel that such a search would lead us down numerous and similar dead ends. Instead, I will focus on an external pull to come out. It may be the case that the best reason for a person to come out is to help others. If we focus on other features of the queer experience not related to authenticity, we may find a better solution.

Chapter 4: On the Injustice of Queer Erasure:

An Exploration of Queer Coding and Censorship

"I don't think they exist."

- *Westley, The Princess Bride*

In the previous chapters, I discussed how authenticity fails to generate a moral duty to come out. As we lack a moral responsibility to be authentic, a queer person cannot possess a duty to come out that is based on a moral demand to be authentic. However, the question still remains: do we possess a moral duty to come out that is based on something else – and what might that 'something else' be? In chapter 2, I argued that Cooley (2012) appealed to an inward pull (the need to flourish) and an outward pull (the need to avoid deceiving other people) as demands that created a duty to come out. Neither of these appeals, I argued, were successful, but I found the contrast between an inward pull and an outward pull helpful. In chapter 3, I considered a different potential inward pull based on a duty to be authentic, and argued that it also fails to generate any kind of compelling moral duty to come out. In the remaining two chapters, I will consider a potential *outward* pull that is different from the one Cooley considers. I will outline how it could be thought to give rise to a moral duty to come out, though I will ultimately argue that it does not in fact do so.

As I was growing up, one of the struggles that I experienced was a lack of representation of how I felt. Growing up in a rural part of the midwestern United States, I rarely had the opportunity to meet a diverse group of people. Because of this, I did not have many opportunities to learn about the queer community. Even worse, this lack of opportunity made it incredibly difficult to understand myself, both as a transgender woman and as a part of the queer community. One of the ways in which one could have combated this problem was through media representations of queerness. However, the representation that is often depicted in media ranges from a poor representation of queerness when it is created with good intentions, to an incredibly negative depiction when it is created maliciously. Most of the time, however, the media fails to depict queerness at all.

This lack of representation is not a coincidence. Rather, through the exploration of the history of queerness represented in media, we can see that there is a deliberate attempt to cover up queer identities.[58] This can lead individuals to think of queer people in much the same manner that characters in The Princess Bride think of 'Rodents of Unusual Size'; one can take the view that they do not exist. This chapter seeks to explore this problem as a potential basis for generating a duty to come out. In this chapter, I will argue that this lack of representation is both incredibly harmful and limits one's ability to understand one's self. Furthermore, I will show that this lack of queer representation is an epistemic injustice. More specifically, this erasure is a hermeneutical injustice. I will also examine how the variable types of depictions of queer characters in the media lead to difficulty in understanding one's queer identity. Finally, I argue that the lack of positive representation for queer individuals leads to a need for an alternative place to find positive representations of queer people. This positive representation can be filled by visible members of the queer community. This role is something that we ought to examine, as it is a promising place to find a potential duty to come out, one that takes the form of an outward pull, and I will investigate whether such a duty exists in the next and final chapter.

I. On Erasure

Before we can examine why we need to combat queer erasure, it is important to define what queer erasure is. For the purposes of this dissertation, queer erasure is the process of removing or avoiding references to the existence of queer people, in whole or in part (such as just erasing trans people from the broader queer community). This process is often deliberate, driven by the intention to hide the existence of the concept. There are many reasons why one ought to be in opposition to this kind of erasure. Some of the effects of queer erasure include "…a variety of physical harms…reinforcing material inequalities and discriminations…and erasure is psychologically damaging, contributing to a sense of worthlessness and alienation" (Stewart, 2021, p. 424). One example of physical harm is suicide, as the inability to express one's self can cause mental distress that results in this kind of response (DeCou & Lynch, 2018, p. 363).[59] This increase in self-harm and suicidality is a result of the psychological harms that queer individuals often endure, which often includes bullying and other forms of dehumanization by their peers (DeCou & Lynch, 2018, p. 364). While coming out may help a queer person to gain acceptance, when one's access to knowledge about queerness is restricted and erased, one is denied the ability to access an understanding of queerness as a concept, and

[58] White, 1999; Kim, 2017; Lee, 2019: O'Loughlin, Schmidt, & Glazier, 2022
[59] I discuss this topic in much greater detail in the first chapter.

thus it becomes an inability to understand one's own self. Denying access to queerness as a concept creates a sense of isolation for queer people who are queer.

Charles Mills (2015) discusses the concept of racial erasure. While this is not identical to queer erasure, the two forms of erasure do share similarities. One of the roots of racial erasure is 'white ignorance'. 'White ignorance' is a term that describes the ways in which white people are ignorant to the struggles and discrimination that people who are a part of minority groups of color experience. White ignorance, in Mills' own words, is

> …the retrospective whiting-out, the whitewashing, of the racial past in order to construct an alternative narrative that severs the present from any legacy of racial domination… its structural and long-term shaping of systemic white advantage, and an accompanying white "innocence" about the role of racial exploitation in making the world what it is today.
> (Mills, 2015, p. 220)

Put another way, white ignorance (and this kind of structural ignorance more broadly) is a system built by those within the majority group (in this case, white people) that privileges the non-minority group. This privilege exists, not just for the advantage of the majority, but it also exists to erase narratives that would highlight the existence of these privileged groups, as well as the advantages that they have by nature of being a part of that group.

It is important to explain what I mean by minority groups. On a surface-level interpretation, a minority group is a group of individuals marked out within a culture due to a feature that they have, whether real or imaginary. Mills discusses the fact that people of color are often considered inferior by racist white individuals and those individuals hold a prejudice against them (Mills, 2015 p. 219). When I use the term in this chapter, both these ideas of inferiority and prejudice are included. In addition, minority does not mean that a group has fewer individuals in the population. Instead, they have less political and cultural power within a system due to these prejudices. As Mills describes in relation to black Americans, these prejudices include "…whites [denying] any racism…but simultaneously decry the unwillingness to work, preference for living on welfare, culture of poverty, and/or refusal to assimilate…" (Mills, 2015, p. 219). Being a minority is not about being a smaller group, although this can be a part of it. Rather, minority refers to those who are subordinated within a society. The majority group simply refers to the inverse of the minority group. The majority group is the group that is dominant within a society.

Those individuals who are not part of these minority groups often miss out on the struggles that those minority groups go through (Mills, 2015, p. 220). But it is not one singular issue that is the problem here. The information that we are ignorant about changes depending on the time, place, and environment. During the colonial era, white ignorance might look like the belief in the superiority of people who possessed the constructed label of whiteness. In today's age, we find that this superiority is directed at culture, wrapping itself in a belief of equality (Mills, 2015, p. 219). This is similar to the way that we can view queer erasure. If racial erasure stems from the ignorance of white people, then it makes sense that queer erasure stems from a similar ignorance that cisgender and heterosexual people experience.

Women as a category also feel this pressure. Marilyn Frye (1983) describes the type of erasure that women face. This is the same sort of ignorance (in this case, we would call this male ignorance) that causes harm to and minimizes the struggle of women. This ignorance presumes that the wheel of history is mostly if not exclusively turned by men. This type of ignorance leaves women out of the picture entirely (Frye, 1983). What is worse, such a worldview leaves out the violence that women encountered, both historically and in modernity (Frye, 1983). This is in much the same way that racial erasure leaves out the injustices done to minority groups of color. While it may be difficult to fully grasp the concept of erasure as merely a consequence of ignorance, it shows us how different groups might all encounter erasure, even though their circumstances are different. The ways in which erasure manifests are different depending on the group that is experiencing it. For example, a queer person of color experiences the effects of both racial erasure as well as queer erasure.

In addition, the intersection of two minority identities creates a third kind of erasure, one that stems from their specific narrative that only exists by nature of their intersecting identities. We can take my own intersecting identities as an example. A lesbian cis woman and a straight transgender woman face very different kinds of discrimination in their romantic experiences. A cis lesbian woman will have to assert their identity as a lesbian to men who pursue them, specifically in a way that denies their availability to them.[60] Their identity as a lesbian woman puts them in a bind, as they are perceived as being part of a group that is meant to be desired, while at the same time being outside of the desirable group. In contrast, a

[60] For the sake of this example, I am ignoring the possible nuances of individual preferences, and simply using the presumptions stated in the previous chapters.

transgender woman who has a sexual and/or romantic interest in men faces the possibility of being erroneously perceived as a man, and thus outside of the desirable categories for heterosexual men. In both cases, the difficulties of being perceived as "the wrong category" can be frustrating. Often, this places these two groups in danger because of the fact that they are being perceived in these incorrect ways.

In contrast, I, a transgender and lesbian woman, face both of these problems simultaneously. I must both face the struggle of keeping out of men's desirability, and I have to stress the fact that I am a woman to other women. The fact that I share these intersecting identities places me in a position that neither of the other two examples need to deal with. In addition, the kinds of erasure that queer people and other minorities experience are different. Calhoun (2003) argues that the nature of queer subordination (and thus erasure) is unlike other forms of subordination because queer subordination forces queer people out of society. She argues that racial and gender subordination only places a person in a disadvantaged position within society. In contrast, because the demand for individuals to adhere to a heterosexual (and further a cisgender) norm, queer subordination allows for no room for queer individual. They are forced to hide their identity in order to be allowed within the public sphere. Therefore, queer identities are denied the ability to publicly exist (Calhoun, 2003, p. 76). For this reason, racial erasure is different from queer erasure. Queer erasure *denies the existence of* queer identities, while racial erasure merely *subordinates* racial identities.[61] Queer individuals are thus forced to be a heterosexual parody of themselves to be allowed within the public spere (Calhoun, 2003, p. 90). However, both kinds of erasure stem from the same place: they both stem from the denarrativization that Mills discusses. Both come from the need that the majority group has to rewrite the treatment that these minority groups experience at the hands of the majority group.

With this idea in mind, we can look at the more specific ways in which erasure affects particular groups of queer people. A specific example of this kind of erasure of queer individuals is the concept of "bi-erasure".[62] Bi-erasure occurs when the discussion around queer individuals reduces the possible categories of identification to being gay or being straight. This kind of erasure denies the ability for a person to understand themselves outside of the categories of heterosexual and homosexual. As Stewart puts it "The phenomenon of 'bi-

[61] Further, gender subordination also functions in the same way as racial subordination. However, in this context, subordination based on gender is distinct from subordination based on one's status as transgender.
[62] See chapter one for further explanation.

erasure' is the process of rendering bi-identified people and their experiences invisible within discussions of LGBTQ+ identities, experiences, and issues" (Stewart, 2021, p. 424). The erasure of bisexual individuals leaves them without a metaphorical home to go to; it leaves them adrift without an anchor to tether their lived experience to a coherent understanding of themselves. This is the same kind of problem that the broader category of queer people find themselves in when they experience queer erasure. And while bi-erasure is more specific than general queer erasure, it does highlight why queer erasure is a problem that needs to be solved.

I now want to argue that erasure (both the general queer and more specifically bisexual erasures) is an epistemic injustice. So what then is an epistemic injustice? Miranda Fricker describes this phenomenon as

> …a kind of injustice in which someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower. The simplest explanation is that an epistemic injustice is a denial or a lack of acceptance of one's ability to possess knowledge of themselves.
> (Fricker, 2007, p. 20)

She goes on to state that as the inverse of an excess of credibility, epistemic injustice both undermines and withholds the credibility that an agent needs to communicate their experience (Fricker, 2007, p. 20). An individual who is experiencing this kind of injustice is denied their own agency in speaking about their experience. When a bisexual person attempts to explain the experiences that they have (as in the example of an individual experiencing bi-erasure), the authority of their own experiences is dismissed or otherwise suppressed (Stewart, 2021, p. 424). In addition, a bisexual individual has their knowledge limited by those around them. The subject is denied the ability to know about themselves. While it is certainly damaging to be denied the ability to be yourself, not being able to know about *what you can be* is even more psychologically damaging.

As a type of epistemic injustice, queer erasure should be thought of, more specifically, as a hermeneutical injustice. A hermeneutical injustice is a kind of injustice that stems from a lack of conceptual resources about a subject. This lack of information qualifies as an injustice because of the type of information that is being denied. Miranda Fricker (2007) explains how the lack of a concept to explain an experience can cause problems for the sufferer of said injustice.

> One way of taking the epistemological suggestion that social power has an unfair impact on collective forms of social understanding is to think of our shared understandings as reflecting the perspectives of different social groups, and to entertain the idea that relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experiences ready to draw on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible. (Fricker, 2007, p. 148)

The conceptual resources that individuals with privilege have access to allows them to avoid a lack of understanding that hermeneutical injustice entails. Fricker uses the example of sexual harassment to highlight this imbalance of power dynamics. Before the concept of "sexual harassment" existed, individuals were still subject to it and understood that it was a wrong that was being perpetrated against those individuals. They were left not just without a way to understand their experiences as a phenomenon rather than isolated events, they were left without a way to communicate about them. Without this manner of communication, they were left without support or a shared understanding of a wider phenomenon (Fricker, 2007, pp. 150-151).

The fact that an individual cannot communicate their injustice is a wrong in and of itself. However, hermeneutical injustices are far more insidious than being merely a way to restrict communication between its victims. Hermeneutical injustice always serves as a way to deny access to resources and understanding from the victim, as by removing their ability to communicate and understand, those that the injustice is perpetrated against are made weaker in the face of those committing the injustice (Fricker, 2007, p. 153). When such an individual can communicate their experiences, it can serve as a way to empower them to fight against the hermeneutical injustice perpetuated against them.

Fricker and Jenkins (2017) describe one of the explanations behind queer erasure. Queer individuals face a gap in intelligibility, which references the fact that some non-queer individuals that a queer person will need to communicate to will lack the underlying language that is necessary to understanding queer individuals (Fricker & Jenkins, 2017, p. 275). If we imagine a daughter telling her father that she is a lesbian, if the father has no prior framework to understand this identity, he could (in theory) substitute his understanding of his own sexuality to make sense of his daughter's identity. Hermeneutical injustice, according to this account, is caused by a lack of framework with which to hang this kind of understanding (Fricker & Jenkins, 2017). However, when we lack a framework to attach a concept to, then the person who needs this concept to explain their experience cannot be understood. Thus, an individual will suffer an injustice because their experience, and thus their sense of self, is denied to them.

Unlike in the lesbian daughter case, if we imagine a child has come out to their parent as transgender, and the parent lacks this framework, then the conceptual idea of being trans has nothing to latch on to. Therefore, the said trans person has to endure this hermeneutical injustice. Further, hermeneutical injustice does not stop at this lack of framework. A further injustice occurs when the individual that lacks a concept refuses to gain it. If we continue on from the above scenario, if the father refuses to learn about what a transgender person is, and denies himself an opportunity to learn, he continues to harm his child. If the trans individual in this same scenario is denied the ability to articulate their experience, or the parent refuses to listen, yet another injustice is perpetrated (Fricker & Jenkins, 2017, p. 275).

Queer erasure is insidious because of the fact that it is, at its very core, a hermeneutical injustice. Whether accidental or intended, the erasure of queerness is incredibly damaging to queer people, as it denies the ability for not just one's own understanding, but queer erasure also denies the ability for queer people to understand themselves as a phenomenon. They are denied the ability to see themselves as normal, and they are restricted from viewing themselves as anything more than an oddity in a hetero-normative world. These kinds of injustices are the direct consequences of queer erasure. In the following sections, I will examine why different forms of queer erasure exist. These will include both historical and cultural erasure. I will then demonstrate how these forms of erasure are injustices.

II. Kinds of Queer Erasure

These next sections cover a broad history of queer erasure in the 20th century. As this chapter is focused on the philosophy of queer erasure, it may seem rather unnecessary to cover this history in such depth. I contend that it is entirely necessary to not only cover the modern history of queer erasure but that it is vital to do so with the depth that I present. The reason that I need to be so thorough with my historical analysis is due to the fact that modern queer erasure was heavily influenced by the destruction of research and the censoring of film and television during the twentieth century. Further, the academic understanding of queerness underwent massive changes during the latter half of this same period. This academic understanding shifted the way in which queerness was perceived as a phenomenon. In order for me to demonstrate the importance of combating queer erasure, and why we might have a duty to come out that originates from a need to combat this erasure, it is important to understand the root cause. The historical analysis will provide an understanding of the mechanisms that caused queerness to be deemed obscene and thus denied the ability to show queerness in any capacity. For these reasons, it is not possible to understand queer erasure as we know it today without understanding how the history of 20th century media impacted the way queerness was communicated.

We can summarize queer erasure into two broad categories. The first of these categories is queer erasure through suppression of information. This kind of erasure is an attempt to limit opportunities to see examples of queerness, and it is not merely an accident. The second category is the deliberate destruction of queer history or references. Another way to look at this is the metaphor of a library. If we imagined a vast library containing the knowledge of not just *what queerness is*, but also *what it is to be queer*, then we can imagine that these kinds of restrictions are different depending on how we are restricted from accessing the library. In the first category, the limiting of access, we can imagine that the library is barred to us. We can either not access the library in its entirety, or we are only allowed to glimpse certain parts of it (in the most extreme version, those limiting access would want to paint as damning a picture as possible). The second kind of restriction is far more violent. Rather than limiting queer people's ability to access these pieces of knowledge, this knowledge is destroyed so that there is no evidence of queerness ever having existed in any form. In this manner, the logic (though it may be faulty) is that one can never find out about queerness if any reference to it is wiped from existence. While both of these are harmful, they are harmful in different ways.

The most obvious example of suppression is the deliberate censoring of literature and resources (resources that are dedicated to teaching or acknowledging the existence of queer individuals) within the academic environment. The easiest example of this is preventing the schooling system from teaching about the existence of queerness or having the possibility of living as a queer person (O'Loughlin, Schmidt, & Glazier, 2022). One way that this is done in the United States is by limiting the ways in which queerness is described. An example that O'Loughlin et.al (2022) gives is how queer people are reduced to a lifestyle choice, one that is described as "unacceptable" or "criminally offensive" (O'Loughlin, Schmidt, & Glazier, 2022,

p. 1). Framing queerness in this way is one type of erasure. By describing and linking queer people and queerness more broadly to a criminal act, the only association that one would have to queerness is through depictions that are morally and socially repugnant. It removes any positive ways in which queer people are allowed to exist.

Such restrictions were not limited to the United States. Individuals who were living in the United Kingdom also had to endure limitations on their ability to provide information on queerness in schools. Section 28 of the *Local Government Act* (1988-2003) was a legal act that restricted the kind of material that could be shown in classrooms. It forbade schools from promoting or publishing material about homosexuality, or promoting the harmlessness of homosexual relationships (Lee, 2019, pp. 675-676). The extent of this law did not end at merely discussing homosexuality. One of the consequences of this law was an inability for people to discuss their own sexual orientation. One of the reasons for this was the fear that if one's own sexual identity was revealed, this revelation could result in them losing their jobs (Lee, 2019, p. 676). This is remarkably similar to the effects that similar laws had in the United States.

Queer erasure is not just limited to removing access to the knowledge regarding queerness. Another route that erasure can take is removing systems of protection that are available for queer people. As O'Loughlin, Schmidt, and Glazier put it, "This project of queer epistemicide not only serves to erase mention of queer folks in the classroom; it does enormous harm to the queer students within those classes" (O'Loughlin, Schmidt, & Glazier, 2022, p. 1). In the case of students, the removal of safe spaces and anti-bullying measures makes it difficult for queer students to protect themselves. Even worse, the teachers and other authority figures are hindered in their efforts to help these students. Either by the removal, replacement, or simply the silencing of these staff, queer students lose access to their ability to safely exist as queer individuals (O'Loughlin, Schmidt, & Glazier, 2022, pp. 6-7).

The act of restricting teachers from discussing queer topics also spills over into the policing of their personal behaviors (even the heterosexual ones). In the 1920s, the American population boom that happened after the First World War caused an extreme increase in the need for teachers. This was due to the fact that the education system was not sufficient to cope with the massive increase of children in need of instruction. While men occupied the administrative roles that were created in this expansion of the school system, women would come to occupy the actual role of teaching students. In this role, unmarried women would prove to be the more productive and economically efficient method for teaching these students. This bias for unmarried women created a problem for the administration. The fact that these unmarried women could have a career as a teacher (and thus they could provide for themselves an income without the need for a husband) allowed these women to circumvent the gendered restrictions that were forced on them. Because of this factor, combined with the increasing awareness of homosexuality as a discrete category, within the United States education system, there was an increased anxiety about the possibility that women teachers might enter queer (or even premarital) relationships, and a correspondingly increased pressure for individuals to visibly conform to the standards of heterosexual femininity (Lugg, 2016, pp. 12, 15).

This is one of the reasons why queer erasure is not just a problem for queer people. When gender expression is limited, individuals will often face the pressure to conform to their assigned gender. Gender conformity refers to the idea that certain styles of dress, behaviors, activities, etc. are coded and assigned to specific genders. Permitting unmarried women (who broke gendered expectations by having a job and not having a husband) to work as teachers came with many restrictions in their private lives. One of these restrictions was the fact that these single women (who were provided a slim opportunity to push against the conformity that was expected of them by being permitted to stay single and not have children) were heavily monitored both on and off the job. Their personal lives were denied to them, as any step out of line was considered to be problematic and could deny them the opportunity to teach. This was due to the fact they could be seen as a source of corruption to those that they were instructing (Lugg, 2016, pp. 12-13). In this way, the push against queerness affects the non-queer population, as they are often restricted by gender norms in much the same way, though they are not denied access to their identities in the same way that actual queer teachers were.

This kind of hypervigilance extends to queer people as well. On the surface, the idea that queer people were being erased and, at the same time, were constantly being searched for seems almost contradictory. Being erased and being put into the spotlight seems at odds with each other. However, both of these factors reinforced the other. With both the fear of "queer corruption" and gender non-conformity being a constant threat, any sign of their existence had to be snuffed out. If it was the case that being queer was something that one caught like the flu, then it makes sense that queerness would be combated like the flu. First, any reference to queerness has to be silenced, as preventing people from knowing about it keeps it from spreading to new people. Second, one must be on high alert for anyone who has caught queerness, as they pose a potential risk of spreading it.[63]

This kind of erasure is often used as a line of argumentation to support the claim that queerness is a new phenomenon. Some people will point to the lack of historical evidence of queerness and argue that being gay is simply the lifestyle choice of the modern youth, and that queerness is just some fad that sprung into existence within the last century. While this line of argumentation would prove little even if it could survive scrutiny, it falls at the first hurdle. As I discussed in chapter one, there are references to relationships that we would label as queer if they existed in a modern context. Achilles and Patroclus are so well known to the ancient world that Plato makes mention of them in the *Symposium,* a work that is dedicated to understanding what romantic love is *(Plato, 2012).* In addition, the very term for women who are attracted to women stems from the name of an ancient Greek poet Sappho, who hails from the island of Lesbos. She wrote a great deal of poetry about her adoration of women, and this is where the terms "sapphic" and "lesbian" originate (Frye, 1983). While it is often the case that such references to potentially queer themes in ancient history are often erased, the erasure of queer individuals is not a phenomenon that is reserved only for ancient history.

Now that we have looked at the kinds of erasure that fall into the restriction category, we can now look at the kinds of erasure that fall into the destruction category. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, a vast amount of research was conducted on queer people. The work of academics such as Magnus Hirschfeld, a sexologist and sexual rights activist, was invaluable in gathering data on the lives of these individuals. The goal of this kind of research was to examine and explain the nature of queerness and queer individuals, with the aim of providing care that was often denied to them. His work began in the 1920s, and it focused on understanding both homosexual and transgender individuals (Linge, 2015, p. 390). If he (and his associates) had been given the opportunity to continue this research, the gathering of such information would have been incredibly helpful to queer individuals in understanding themselves.

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[63] For those of you that are familiar with modern queer discourse, one might find a striking similarity to the debunked idea of "rapid onset gender dysphoria". ROGD is the idea that individuals who suddenly show symptoms of gender dysphoria do so when exposed to peer groups who have gender dysphoria or are transgender. In much the same way that being gay was once considered a social contagion (and was thoroughly debunked), some individuals try and use the same rhetoric in relation to gender dysphoria. The research in question is rather poor, however, having selected only adults who reported that their children presented with gender dysphoria "out of nowhere", and not the actual individuals who experienced it. The original paper has since been retracted (see Ashley 2020 for further explanation).

So, why is such an important individual, as well as his work, not well known? One would presume that simply pointing out that queer research, especially research regarding transgender individuals, would be a strong counterargument to individuals claiming that queerness was a new phenomenon. It is not an unfortunate quirk of history that access to his research is so limited. The institute where he conducted his research, *Institut fur Sexualwissenschaft,* was located in Germany. The institute, unsurprisingly, was not something the Nazis tolerated. Their limited tolerance result in the literal destruction of both the institute and its research. This research was destroyed by burning it all (Linge, 2015, p. 392). While the persecution of queer individuals is not as well-known as the treatment of the Jewish population, the Nazis thoroughly persecuted queer individuals as well, often to the point of death. ‘Persecution’, Waites writes, ‘occurred under paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code (1871), extended in 1935 to cover all “unnatural vice” and “indecent activities” between men’, and ’[t]he death penalty formally commenced from 1942’ (Waites, 2018, p. 54). Further, such persecution and genocides were extended to transgender individuals, who also faced the same persecution and killing. The destruction of the research on queer individuals was not the only erasure that stemmed from the Nazi's treatment of queer people. The fact that queer individuals were part of the holocaust was erased after the downfall of the Nazis. It took until the 1980s before academic writings considered the description of genocide to be accurate to the plight of queer people in Nazi Germany, with more widespread acceptance taking even longer (Waites, 2018, pp. 53-54).

Here again, we can turn to the phenomenon of racial erasure to shed more light on queer erasure. One of the features of racial erasure is the downplaying of the historical wrongs that have been done to people of color. This includes enslavement and structural racism but also extends to the narratives of the innocence of white people who were responsible for these structural problems. The narratives that white Europeans and Americans told themselves created a story that allowed these majority groups to sidestep the problems that white people caused. These naratives allowed the majority groups to wash their hands of the blame they held for the structural racism that they caused. The genocide done by the Nazis was not some fluke but was the logical extension of how Europeans saw and treated those that they felt were their inferiors. The fact is that the Nazis were not the inventors of this kind of persecution. The ways in which colonial people were treated was as merely a subject to be conquered, exploited, and often eliminated (Mills, 2015, p. 221). This is the same kind of thinking that led queer people to meet the same fate as those racial minorities (such as the European Jewish population) that the Nazis targeted.

After the second world war, queer people would continue to face this kind of pressure against their identities. During the Red Scare, both the United States Government and the United States Communist Party sought to purge queer people from their organizations (Lugg, 2016, pp, 17-18). This pressure to remove queer people was spurred on by the research by Alfred Kinsey. His research into queer identities found that, unlike the preconceptions that queerness was some kind of contagion and aberration found in an otherwise healthy population, at least 10% of the population was exclusively homosexual, with over a further 40% having both hetero and homosexual desires. This led to greater pressure on identifying and removing queer people from society (Lugg, 2016, p. 16). Here we can also see that the pressure to remove queerness from the education system was incredibly intense at this time. As Catherine Lugg puts it, “Homosexuality was still considered contagious. Supposedly, it only took one queer to spoil an entire school building” (Lugg, 2016, p. 18). One of the reasons for this sudden panic to remove queer people was that if it was the case that queerness was contagious, Kinsey’s research changed the danger that queer people represented. If it was the case, as was the old thinking, that queerness was usually just a brief phase, and only a handful of deviants held on to this behavior into adulthood, then protecting students was far easier. One only had to be on the lookout for a handful of anomalies. With this research, this illusion was shattered. Queer people, by this logic, were both widespread and a danger to children, who could be corrupted not just by a handful of individuals, but rather by almost ten percent of the overall population. This panic and paranoia, while certainly not the intended result of Kinsey’s research, was nonetheless one of its consequences.

This erasure of queer history is a massive harm for queer individuals. Erasure can lead to not just emotional harm, such as the feeling of being isolated from the wider community, but can also lead to psychological harm, such as from the feeling of a lack of knowledge about one’s existence (Stewart, 2021, pp. 424, 428). The lack of history leads to a lack of foundation in one’s identity. This further perpetuates the idea that queer people are a new phenomenon. While the late 1920s and early 1930s were a golden age of queer research, and the works of individuals such as Hirschfeld pushed our understanding of queer people further, the destruction of this research left us disconnected from this point in the history of queer people.

At this point, it should be apparent why these kinds of queer erasures qualify as a hermeneutical injustice. The ways in which queerness is erased limits a person’s ability to understand themselves. This is not just a problem for the queer person in the sense that they have limited archetypes that they can look up to. Especially in the case of the erasure via destruction, queer people are denied access to the resources that can let them know that being queer is an option. This kind of hermeneutical injustice limits queer people's access to themselves, as they lack the language and the words to articulate their experiences. This is the same kind of injustice that those victims of sexual harassment faced before they had the concept to describe what they were experiencing (Fricker, 2007, pp. 149-150). In the same way, queer people who lack an understanding of queerness suffer from the same issue, and queer erasure is one of the causes of this.

Hermeneutical injustice does not need to be all-encompassing. Aspects of someone's identity may place them at a disadvantage in comparison to other aspects of their identity. A middle-class woman may suffer from sexual harassment while also being the manager. She can possess privilege in one respect while still suffering injustice in another. This also works to exacerbate different kinds of erasure. In the case of racial erasure, someone who falls into the categories of both a racial minority and a queer person will suffer from both difficulties, and the narratives that they have to deal with will erase both of their identities in a way that someone who falls into only one category will not have to deal with.

Furthermore, two different people can both lack knowledge of the same injustice, but the fact that this lack of knowledge exists affects them differently. Regarding Fricker's example of sexual harassment, both the harasser and the person who experiences the harassment suffered from the lack of knowledge that sexual harassment was a concept, much less a thing that one was capable of. However, the person being harassed is suffering more from this injustice than the person doing the harassing. A lack of knowledge does not make one the victim (Fricker, 2007, p. 151). Another such case can be found in regards to queer people. It is often the case that queer people are denied the opportunity to see representations of themselves while they are growing up. While queer and non-queer people both experience a lack of understanding of what it is to be queer, it is only the queer person who suffers an injustice. This is due in part to the fact that the queer individual is denied the ability to understand their identity. In contrast, while the non-queer individual may face some harms from a lack of understanding caused by this injustice, it affects them in a fundamentally different way. Lacking this information does not affect the way in which the non-queer person can see themselves, only in the ways in which they can understand queer people (Fricker, 2007, p. 151). However, queer people are not just denied the ability to know about themselves because of apathy. The existence of queer people is often covered up, if not deliberately excluded from the existing culture.

III. The Hays Code

While the work of individuals (such as Hirschfeld) was being destroyed in Nazi Germany, the United States was undergoing its own problems with queer erasure. This problem can be found in the media landscape of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the 1900s, the combination of moving photos and recorded audio created the ability to show what would eventually become the medium of film (and later, television). Like any new medium, film presented a new way to tell stories. At the start, films allowed for a great deal of freedom for the creators to show glimpses of other worlds, both those that were fictional and others that were more grounded in reality (Kim, 2017). One of the perceived problems was that these films lacked a standard for what was appropriate for the audiences that they were attracting. Organizations, such as The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) (Kim, 2017, p. 158) and the Catholic League of Decency (White, 1999, p. 11) were created to help provide some regulation to this new medium.

In 1922, the MPPDA needed a new individual to run the organization. They hired a man named Will H. Hays to serve in this role. Hays was religious, and his religious worldview had an impact on what he permitted these films to show (Kim, 2017, p. 158). This resulted in the Motion Picture Production Code. This code, better known as the Hays Code (named after its creator) served not just as a suggestion, but as an enforceable demand regarding what was allowed to be shown on the silver screen. Other organizations, such as the Catholic League of Decency, also pushed for these codes to be heavily enforced (White, 1999, p. 11).

On the surface, having a standard that allows someone to classify media seems like a smart move. Without some standard, films may be given free rein to explore subjects that are completely unsuitable to some audiences. However, due to Hays' worldview and religious upbringing, important parts of the code were heavily restrictive and innately discriminatory. One particular line is the subject of this chapter. While homosexuality and transgender identities were not called out by name, they were implicated within the Hays Code. Specifically, the Hays Code banned the showing of "sexual perversion or any inference to it" (Kim, 2017, p. 158). While this was not an explicit ban, the fact that queerness was considered to be perverse was the justification that caused all references to queerness to be banned by definition. For this reason, explicit and implicit queerness could not be shown until the Hays code was lifted.[64]

Unfortunately, film did not have the same protections that other forms of media had access to. This was because films were not protected by the freedom of speech enshrined within the American Constitution. While the writings of an author could be protected from such kind of censoring, the medium of film possessed no such protection. This distinction came about due to a 1915 ruling by the United States Supreme Court, Mutual Film Corp. v. Ohio Indus'l Comm. (Noriega, 1990, p. 22). Their ruling decided that the creation and distribution of film was simply business, and thus was exempt from the protections of the First Amendment (Mutual Film Corp. v. Ohio Indus'l Comm., 1914). If this ruling had been in the other direction, this kind of censoring and regulation might not have been possible.

Once the Hays code was put into practice as regulation, explicit queerness became near impossible for any film to show. The 1934 film *Queen Christina* was the last film to skirt the Hays Code before it became the standard for all American films. In it, the titular queen proclaims that she will not die “an old maid”, but she would rather die as “a bachelor”. This particular wording, one that was implicitly against the gender role expected for a woman who was yet unmarried, was considered far too explicit for the audiences in attendance. This push against gender norms was something that could not be tolerated, as it fell within the purview of the ban on sexual perversion. Furthermore, the actress herself caused this statement to become even more of a problem for the censors. Greta Garbo was a queer woman who played the role of the titular monarch (White, 1999, pp. 46, 59). This fact highlighted the non-conformity of the statement and further condemned the performance as sexually deviant (Noriega, 1990, p. 22). From that point, queer representation would only exist in its most limited forms, often only as subtext (White, 1999, pp. 10-11).

Thankfully, the Hays Code was a short-lived phenomenon. By the end of the 1950s, some of the restrictions that the code held in place were beginning to lift. Some topics, such as “adultery, prostitution, and miscegenation” (Noriega, 1990, p. 30), were no longer restricted nor enforced. By the end of the code’s life, the only important part of it that was still heavily enforced was the restriction around showing “sexual perversion” (Noriega, 1990, p. 22). For this reason, queerness was one of the last pieces of media that remained restricted. It was the

[64] There were, however, many specific exceptions that allowed for some references to queerness, but this will be discussed later on in this chapter.

ruling of the Supreme Court that caused the end of the code (Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson, 1952). In contrast to the ruling that allowed for the code to exist in the first place, a similar ruling would permit films to begin showing this “sexually perverse” material.

> The Miracle decision [which was a decision to allow the showing of an Italian film that would not have made it past the censers prior] gave Hollywood filmmakers a legal basis in addition to the financial impetus for challenging the Production Code. In addition to such heterosexual taboos as adultery and miscegenation, filmmakers exploited homosexuality, which had become a talked about popular concern after World War II, when the Kinsey reports made Americans fear that homosexual behavior, like communism, was everywhere. In the McCarthy era, numerous government employees - mostly male - were asked, "Are you now or were you once a homosexual, and/or a Communist?" The anti-homosexual movements ironically made the "problem" worse since homosexuals responded to these attacks with greater efforts to become more cohesive and politicized. The strengthened homosexual communities provided support and protection, but also increased the popular concern and fear that underlay the anti-homosexual movements, and so on.
> (Noriega, 1990, pp. 25-26).

The creation and the use of these codes seemed to have caused their own undoing. By restricting the topics that were permitted to be viewed, as well as heavily persecuting those same people, there was an impetus to create movements in opposition. Even the glimpses of non-heteronormative life that censored films can show can create a massive impact on the cultural understanding of queerness itself (White, 1999).

This missing representation of queer themes, stories, and characters is also a form of hermeneutical injustice. The lack of queer representation is not just a disappointment for queer individuals, as lacking available access to queer stories is not the same kind of issue as lacking good science fiction or high fantasy equivalents. Rather, the erasure of these kinds of stories is a harm that was not pure coincidence. The lack of representation of queer characters or queer stories in media creates a vacuum of these stories for queer individuals to see themselves represented on screen. This lack of representation prevents queer individuals who lack access to other avenues to the queer community from understanding their queerness as representative of a broader social environment. While some queer children may have access to either queer relatives or live in an environment where they may encounter queer individuals out and about, not all are so lucky.

However, some may argue that erasing references to queer media is done as a form of harm reduction. There are two separate reasons that are often used as a justification for the erasure of these queer themes and characters. The first of these is the idea that queerness is contagious or can be caught, and that children can be “turned gay”. One of the more obvious examples is almost the inverse of where this analysis started. As O'Loughlin, Schmidt, and Glazier explain, one of the supposed reasons that children are shielded from references to queerness is to prevent them from being “turned gay” (O'Loughlin, Schmidt, & Glazier, 2022, p. 1). The idea that exposure to queerness in any form can act as a gateway to becoming queer is a longstanding idea, especially in the United States (Lugg, 2016, pp. 2, 5). The entire history of the Hays Code was created in response to this fear, and thus the erasure of queerness was used to protect against the possibility of turning children into queer children (White, 1999, p. 27).[65] Second, this fear of being turned gay was a response to the belief that being queer was a bad and immoral identity to have. People held the idea that being gay was not a natural state, but rather that individuals were corrupted into becoming gay, and thus anything was permissible to stop the spread of this corruption. By removing access to these kinds of stories, while straight stories are given no such restrictions, the implicit statement in this erasure reinforces the main argument in favor of the Hays Code: that depictions of queerness are not suitable for the public at large, and that queerness itself is in some way wrong.

IV. Queer Coding

Thankfully, queerness, while far from being shown in equal amounts to the cisnormative and heteronormative equivalents, has become more mainstream within the last few decades. However, lifting the Hays Code was not the end of the damage it caused. One of the results of the erasure of queer depictions in media is the ways in which this erasure limits the kinds of representation that is available to audiences. Queer individuals are often denied the ability to see themselves explicitly on the cinema screen. When the creative minds behind film and television are limited in the kinds of material that they can show on screen, the best

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[65] “For instance, one of the University of Missouri’s principal reasons for refusing to recognize the student group Gay Lib was that ‘[w]hat happens to a latent or potential homosexual from the standpoint of his environment can cause him to become or not to become a homosexual’. In the University’s and dissenting Judge Regan’s view, the University had a responsibility to protect potential homosexuals from becoming overt homosexuals. And that, in their view, meant protecting them from being influenced by their fellow (overtly) gay and lesbian students” (Calhoun, 2003, p. 98).

course of action to circumvent this limitation is to play by the rules of the restriction, rather than the spirit. From these careful pushbacks, queer people can see representations of themselves on screen that would otherwise be denied to them. Unfortunately, the results of these kinds of representations are often problematic.

While the Hays Code restricted and heavily censored the types of queerness that could be shown, it could not remove them completely. One demand that was placed on sexual perversion was the need to properly punish those individuals that presented these kinds of qualities. When a queer character was shown on screen, they had to be properly punished for their perceived immoral behavior. More specifically, acts of "crime and vices" had to be sufficiently punished within the narrative (White, 1999, p. 27). The just punishment for queer characters was often their death, and this was directly demanded by the Hays code. This is more commonly known today as the "bury your gays" trope. One such example is the suicide of the sapphic character in the film *The Children's Hour* (Noriega, 1990, p. 25). The excessive deaths of queer characters are still seen in modern media, examples of these include the killing of sapphic characters such as Lexa from the television show *The 100* (Kass, Grillo-Marxuach, & Rothenberg, 2016) to the deliberate subversion of this trope in the season 1 finale of *Wynona Earp* (Andras & Smith, 2016). The remnants of the Hays code continue to do tremendous harm with these kinds of stereotypes and tropes. But we can find that there exists a much more problematic trope that comes out of this era.

Before we continue, I should clarify what a trope is. Stephanie Rennick (2021) argues that these kinds of tropes are repeated ideas in media, often recurring with some regularity that plays off of a specific motif (Rennick, 2021, pp. 5030, 5038). Tropes, she goes on to argue, serve to show us the intuitions that exist within a society. In the same way that philosophers use thought experiments to tease out their intuitions about philosophy, tropes that appear in fictional stories can act as indicators of the intuitions that are widespread within society (Rennick, 2021, pp. 5028-5029). While it does not need to be the case that the trope is accepted, the trope's continued existence and prominence demonstrates that the underlying foundation still exists. The continued prominence of the "bury your gays" trope is a continued sign that queerness in media still suffers from the after-effects of the Hays Code.

One of the tropes that truly highlights this fact is the widespread use of the queer coding trope. Queer coding is the process of hiding the nature of queerness within the subtext of the character being shown (Kim, 2017). Put another way, 'Despite the active censorship of homosexual material in films, reviewers in the mid-1950s began to identify homosexual characters and to make comments on the nature of the film vis-a-vis its homosexual "overtones," "undertones," "themes" and "angles"' (Noriega, 1990, pp. 26-27). During and after the Hays code was in effect, films were denied the ability to show what it deemed as "sex perversion" on screen. In order to get around this, the creators of film and television had to find workarounds to show the queer material that they wanted to. While the creators of these forms of media would not have been permitted to write queerness into the text, by coding queerness into the script, they could add it as subtext (White, 1999, p. 32). However, because of the restrictions these creators had to work under, there were only certain ways in which these themes could be shown. The most impactful of these was that they could not show sympathy to the characters in question. The media could not, for instance, state that the queerness of the character was part of their nature. Rather, the character could only be shown as someone who had *made the choice* to be deviant. If they had done so, by stating that the character is just "born that way" it would be seen as promoting deviancy, and thus they would be banned (Noriega, 1990, p. 33).

Unfortunately, the queer coding trope was often used with ill intentions. One of the places where we often see queerness coded into characters is in the villainous and otherwise evil individuals who fight against the protagonists. Kim (2017) lays out in detail the methods and the reasons for queer coding. They examine the stereotypes that queer coding plays off of. One of their arguments is how queer coding was used to help solidify and enforce gender norms (Kim, 2017). They highlight the trope of the "sissy": "[t]hese stock sissy characters would be used for humor in old films, usually flamboyant and obnoxious to a ridiculous extent through dress and behavior" (Kim, 2017, p. 159). This stereotype is meant to push both men and women away from the center. The man who is placed in the role of the "sissy" both possesses masculinity by their nature of being a man, as well as demonstrating feminine traits by acting in ways that are coded as "womanly", such as being flamboyant in dress and mannerism (Kim, 2017, p. 161). While this is not innately negative, the way in which these traits are used within the story adds negative connotations. Kim points out that there was a trend of using these "sissy" characters in the role of villains and other nefarious individuals.

The ways in which the creators of film and television insert queer-coded characters into their stories is often meant to demonize queerness. This was often done with the purpose of associating being queer with being evil. Being a villain is associated with being against the norm. especially in the case of male villains, we often see the "sissy" traits latched on to them as a way of coding them into queerness.

> Physical characteristics of the queer-coded villain include delicate features associated with feminine beauty. Finer bone structure, high cheekbones, thin bodies unlike the masculine forms of the heroes, and features touched with makeup are some of the characteristics that are often associated with the queer-coded villain… A villain of the same nature would subvert the gender roles that the male hero exemplifies, such as masculinity and strength. By showing the villain as deviant from gender roles by being effeminate, the hero maintains their masculinity while the villain's act of gender transgression becomes equated with evil and negativity.
> (Kim, 2017, p. 159-161)

Rather than seek to show queerness positively by finding the edge of acceptability within the limitations of the restriction, queer coding is often used as a way of further demonizing queerness. The fact that by associating "gender deviance" with villainy, and by doing this through queer stereotyping, queer-coded villains were one of the few exceptions to the bans enforced by the Hays code. In addition, it created an association between venturing outside of one's gendered norms and being outright evil.

Some of the stereotypes that were used to highlight and strengthen this queer connection were in the way in which these characters acted on screen. Whether they are rooted in reality, there were certain behaviors that were innately associated with queerness. "For example, if a character on stage sashays over to the hero and talks with a slight lisp, a majority of the audience would assume the character was a homosexual, even if not acknowledged consciously" (Kim, 2017, pp. 157-158). Further, by associating queerness with villainy, one could play up the tropes of the villain to further demonize queerness. According to Noriega, "[The Villain] was merely 'unmasculine,' 'a sort of perverted Peter Pan,' and an 'evil seducer' with 'twisted affections'" (Noriega, 1990, pp. 28-29). Before we can examine why the act of portraying queer people in this way is harmful, it is necessary to examine the actual characters that are created from this kind of queer coding. These characters are what people see of queerness, and it is these often poor examples of queerness that make impressions in the minds of those that view them.

V. Disney's Queer Coded Villains

One of the most obvious examples comes from the Renaissance era of Disney films. The vast majority of the classic Disney villains are coded as gay. Most of these villains deviate from the prescribed gender norms, and they do this in a way that is stereotyped as gay behavior (Kim, 2017, pp. 160-161). While I would love nothing more than to analyze the entire catalogue of classic Disney films, such an analysis is both excessively time-consuming and unnecessary. Instead, I will focus my analysis on a handful of films. These will include *The Little Mermaid* (Musker & Clements, 1989), *Aladdin (Clements & Musker, 1992), The Lion King (Allers & Minkoff, 1994),* and *Hercules (Clements & Musker, 1997).* This selection of films all include villains that are queer-coded, but each is coded in a different way.

The first of these examples is also the most distinctive. Unlike the other villains in these films, Ursula in *The Little Mermaid (1989)* is a woman. Her position in the story is that of a manipulator. She uses both her magical abilities and this talent for manipulation to convince the hero, Ariel, to trade her voice in order to visit the world above (Musker & Clements, 1989). On its own, this would not seem to be queer-coded. However, Ursula's design, as a full-figured woman with heavy makeup is meant to be indicative of a drag performance. More specifically, the design for Ursula was based off of the appearance of the drag queen Divine (McGill, 2018). With this added context, the role of Ursula as a manipulator takes on a new meaning. Through this connection, Ursula acts to associate drag and drag queens with the trait of manipulation, and places her in a gender non-conforming role.[66] Further it changes our interpretation of Ursula to be gender non-conforming, rather than merely womanly.[67]

Jafar serves a similar role in the movie *Aladdin (1992).* He also shares the role of a manipulator and uses magic to control those around him. In contrast to Ursula, Jafar uses both

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[66] One could point out the possible fatphobic implications of this, however, this is outside of my scope.

[67] The little mermaid does also highlight a similar discussion between explicit and implicit queer coding. The character of Ursula is not subtle. By being based off of a drag queen, it is impossible to get around the association. In contrast, the journey that Ariel goes through can be compared to the queer and especially the trans experience. The story is about an individual who feels estranged from her world and wishes to be part of another. However, her physical body makes this impossible because of these missing features. In response, she trades something of importance and permanently separates herself from her family in order to change herself and join this new world (MCgill, 2018). Such a description shares a stunning similarity to many queer experiences. However, whether this was intended is not the important part. Rather, the importance is that the story can be interpreted this way, and thus, it is implicitly coded and requires being read in a way.

of his skills to control the sultan in order to advance his own ends. While he does desire the love interest, Jasmine, this is more because marrying her would allow him to become the sultan as for her own attractions (Clements & Musker, Aladdin, 1992). In addition, his dress and mannerisms are meant to invoke the idea of queerness through the use of more effeminate gestures and movements. At one point in the movie, he transforms into a snake in order to fight the titular hero. Where Aladdin fights with skill and physicality, Jafar's use of magic can be seen as deceitful (Clements & Musker, Aladdin, 1992).

This motif of deceit is also highlighted by Scar in the original *Lion King (1994)* film. He both kills his brother Mufasa through deception and then deceives his nephew Simba into running away by convincing him that the death of his father was his fault. This means that there is no one to contest his reign (Allers & Minkoff, 1994). Until he is backed into a corner, Scar refrains from physical violence and relies on his skill at controlling others in order to advance his goals. In contrast to Mufasa, Scar uses promises and the mistreatment that the hyenas face in order to convince them to follow him. And when it is convenient to him, he attempts to betray the hyenas who follow him to convince Simba not to harm him. Further, Scar attacks Simba with burning coal when Simba believes that the fight is over (Allers & Minkoff, 1994). Scar uses manipulation and deception throughout the film, and discards those he considers allies to gain any advantage he can.

In addition, the way in which Scar moves also highlights this queer coding. In much the same way that Jafar moves, Scar also has the same effeminate mannerisms that we see on queer coded characters. The role that Scar has in the film is as a contrast to the more traditionally masculine Mufasa and Simba. Both of these characters are shown as heroic and brave. Mufasa leaps into danger to save Simba and is betrayed by Scar (another example of his deceptive nature) which results in his death. While Simba is shown to run away from Scar after this event, this is done as a child, and part of his growing up is the journey he has to gain the bravery to face Scar and avenge his father, and it is motivated by scar convincing him that he is responsible for Mufasa's death. This contrasts with Scar's conclusion, where he dies after failing to metaphorically stab Simba in the back, and falls to a demise at the hands of his own hyenas (Allers & Minkoff, 1994).

If these two characters are too subtle in their queer coding, Hades from *Hercules (1997)* serves as a much stronger example of this trope. He shares many of the same traits as those mentioned previously. He serves as a manipulator, using minions to perform tasks that he is more than capable of, and by delegating these ruses in such a manner, his plans are often thwarted (Clements & Musker, Hercules, 1997). He acts in ways that highlight his femininity, and his design places him in long flowing robes in contrast to the much more utilitarian Hercules (Kim, 2017, pp. 160-161). Queer-coded villains, by their association with queerness, cast the state of being queer as perverse. In contrast, the fact that the heroes are all straight links heroism and being the “good guy” with heteronormative love. In essence, we are only permitted to see sexual and romantic deviance as evil, and thus by contrast, following the norms makes you heroic and morally good (Noriega, 1990).

So, as we can see, this association with villainy runs deep. While this is only a small selection of possible examples, it does highlight the fact that simply coding your villains with features of queerness is sufficient to connect the concept of queerness and the concept of being deviant or evil in the minds of the audience. One might argue that doing this is just done to add flair or flavor. But I argue that this does harm queer people. Furthermore, this is done whether or not those responsible for coding queerness in this way intended for this association to be made. The obvious harm that queer coding villains does is that queer coding associates the stereotypes of queerness with being evil. Often, the root of these stereotypes lies in the lack of conformity with the expected presentation and adherence to one’s gendered roles.

> This era in censorship set the stage for a culture in which the stereotypical behavior of homosexuals, or any behavior deviating from the traditional gender roles, is seen as dangerous, evil, and even fatal. By representing coded homosexual characters as depressed, perverse, and succumbing to punishing ends, it shifted social subconscious beliefs of LGBT individuals in real life to those represented on screen. … The truth of the matter is that although content pertaining to homosexuality was banned, it was certainly alluded to, and is still is to this day.
> (Kim, 2017, pp. 158-159).

As discussed earlier, the fact that even positive representations of queerness often ended in the deaths of the queer characters highlighted that there was no way in which a queer character could have their happy ending. At best, the queer character would have to be content with living in misery for the rest of their days. By associating queerness with these tropes, queer people are left with only a negative view of themselves as either evil or tragic. Their ability to relate to representations of queerness is limited. In this way, one can only be good by accepting those traits and roles associated with their assigned gender, and thus, by consequence, rejecting those traits that fail to conform. And because of the way that queerness is presented, these forms of media try to create an association between failing to conform and being queer (Kim, 2017, p. 160).

Now, one might argue that this lack of positive queer representation is not much of a problem. Some of the greatest and most memorable villains, such as the four mentioned above, are made better by queer coding. Surely, some might argue, it is far better to see queerness represented in this way, rather than not be seen at all. I argue that simply labeling representation in this way misses out on the nuance of the ways in which we can see queerness represented. The way that queerness is shown can have a profound effect on how queer people can see themselves. Kim presents us with a similar position in their original paper, "Media often teaches us how to feel about others and ourselves…it promotes specific body types and clothing styles. In the same way, by promoting gendered behavior and banning homosexuality, it spread a message that homosexuality was not fit to be viewed openly." (Kim, 2017, pp. 158-159). They highlight the fact that by associating non-conformity and deviancy with villainy, conformity and adherence (in this case, to gender roles) are the traits possessed by good people. And because of this, queerness, being linked to these villains, is forced to share these ideas with the concept of deviance.

This too, I argue, is a hermeneutical injustice. Fricker discusses the ways in which bad ideas about homosexuality cause harm to queer people. Associating the fact that one is queer with possessing damaging traits, such as the fear that queer people are dangerous or sick, presents a harmful image of what the "normal" queer person is (Fricker, 2007, pp. 164-165). In this same way, this trope of the queer-coded villain reinforces these stereotypes indirectly. The tropes that we are exposed to influence the ways in which we understand the world (Rennick, 2021, p. 5040).

Again, we can turn to Fricker and Jenkins to help us understand this injustice. As they argued, one way that hermeneutical injustices manifest is that an individual can refuse to move past previous prejudices to gain new levels of understanding. In their paper, they use the example of a patient who refuses his doctor's advice due to the ethnic background of said doctor, which results in said patient potentially suffering a heart attack (Fricker & Jenkins, 2017, p. 270). Because of the prejudices that the patient has results in them ignoring their doctor's advice, and thus they have to deal with potentially life-threatening illnesses. In much the same way, a queer-phobic individual refusing to learn new information about queer people, specifically because of a presumption that was made because of the association that they made to these queer coded villains, results in an inability to learn about the lives of queer people, and thus they perpetuate the injustice that stems from this trope of the queer coded villain.[68]

Only having access to these kinds of queer characters skew the conceptions that non-queer people can have. Even worse, we can imagine the same problem that a queer person can face in understanding themselves when the only access to queerness come from these villains. If we only see queer people as villains, then the intuition we associate with queer people is that that queer people are, at best, not quite right, and at worst, they are an active danger to non-queer people. These injustices stem from the fact that, especially in the era of the Hays Code, *there were no alternatives*. Both queer and non-queer individuals only got to see these kinds of queer people in the media. Because of this, even queer people could develop these intuitions relating queer people to dangerous or predatory villains.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have shown that queer erasure is a form of epistemic injustice. More specifically, the ways in which queer people are removed from the narrative text and subtext in film and other media are a hermeneutical injustice. This is due to the fact that by either completely removing the subject of queerness or by restricting queer themes to only harmful tropes, queer people are often unable to construct an understanding of themselves in the same way that heterosexual and cisgender individuals are able to. Furthermore, Queer coding and other similar tropes actively harm queer individuals. This is due to the fact that queer-coding presents queerness as deviant by association. This makes it the case that the only access that queer people have to queerness is an affirmation that queer people are inherently bad and creates an association between queerness and deviancy for the rest of the population. The lack of alternatives that queer people have access to often leaves them floundering. They lack some

[68] This is remarkably similar to Kristie Dotson's (2012) concept of contributory injustice. As she describes it, contributory injustice is a third type of epistemic injustice. While both testimonial and hermeneutical injustices focus on the harm that is being done to the person who is the focus of the injustice, contributory injustice describes the individual who is perpetrating the injustice. In her own words, "…those who experience contributory injustice find that they can readily articulate their experiences. However, those articulations generally fail to gain appropriate uptake according to the biased hermeneutical resources utilized by the perceiver" (Dotson, 2012, p. 32). When a non-queer person refuses to understand the queer experience, when they already have a preconceived notion of queerness, they perpetuate a contributory injustice. This is often caused by queer-coded villains. If the associations that we have previously discussed causes an individual to associate queerness with being bad (however that manifests), then they are unlikely to listen to queer people when they try and correct these perceptions.

representation to provide them with a concept that they can use to describe and make sense of their experience.

This chapter has laid the groundwork for the following chapter, in how I look at how this lack of representation might be argued to generate a moral duty to come out of the closet. This moral duty, if it exists, would arise from a need to combat the negative narratives associated with queer identities. In addition, coming out is a way of filling in the lack of positive narratives caused by a lack of media surrounding them. This search, I will argue, does not yield a moral duty to come out. Rather, I will argue that there is a much more effective solution to the question that we have been pursuing. Instead of a moral duty, I will argue that we should think of the motivation to help facilitate other people's coming out as supererogatory.

Chapter 5: Against a Moral Duty:

Lighthousing and Supererogation

"Throw me the rope."

- *The Man in Black, The Princess Bride*

In the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have shown how arguments for a moral duty to come out for reasons of deception, flourishing, and authenticity are flawed. Queer people are not forced into coming out to avoid a deceptive nature. They are also not forced to come out because they are otherwise unable to flourish. Finally, as authenticity is not an innately moral good, there is no obligation to be authentic, which means that authenticity cannot ground a moral duty to come out. From these previous analyses, I have so far been unable to argue for a moral duty to come out. This chapter, building on the previous chapter, seeks to try one final time at finding this putative moral duty. In this chapter, I examine if I have an outward pull to come out. That is, do I have a duty to come out in order to help protect other queer people from the harms of queer erasure?

In the previous chapter, I examined how queer erasure can constitute an injustice against queer people. Specifically, queer erasure and queer coding are kinds of hermeneutical injustice. By limiting the kinds of queerness that queer people have access to, either in whole or in part, a queer person comes to experience a limitation in terms of understanding their experiences. As I argued for in the previous chapter, we all ought to combat this kind of queer erasure, as it is inherently harmful. This responsibility to combat queer erasure is where I believe we will find a reasonably compelling case for there being a moral demand to come out. Coming out is an act that can provide a visible representation of queerness that can serve as a way of combating queer erasure. I consider the argument that we must come out in order to combat this erasure. This argumentative strategy seeks to show that queer people (like everyone else) have a moral duty to combat this erasure, which *in their particular case* gives rise to a duty to come out. While I concede that this line of reasoning does show that there is some kind of moral motivation to come out, I argue it does not succeed in establishing a *duty* to do so. Rather, I argue, the act of coming out is supererogatory, i.e., it is praiseworthy but not morally required.

This chapter will come to this conclusion through several steps. The first will show why we ought to consider a possible moral duty to combat queer erasure. This includes an explanation for why simply adding more queer representation in the media is not a sufficient solution. Following this section, I outline an effective way of combatting queer erasure, which is the concept I call “Lighthousing”, the act of a queer person making themselves visible for the benefit of other closeted queer people. The mechanisms of Lighthousing solve the problems that queer erasure presents.

The third section addresses the worry that Lighthousing may be too demanding. This is because of the fact that if queer individuals have a moral duty to engage in Lighthousing, then they may be forced to come out in disadvantageous (or potentially lethal) scenarios. In response to this concern, I demonstrate how a Kantian account of ethics does provide a solution to this concern of excessive demandingness, but in doing so creates a problem for us to address, which I refer to as the pendulum problem. For this reason, the remainder of this chapter will explore how a Kantian may search for a solution to this pendulum problem.

The fourth and fifth sections outline how a Kantian might seek to use the concept of supererogation to reach a solution to the pendulum problem. Section four outlines what supererogation is and shows how it potentially provides a solution to the pendulum problem. Section five demonstrates why supererogation cannot generate a Kantian duty to come out, but in doing so, I also show that supererogation allows us to salvage Lighthousing as a morally significant practice. Ultimately, I argue that while the pendulum problem can be solved by supererogation, supererogation cannot generate the putative duty to come out we set out to find. Finally, section six addresses some of the criticisms that one could level against my position.

I. Combating Queer Erasure

This section builds upon the groundwork of the previous chapter. As I argued there, queer erasure is innately harmful to queer people. Queer coding and queer erasure are both forms of hermeneutical injustices. As a brief reminder, a hermeneutical injustice is a kind of injustice where an individual lacks some kind of conceptual resource for making sense of their own experiences (Fricker, 2007, p. 148). If we accept that queer coding and queer erasure is a kind of injustice, then it seems natural that we would have some kind of duty to counter it. Further, because of the nature of queer individuals as having intimate experience with queerness, then it seems at least intuitive that they should have this kind of responsibility. It seems reasonable to at least interrogate the idea that queer people have some duty to help other queer people.

But why should we consider this putative duty the domain of other queer people? As we discussed in chapter one, being visibly queer can often be dangerous for said queer individuals. Would it not simply be better to increase the queer representation in media, thus countering the presence of queer erasure? If queer and non-queer people can shoulder this burden equally, by making media that includes positive (or at least non-stigmatizing) representations of queer people, then we avoid the possible messy solution of the risks that queer people can face when coming out publicly.[69] If it is the case that fixing the media can effectively combat queer erasure, then we do not need to consider whether or not queer people must shoulder this duty at all.

Unfortunately, I argue that simply relying on better media to combat queer erasure is a flawed strategy. These flaws are problems that individual queer people do not have to consider in the context of this putative duty to combat queer erasure. The first problem relates to how prevalent the harmful tropes around queer people still are. As discussed in the previous chapter, some of the effects of the Hays code still linger in the harmful tropes that can still be found in various fictional media. These tropes, such as the "bury your gays" trope, affect the stories that get told and presented. While one of the simple solutions to this kind of problem is simply to stop making stories with these tropes, this is easier said than done. These tropes still affect stories merely by existing, even if the stories do not include them. As stated in the previous chapter, some stories will subvert the tropes to make a joke, such as in the case of the season one finale of *Wynona Earp* (Andras & Smith, 2016).[70]

While this is one solution, the worry that the trope will be used is still harmful. More importantly, the removal of these tropes is a process that requires a great number of people to agree to stop using these tropes. This process of removing these harmful tropes is a slow one. Unlike an individual queer person making the decision to combat queer erasure, the film industry cannot simply choose not to include these tropes. In addition, never using these tropes also seems like an extreme solution. Simply saying that we can never kill off queer characters greatly limits our ability to tell stories. Limiting the kinds of stories that we are allowed to tell simply because they were once used as a way of causing harm seems like a potentially

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[69] Even Cooley argued that the moral duty to come out is superseded when the risk of death is a possibility (Cooley, 2012). See chapter two.

[70] In the episode, Wynonna, Willa, and Waverly are sisters. In the scene, Willa is threatening Wynonna and Waverly at gunpoint. Nicole, who is in a lesbian relationship with Waverly enters the scene and proceeds to get shot by Willa. In the "Bury your Gays" trope, this would result in the death of Nicole for dramatic tension. Instead, the trope itself is subverted for humor. Nicole, being a police officer, had chosen to wear a bullet-proof vest. Thus, rather than being killed, she was merely injured. Thus, the bury your gays trope was subverted as a light comedic moment, rather than killing a lesbian character (Andras & Smith, 2016).

slippery slope. Not using a trope and not being *allowed* to use a trope are two very different things. There are still good stories that can be made with these tropes, even if they have a negative history. For this reason, we cannot expect to have a quick fix for this media.

The second problem with relying on the solution of more queer media is that all of the progress toward the acceptance of queer characters that has been made can be undone, in a way that an out queer person cannot be. One of the features of queer media in the 20th century is the fact that the Hays code restricted the type of media that could be shown. While I certainly would not make the argument that queer media was openly accepted before the Hays code was implemented, material with queer themes was still created and shown before the code came into effect. For example, the film *Queen Christina* (1934) had relatively explicit queer themes when it came out. Stating that Queen Christina would be a bachelor and not an old maid was something that was not allowed after the code (White, 1999, pp. 46, 59). However, the fact that a film with such obvious queer themes were once shown at least tells us that there was a more permissive film culture at a point beforehand, even if it was both brief and still heavily restricted. For this reason, we should not simply accept that we have reached the end of history, and never again shall queer media be restricted. It has happened once, and it can happen again.

However, could this fear of being forced back into the closet or otherwise be restricted from coming out not apply to queer people? Queer people existed in the past, and they lived in an environment that limited their ability to openly come out and present as their true selves. If it is possible for media to be restricted, could it be the case in some such future that queer people's ability to be open about their identity is also restricted? It is important to note that there are places in the world where being queer in public is still under some kind of restriction. While this is certainly a possibility, the mechanisms for queer people to come out and be open about their queerness are different than the mechanisms behind media's representation of queerness. Unlike a singular queer person, the process of creating media such as film and television is subject both to regulatory bodies and a team of creators that have control over the project. Whether or not an individual queer person comes out is a personal choice.

The final problem is that the advice that a queer person can offer to other queer or questioning people cannot always be transmitted by media sources. For example, a closeted queer person may learn what a queer person is from these sources of media. They may even be shown several processes for coming out. Unfortunately, in such a scenario, a closeted queer person is limited to the media they have access to. In contrast, a queer person who is out can actually advise a closeted person on what the next steps in their journey might be. This advice could include where to go for medical care (such as in the case of HRT (hormone replacement therapy)), how to come out to family and friends based upon knowledge of the closeted person's family, comforting an individual who is having difficulties coming to terms with themself, etc. Especially in an environment where medical care for trans people is subject to heavy gatekeeping, the advice of a visible transgender person is far more beneficial than if it could be transmitted through media.[71] So while some of the heavy lifting could be replaced by the media we consume, there are personal touches that talking to a queer person provides that the media could not cover alone.

Not all media is created equal, however. Some forms of media, such as fiction, are limited in the ways by which they can transmit their material. Because fiction is usually told as a story, fictional media can only provide limited information. In contrast, non-fictional media is not limited in the same way. There are various websites, for example, that can provide information on the queer experience at the push of a button. Even the problem of medical care could be solved by simply looking on the internet. It seems like non-fictional media can solve the problems that fictional media has in helping closeted queer people.

Non-fictional media is not without its own flaws, however. The most obvious of these flaws is the problem of trust. If a closeted queer person knows an out queer person, they are not talking to an anonymous source on the internet. If a transgender individual wishes to seek advice on if they are actually transgender, they can ask someone they trust who is out as transgender. In contrast, if they wish to use non-fictional media, it is reasonable to expect that they lack the ability to fully trust the material they are looking at. In the case of HRT, for example, official sources may present heavy gatekeeping, while unofficial ones may be impossible to trust. In contrast, a closeted queer person will have at least some level of trust in the person that they are seeking advice from. For these reasons, while it is the case that queer people could find answers in non-fictional media, these answers will be less trustworthy or reliable than an actual queer person.

Regardless of these factors, a queer person still has the authority to be open about whether or not they come out, even if doing so can negatively impact their lives. These queer people can choose to be openly out even when there is a danger in doing so. Media, such as

[71] One such scenario could be a half-decade-long waiting list to receive medical care related to hormone replacement therapy, as implausible as that might sound.

film and television, does not get such a singular choice. While we can and arguably should push for better queer media, and steps have been made to improve representation, we should not just rely on the kindness of corporations or regulators to allow us to show queerness. It is for these reasons that it makes sense to consider the possibility that queer people have a duty to come out to combat queer erasure. Unlike a piece of media, a queer person both understands what it feels like to be queer, as well as has an understanding of the process of coming out. Because of the fact that queer people have a better understanding of queerness, they have a unique motivation to help.[72]

II. Lighthousing

For the above reasons, addressing the lack of queer representation within media is not sufficient for combating queer erasure. Instead, I argue that in order to combat this kind of queer erasure, queer people need to make themselves visible to closeted individuals in some meaningful way. A strong solution to this problem of queer visibility is an act that I call "Lighthousing". I use this term to reference the act of a queer person visibly demonstrating their queerness to other people. This broadcasting feature is the most important aspect of Lighthousing, as it is this broadcasting that allows others to identify a queer person as a Lighthouse. This is done with the deliberate intention of helping those other closeted queer people discover and understand their queerness.[73] In much the same way that lighthouses guide ships away from dangerous terrain and towards safe harbors, a visibly out queer person can function in much the same way, specifically to guide other queer people. A queer Lighthouse can serve as a guide to those individuals who are coming to understand themselves, such as understanding both *if* they are queer, and what to do about their queerness (whether it is safe to come out, resources to aid in transitions, etc.).

The reason why we ought to consider Lighthousing as an effective way of combating queer erasure is that Lighthousing directly draws on the experiences of queer people who are out of the closet in order to help facilitate the coming out of closeted queer people. When a friend comes to me asking about how my transition started, I do not need to speak in hypotheticals. I can draw upon my own first steps in my transition. Further, due to my direct

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[72] Another similar idea appears in Kant's writings. He argues that we have a moral duty to encourage the development of our own talents (Kant, 1997). In the same way, we can help develop other's abilities, which parallels with the current idea of helping other queer people.

[73] Further, Lighthousing is not done with the intention of helping non-queer individuals to understand queerness. While it might have similar mechanisms to Lighthousing, they are not the same thing.

lived experience, I have the ability to speak about minutia that may be overlooked when someone has not undergone the experience of transitioning. This can include the process of choosing a name to choosing a style of clothing, or this experience could extend to the medical processes involved with my own transition or how I overcame some of the obstacles I faced. While we can conceive of other responses to queer erasure (such as the importance of allies or having improved kinds of queer-focused media), Lighthousing has a strong focus on the possible responsibilities of queer people. These Lighthouses can fill the conceptual gap by serving as a visible representation of queerness. Filling this kind of conceptual gap is one way that we can succeed in solving this hermeneutical injustice caused by queer erasure. It is for these reasons that Lighthousing can combat media that poorly represents queer people. Asking that we make better media, while certainly a noble goal, is not a good replacement for serving as a metaphorical Lighthouse. The ability of a person to properly Lighthouse is invaluable. My own journey of coming out was made better because of it. Furthermore, coming out quite widely is necessary for a person to be a Lighthouse.

One might respond that this places a great deal of pressure on queer people to be out and be visible. As a result of this pressure, these queer people who act as a Lighthouse may have to bear a great deal of stress in this role. Furthermore, the act of Lighthousing could place these individuals in various levels of danger. These dangers can be as great as placing an individual in mortal peril.[74] However, we should not limit the possible dangers to such an extreme result. Another danger is the worry that because Lighthousing requires someone to be open about their identity, this openness could result in individuals losing their friends and family. If a parent does not respect their child's identity, Lighthousing could result in the fracture of that relationship.

Furthermore, transgender individuals also face a unique risk in coming out. In previous chapters, I discussed the idea of "woman first, transgender second". Briefly, this is the idea of a transgender individual, such as myself, wanting to have their gender identity supersede their status as transgender. In my own case, I want people to conceptualize me as a woman who happens to be trans, rather than a transgender individual who identifies as a woman. There is a concern that opening up about my transgender identity could mean that some transphobic individuals may outright deny that I am a woman at all. In the same way that a cis lesbian may lose their friends and family, I could be denied my identity as a woman. However, if Lighthousing can be a sufficient good, some of these sacrifices may be necessary costs. The

[74] See chapter one for further discussion.

ability to communicate about one's own experience is something vitally important when it comes to Lighthousing, and this cannot be done from the potential safety of the closet.

The Jack example that I presented as part of chapter two was my own experience with someone who was acting as a Lighthouse for me.[75] The fact that Jack was visibly queer allowed me to ask questions about myself with someone who had the experience of coming to terms with his queerness. One of the major obstacles in understanding my own identity as a transgender woman was a lack of access to resources that allowed me to understand my own experience in a way that was intelligible. As stated before, this problem was a constant hermeneutical injustice that I struggled to overcome. While I had a limited understanding of what it meant to be transgender, I also lacked the ability to recognize whether or not I was a transgender woman. The lack of media that covered how one knew that they were transgender made it difficult for me to reach my own understanding. In essence, I had experienced a hermeneutical injustice because I lacked the ability to know about myself. This was where Jack's Lighthousing was so helpful. The fact that he was open about his queerness made it possible for me to turn to an actual queer person when other sources of representation failed me. Even in the case where the media had fulfilled a role of giving me good queer representation, the advice that Jack gave me was not something that queer media alone could have provided.

Furthermore, Lighthousing can only be done if the person who is acting as a Lighthouse is broadcasting it. If it had been the case that Jack was partially in the closet (say to all but his close friends), I would not have known to have gone to him as a resource. It might have been the case that going to him would still have helped me to understand who I was and what steps I needed to take next. But this misses the true problem I was experiencing. Yes, I had experienced a hermeneutical injustice because I did not have resources that could have helped me understand that I was transgender. Yes, I had experienced a feeling of isolation and loneliness because I had no understanding of my own identity. But the problem that Jack helped me solve was the feeling that I had no one to go to for help. If Jack was in the closet, then it would not have been possible for me to go to him for help. The fact that he was open about his life and experience as a trans man, *even with people who he did not already*

[75] As a reminder, the Jack scenario is my own story of accepting my queerness because my friend Jack helped me to understand what to do about the fact that I am a trans woman. This help was only possible because of the fact that Jack was visibly out as trans and was open about this fact.

know to be trans or queer, was the feature that allowed me to ask him for the help that I needed. In the same way that a lighthouse hidden in a cave cannot serve the role of protecting ships from the rocky shore, a queer person hidden away in the closet cannot offer help by being visible. If I am a queer person who is comfortable in my identity, then I have the capacity to act as a visible representation of queerness to individuals who are in the closet. The person who is Lighthousing does not go to people in need of help, the person in need of help needs to be able to find the Lighthouse.[76]

So, having established the benefits of Lighthousing, the question becomes: do I have some kind of obligation to come out because I have a moral duty to act as a Lighthouse for other queer people that can only be fulfilled by coming out? In other words, was it the case that Jack had a moral duty to act in the way he did, or was it merely good that he did so? This is the question that originally led us to this inquiry, whether we have a moral duty to come out. If we are able to establish a moral duty to act as a Lighthouse, that in turn would establish a moral requirement to come out.

As I have argued in this section, our need to combat queer erasure is a strong mechanism that could potentially generate some kind of moral duty to come out. I argue that queer individuals have a moral duty to combat queer erasure. Lighthousing allows a queer person to combat queer erasure, and to do so even more effectively than even the best media could do. However, in much the same way that a lighthouse is no help when it is hidden, in order for a queer person to act as a Lighthouse, they must be out of the closet. If it were the case that we had a duty to Lighthouse, then since we must come out to be a Lighthouse, we would have a moral duty to come out of the closet. This line of reasoning presents a strong possibility for a moral duty to come out.

III. A Kantian Analysis

However, while the benefits of Lighthousing are readily apparent, there is a worry that this medicine for queer erasure may carry with it some hidden poison. One obvious problem with arguing that Lighthousing is a moral duty is that this moral duty can be incredibly demanding. As I briefly discussed in the previous section, the results of Lighthousing to the individual who chooses to Lighthouse can fall on a spectrum of responses. In the best case, a Lighthouse does not suffer any ill effects from coming out. In the other extreme, a queer

[76] Coming out is not an all or nothing affair. If it was the case that the only person who knew I was queer used me as a Lighthouse, I would have still been openly out to them. For more detail on this argument, see chapter two.

person may encounter lethal consequences. And in between these two extremes, we can find any number of negative impacts. These may include isolation from friends or family who may find being queer repulsive or reprehensible. For this reason, Lighthousing can demand a great deal from those who choose to engage in it.

In order to address this potential issue with Lighthousing, and further examine the potential moral duty, I am going to narrow my analysis. The remainder of this dissertation is going to focus on addressing the problem that the putative moral duty to Lighthouse may be too demanding. In order to do this, I am going to use one ethical framework to work through this concern. For this reason, I will focus on a Kantian analysis of Lighthousing.

To start, we must first figure out what kind of form a duty to Lighthouse might take within a Kantian framework. Kant provides a distinction between two kinds of duties, with each of them having unique features. These two classifications are the perfect duty and the imperfect duty. This distinction between these types of duties stem from the way in which a moral agent acts upon these duties (Kant, 1997). Both perfect and imperfect duties fall under the categorization of a categorical imperative. A categorical imperative "…would be that which represented an action as objectively necessary of itself, without reference to another end" (Kant, 1997, p. 25). Simplified, a categorical imperative is something we must do, regardless of any other factors. It is a moral demand, and it is one that every moral creature possesses.

A perfect duty is a duty that requires that we must always act in a specific way, without deviation. This duty is one that permits "no exception in favor of inclination" (Kant, 1997, p. 31). The duty to always tell the truth regardless of what we might feel about telling such a truth is one such example. Within a Kantian framework, truth telling is a perfect duty because lying is universally wrong. There is no circumstance in which one could lie and still act from or in accordance with duty. A perfect moral duty is one where we do not ever have a free pass to depart from it (Kant, 1997, pp.32-33). If it were the case that Lighthousing is a perfect duty, then there would never be a case in which it would be morally permissible for us *not* to act as a queer Lighthouse. And thus, a Kantian account would be so demanding as to risk the safety of an individual whenever such a person *would be capable* of acting upon this duty.

In contrast to a perfect duty, an imperfect duty has some variance in the way that one can carry it out. Kant uses the example of charity to highlight this point. While it is the case (according to Kant) that we have a duty to be charitable, we have a wider room in the way that we fulfil this duty. Your duty to be charitable can vary depending on what you are able to give (Kant, 1997, p. 33). It seems absurd to argue that a prince has the same moral duty to be charitable as a pauper, and saying the reverse seems even more absurd. But because of the fact that an imperfect duty allows for wider room to accommodate how each individual can fulfil this duty, both the prince and pauper can fulfil their duty to charity without having to give the same amount of actual material goods.[77]

Positioning the act of Lighthousing as an imperfect duty is a possible solution to this worry of excessive demand. If we allow for the possibility that we can have a sliding scale of moral duty, then we can find a solution to this worry. Rather than Lighthousing being an all or nothing state, we can argue that we have a moral duty to Lighthouse (and thus the moral duty to come out) to the extent that we can avoid placing ourselves in a position where we will experience harms above a certain threshold. This seems to solve this fear of excessive demandingness, at least for those who accept the existence of imperfect duties at all. Unfortunately, it also leads us to an additional problem.

The problem is this: If it is true that we lack a moral duty to act as a Lighthouse in environments where queerness is heavily punished, all other factors being equal, this means that we have the strongest obligation to come out when the environment seems the most supportive. If I lived in the gay villages of various cities, in an environment where most of the homophobia and persecution are removed or heavily minimized, this would be the environment where I would have the strongest duty to serve as a Lighthouse for other queer individuals. However, it seems counter intuitive to argue that such an environment is where we have the greatest duty to Lighthouse. This is because it also seems like the kind of environment where Lighthousing is the least important. It seems odd to say that we have the greatest duty to Lighthouse in precisely the environment that has the least amount of queer erasure.

The worry here is that the putative imperfect moral duty to act as a queer Lighthouse seems to operate like a pendulum. Rather than a sliding scale where the greatest demand is weighted to one side, we have a central point where the environment somewhat requires a Lighthouse, but where the environment is not excessively dangerous for the Lighthouse. On one side of this, Lighthouses are sorely needed, but being a Lighthouse is too dangerous for anyone to have an obligation to be one. On the other side, the costs of being a Lighthouse are low enough that people can reasonably be expected to shoulder them in order to benefit other

[77] In such a case, some individuals can fulfil their duty to charity even when they can provide nothing. This returns to the "ought implies can" problem addressed in chapter 3 (Kant, 1996).

queer people, but other queer people are mostly doing fine already, so the beneficial impact of being a Lighthouse is very limited. However, this seems to misalign with the concept of an imperfect duty; for example, it looks very different to the case of charity, where the person who has the greatest duty to give is both most *able* to do so and most likely to cause *benefit* by doing so. The problem is that the point of Lighthousing is to help those whom queer erasure has affected. If our greatest demand to Lighthouse is when there is the least need, then it seems like there is a massive divergence between our duties to engage in Lighthousing and the benefits that Lighthousing is supposed to bring. The greatest duty to help closeted queer people is held in relation to those who need the least help with coping with, or coming out of, the closet. Other imperfect duties, such as charity, do not work this way. In the case of charity, I have a stronger duty to be charitable because I have more to give to others who need it (Kant, 1997). This higher demand that stems from one's privilege and ability to benefit others who are less privileges seems like it should be the same with Lighthousing. But this is not the picture we get if we posit that Lighthousing is an imperfect duty. This is what I shall refer to as "the pendulum problem".

As I have argued, the potential risks associated with the act of Lighthousing means that we cannot reasonably claim that it is a perfect moral duty. Because of the fact that Lighthousing can result in both mental and physical harms which can include death, I will not argue that it is a perfect duty. Instead, in order to find a solution to this fear of excessive demand, it is much more reasonable to classify Lighthousing as a kind of imperfect duty. However, the nature of imperfect duties seems to stand in some tension with the putative duty to Lighthouse. Because the strongest demand to act as a Lighthouse overlaps with the environment that requires Lighthousing the least, there appears to be something unsatisfactory in this understanding of Lighthousing. This results in the pendulum problem.

IV. Lighthousing and Supererogation

Thomas Hill (1971) presents a possible solution to the pendulum problem. Hill's arguments rely on the philosophical concept of supererogation, and thus, in order for us to properly examine his arguments (as well as where they lead us to on our search for the solution to the pendulum problem), I must first explain what supererogation is. This section deals with this analysis of the philosophical concept of supererogation. Section five returns us to the discussion on Hill's argument for the imperfect duty to come out that stems from supererogation, which leads on from section three. In the next section I examine Hill's original position, Baron's (2015) argument for why Hill's position is untenable, and finally explain why a Kantian duty to come out cannot solve the pendulum problem. While I will ultimately argue that Hill's position is flawed, I will first seek to provide the strongest argument for his position.

Supererogation refers to an ethical concept of something that is morally good but not morally demanded of you. In other words, it is morally praiseworthy. An individual is considered to have gone beyond their ethical obligation when doing something that is supererogatory. Articulated another way, one could think of a supererogatory action as something we ascribe to saints and heroes (Urmson, 2023). Urmson discusses several definitions for the kinds of people and actions that qualify as saintly or heroic. Importantly, he discusses the kinds of people that we would consider to be saints and heroes from an ethical perspective.

> …we may also call a person a saint (3) if he does actions that are far beyond the limits of his duty, whether by control of contrary inclination and interest or without effort; parallel to this we may call a person a hero (3) if he does actions that are far beyond the bounds of his duty, whether by control of natural fear or without effort. Such actions are saintly (3) or heroic (3).
> (Urmson, 2023, p. 19)

According to Urmson, the important feature that qualifies an individual as either a saint or a hero is that they must go above and beyond the call of their moral duty. To qualify as supererogatory, it must be an action that goes above and beyond what is required or expected of us. Urmson uses the example of Francis of Assisi to make this point. Francis considered it his holy duty to preach to birds. While Francis may have considered it his duty, it was not something that was demanded of him by the tenets of the church.[78] Because of the fact that Francis acted beyond what was expected of him, his moral actions were supererogatory.[79]

David Heyd (2015) uses the act of making a promise to demonstrate a supererogatory act that is less rooted in a religiously motivated way. As an example, let us suppose that I make a promise to my mother to let her know when I am ill. From that point forward, I would

[78] One could argue that the command came from God, and thus the tenets of the church were thus superseded. For the sake of simplicity, we will not consider this in my analysis.
[79] See the third example in section six for more on this feeling of duty when something is actually supererogatory.

have a moral obligation to inform my mother when I have succumbed to an illness. Following this promise, I have a moral obligation to fulfil this promise. If I were to fail to inform my mother when I was sick, I would be breaking my promise, and therefore, I would fail in my moral duty.[80] However, the act of making that promise is not morally demanded of me. Making the promise to inform my mother about an illness is done out of a desire to reassure my mother. It is not within my moral duty to do so. For this reason, the act of making a promise falls under the category of a supererogatory action, while the duty to fulfil the promise does not (Heyd, 2015, p. 31).

Now that we have explored what supererogation is, we can explore how it relates to the act of Lighthousing. One of the reasons that we should consider the act of Lighthousing to be a supererogatory action is because by doing so, we take pressure off of queer individuals to come out. A queer individual who does not have the confidence, security, or safety to come out should not be considered immoral for not doing so. Further, it is important that an individual's choice to come out should be made without worrying about their failure to do so being an immoral act. By coming out, queer individuals often place themselves in disadvantageous situations. Queer people should not have to compromise their safety in order to help combat queer erasure without personally accepting such an obligation.

For this reason, it would be more conceptually favorable to adopt the view that the act of coming out to help other people (via the act of Lighthousing) is an action that is beyond the demands of duty. If a queer person comes out to a select group of friends and keeps their queer identity hidden from the wider population, they have not done anything morally blameworthy. But suppose they choose to reveal their queerness in a broader context (shouldering some risk in the process), thus allowing other queer individuals to use them as an inspiration for them to come out. In such a case, those individuals who helped other people to come out should be considered to have gone beyond what was morally required of them in a way that is admirable. This resolves our fears around Lighthousing being too demanding.

Conceiving of Lighthousing as a supererogatory act provides an excellent response to the concerns about demandingness whilst avoiding the pendulum problem. If Lighthousing is

[80] Obviously, an individual could argue that breaking a promise is not a failure of moral duty. A Utilitarian individual might argue that if the illness is not severe, breaking my promise and lying to my mother would be the ethically right thing to do. The act of breaking the promise could be justified because not causing them to worry would minimize the amount of harm done in the situation. As long as my mother never finds out, there is no negative to breaking my promise caused by my deception. For the purpose of this paper, we will skip over this line of argumentation about the ethics of breaking promises, as it is an unnecessary sidetrack to the primary argument.

a supererogatory act, queer individuals can choose if and when they want to be a Lighthouse based upon environmental factors. By allowing this choice, queer Lighthouses can do the greatest good while taking on a risk that they have the capacity to combat. If queer individuals decide that they are willing to potentially risk their lives and their relationships, then that is a choice they get to make and should be praised for, rather than one that they are obligated to do because of a duty. Lighthousing becomes the most praiseworthy in environments where there is the greatest risk, but we would not consider someone blameworthy for choosing not to be a Lighthouse. Overall, this means that the cases where Lighthousing is most beneficial (whilst also being most dangerous) are positioned as the most morally impressive, but without the undesirable side effect of forcing queer people into dangerous situations on pain of immorality.

This argument for supererogation can work for other ethical theories as well. If one accepts that supererogation exists, then we already have arguments for how supererogation fits into other ethical frameworks.[81] However, due to the fact that this chapter is not focused on arguing that supererogation exists as a concept, and in an effort not to derail our Kantian analysis, I feel it unnecessary to explain how supererogation works in each ethical theory. As I discussed earlier, my argument is not focused on the question of if supererogation exists, but rather why Lighthousing should be considered supererogatory. Further, the remainder of this chapter focuses specifically on whether or not there is a Kantian solution to the pendulum problem. As other ethical theories can account for supererogation, similar arguments should function regardless of one's ethical framework.

V. Supererogation and Imperatives

Now that we have explored the concept of supererogatory actions, we can now return to our exploration of how supererogation fits with our analysis of Lighthousing as an imperfect duty. Returning to where we left off in section three, Thomas Hill (1971) argues that there are underlying similarities between imperfect duties and supererogatory actions. In his account, we can find supererogatory action within the confines of wider imperfect duties, specifically those duties that are "neither forbidden nor required…and is done by an agent who has adopted the relevant principle of wider imperfect duty and has often and continually acted on that principle" (Hill, 1971, p. 71). According to Hill, while not every imperfect duty is

[81] (Alfred, 2017), (Heyd, 2023), (Li, Forthcoming), (McElwee, 2016)

supererogatory, but supererogation falls within the category of imperfect duties. These are actions that we have no obligation to do and are not actions that are immoral to perform.

But classifying a supererogation under the perview of moral duty, even an imperfect one, seems counterintuitive. The opt-in nature of supererogation is contrary to the demand of a moral duty. In contrast, an imperfect duty is still under the category of categorical imperatives. This means that we must always perform the action regardless of our willingness to do it.

However, one could argue that the important feature is not that some imperfect duties are supererogatory. Rather, one could argue that we should think of supererogatory actions and imperfect duties as being of a similar kind, in the sense that both require an assessment from the moral agent on what the right amount of moral demand is. Hill seems to support such an inference. He argues that "Kant's scheme has a place for supererogatory acts . . . they will be found as a subclass of acts *which fulfill principles of* wider imperfect duty" [emphasis mine] (Hill, 1971, p. 168). The mechanisms of supererogation work the same way as an imperfect duty without themselves being imperfect duties. They both have the same shifting demand for the person engaging in them. However, the difference is the opt-in nature of the supererogatory action. By considering both imperfect duties and supererogatory actions as being of the same category without perfectly overlapping, it seems that we can solve this apparent contradiction in categorizations.

So, how would seeing supererogation as being of the same kind as imperfect duties solve our pendulum problem with Lighthousing? It might seem that supererogation provides us with a solution for tackling the pendulum problem outlined in the previous section. If we consider Lighthousing to be supererogatory, the lowest need for Lighthousing (a safe and supportive environment) can overlap with the lowest moral pressure. This leaves us with the highest danger and the highest demand overlapping. Without appealing to the idea of supererogation, it would seem that queer people have an obligation to place themselves in danger in order to properly come out and act as a Lighthouse. Therefore, queer Lighthouses would be forced to come out in potentially dangerous environments, on pain of immorality. Understanding the act of Lighthousing as being of the same kind as imperfect duties while still possessing the opt-in nature of supererogation, provides us with the best of both worlds. In this conception, Lighthousing benefits from the nature of an imperfect duty (that it is variable in its necessary obligation) without forcing people out of the closet when they are not ready or able to do so because of its supererogatory nature.

Unfortunately, this is a false solution to our pendulum problem. There are a number of criticisms showing that supererogation cannot be of the same kind as imperfect duties. This incompatibility is mainly because of the nature of categorical imperatives. Marcia Baron (2015) has specifically argued against Hill's Kantian account of supererogation. She presents an argument against the idea that imperfect duties and supererogation can coexist within the overarching categorical imperative. Further, she argues that the attempt to integrate supererogatory acts into Kantian ethics is "misguided" (Baron, 2015, p. 3)

Baron argues that one of the flaws with Hill's analysis is the way in which Hill squares the inconsistency within the interaction between supererogatory acts and one's moral duty. By their nature, supererogatory acts must be above and beyond the call of duty. This feature of being beyond one's duty is *the key* feature that categorizes an act as supererogatory. But Baron argues that Hill has made a significant mistake by placing supererogation within the category of a categorical imperative. If it is the case that imperfect duties and supererogatory actions are of the same kind, this means that supererogatory actions are something we must do regardless of our desires. This means that, according to Baron's reading of Hill, supererogatory acts are still motivated by a sense of moral duty. According to Baron, such a position is inherently contradictory, such that supererogatory acts are beyond one's duty if they are motivated by one's duty (Baron, 2015, p. 2).

Baron further questions the ability of a Kantian system of ethics to account for supererogation at all. She explains that Hill's conception of supererogation (which falls within a Kantian framework) rests on the idea that we are going beyond a minimum moral requirement when we act in a way that one would classify an action as supererogatory. She argues that going beyond one's moral duty is not something that can be decided by one's preferences. Instead, "…it is a matter of judgment. And thinking in terms of satisfying minimum requirements also is not quite right…" (Baron, 2015, p. 12). Imperfect duties do not operate on the concept of being a minimum requirement. My imperfect duty to charity does not have a minimum requirement. Rather, an imperfect duty is limited by what one is capable of doing, and thus (returning to the Kantian phrase) what one is capable of doing is what one ought to do (Kant, 1996). I do not have a minimum requirement to accomplish when I am charitable. Rather, my duty is based on what I am able to give. Therefore, there is no state beyond that duty that I can reach.

While I stated earlier in this chapter that I will not be engaging with the question of whether or not supererogatory actions exist, it is important to point out that the claim that they do not is part of Baron's position. While addressing this criticism is beyond the scope of this chapter, it would do a disservice to her position not to include it. However, I am assuming that supererogatory actions do exist.[82] Nevertheless, it is important for me to find a solution to the other component of her argument, namely, her claim that Kantian ethics cannot account for supererogation. This is because Kantian ethics cannot account for actions that are "beyond duty" (Baron, 2015, p. 2). If Baron is correct in saying that there are no supererogatory actions within a Kantian framework, then we are still stuck at the pendulum problem and must search for another solution.

If we classify supererogatory acts as being of the same kind as imperfect duties, we still conceive of supererogatory acts as being rooted in moral duties. This is because this categorization places imperfect duties (and thereby the wider category that we were supposing can encompass supererogatory acts) as falling under a categorical imperative. By its nature, the categorical imperative is something that we must always do, and thus we cannot refuse to fulfill it (Kant, 1997). This is fundamentally at odds with what it means for an action to be supererogatory. So for this reason, we should at least investigate an alternative to this problematic categorization.

While we may have a problem when we place supererogation under the umbrella of the categorical imperative, this is not the only kind of imperative that Kant presents to us. The inadequacy of the categorical imperative leaves us with the possibility that supererogatory acts fall under the category of hypothetical imperatives. I argue that this is a good solution because by situating supererogatory acts as hypothetical imperatives, we avoid the association that imperfect duties have by nature of being within a categorical imperative, which is where moral duties reside (Kant, 1997). According to Kant,

> The [hypothetical imperative] represent[s] the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else that one wills (or that it is at least possible for

[82] (Alfred, 2017), (Heyd, 2023), (Li, Forthcoming), (McElwee, 2016)

> one to will)…Now, if the action would be good merely as a means to something else the imperative is hypothetical…
>
> (Kant, 1997, p. 25).

It is not the case that an individual must bring about a certain end for it to be good, merely that acting on a hypothetical imperative is good for the intent of bringing about a consequence. Kant even classifies the desire for one's happiness as a hypothetical imperative.

A hypothetical imperative seems to fit with the way that Lighthousing functions. The reason why we could not place Lighthousing under a categorical imperative is due to the fact that categorical imperatives must always be done. While some categorical imperative (such as imperfect duties) have some kind of variability for *how* they may be carried out, they *must still be carried out* regardless of conflicting factors. Therefore, no categorical imperatives can be beyond one’s duty. Because of the fact that supererogation requires the action taking place is beyond duty, no categorical imperative can be supererogatory. On the other hand, positioning Lighthousing as a hypothetical imperative allows for it to be supererogatory because of the inherent opt in nature of hypothetical imperatives. This means that in the same way that we have the choice to perform a supererogatory act, so to can we choose to accept a hypothetical imperative.

Supererogation, understood as a type of hypothetical imperative, allows us to find a solution to the pendulum problem. However, this is (I argue) a bittersweet solution. Seeing Lighthousing as supererogatory allows us to place the highest moral value on coming out in line in cases where there is the highest need to Lighthouse: acting as a Lighthouse is most praiseworthy when it is done in the most adverse circumstances, which are also those in which queer people stand to benefit most from the presence of a Lighthouse. This lines up in an obvious way. Seeing Lighthousing as supererogatory also means that queer people are not forced to Lighthouse when they feel unable to shoulder the burdens that will come with it: Lighthousing is morally good, but not morally required. The only sense in which a queer person can have an imperative to come out is if they have taken on the goal of assisting other queer people through Lighthousing: In order to fulfil this objective, they must come out. But this is a hypothetical imperative, not a moral obligation.

The reason that I say this solution comes at a cost is that, while it does avoid the pendulum problem, it is a solution that excludes moral duties. By separating supererogation from categorical imperatives, we lose the moral demands associated with that category. On this picture, there is no moral duty to come out. However, this is a solution that I am happy to come to rest on. It places queer people in the position to choose when they become a Lighthouse. Rather than being forced to Lighthouse, it becomes a choice for each queer person. We should say that coming out in order to act as a Lighthouse is a supererogatory act and abandon the idea that it is a moral duty.

For this reason, placing supererogatory acts as a kind of hypothetical imperative solves the problem that exists when they are placed under a categorical imperative. Hypothetical imperatives can account for the nature of being beyond duty that supererogatory actions require. Lighthousing is good because of the fact that it is a means to something else, which is what a hypothetical imperative accounts for (Kant, 1997, p. 26). The benefits that stem from Lighthousing include helping queer people realize they are queer, potentially come out, access support, and have advice for flourishing if they do come out. Because of the way in which one can opt into a hypothetical imperative, it allows us to preserve the importance of the opt-in nature of Lighthousing, and the further need for it to be a supererogatory action. The only time that a demand is placed upon queer people to come out is when they wish to bring about the consequence of helping other people to come out and accept themselves via the act of Lighthousing. Placing supererogatory action as a kind of hypothetical imperative seems to be the best way to accomplish this.[83]

VI. Counter Arguments

There are several counter arguments that one could present to refute the claim that Lighthousing is a supererogatory act, and therefore there is no Lighthousing-based duty to come out. Before I conclude this chapter, it is important that I address some of these. The first of these counter arguments is more specific to the Kantian position I have just addressed. This counter argument addresses the possibility that I have accidently argued that the act of coming out *is* a moral duty after all, because of its relationship to Lighthousing. The second argument addresses whether or not some individuals might after all be considered morally blameworthy

[83] As I discussed earlier, one benefit to classifying Lighthousing as a supererogatory act is that it is backwards compatible with other ethical frameworks. If one accepts supererogation, then their ethical framework should also account for Lighthousing.

for not coming out. The third argument examines whether or not an individual who felt that a personal demand to do an act negates its supererogatory nature. All of these counterarguments present possible objections to my conclusion, and I will address each of them in turn.

Accidental duty

The first counterargument stems from the relationship between a supererogatory action and the moral duties that stem from it. There is one final point to consider about how supererogation interacts with one’s duty. Can the choice to perform a supererogatory act lead to a moral duty? More specifically, while I have established that Lighthousing is a supererogatory act, one could argue that this makes the act of coming out a moral duty that stems from being a Lighthouse. If this is the case, it could mean that the foundation of my previous arguments are fundamentally flawed.

Fortunately, I argue that this is not the kind of relationship that the act of coming out has with Lighthousing. To use a concrete example of such a relationship, we can inquire as to whether or not firefighters are performing supererogatory actions by throwing themselves into a burning building to save other individuals. Cowley (2015) presents such a scenario in his attempt to argue against the concept of supererogation. He argues that firefighters are expected to perform the duties associated with fighting fires. Furthermore, while he does admit that some firefighters are going to be braver than other firefighters, he does consider all firefighters equally praiseworthy. However, due to the fact that firefighters are *expected* to go into burning buildings to save lives, their actions cannot be considered supererogatory (Cowley, 2015, p. 9).

In contrast to Cowley, I would argue that it is not the actions a firefighter undertakes that are supererogatory. Instead, the decision to become a firefighter qualifies as a supererogatory action. A person choosing to become a firefighter is akin to the example of a person making a promise. While the act of fulfilling a promise or going into a burning building is fulfilling one's duty, the act of making a promise or becoming a firefighter is supererogatory. The demands on a firefighter are their moral obligation, but the choice to become a firefighter is beyond what is expected of an individual.

For these reasons, I do not have a moral duty to become a firefighter. It is never the case that I am morally blameworthy because I did not enter the firefighting career or choose to volunteer.[84] However, just as the act of keeping a promise is a moral obligation to someone who has chosen to make that promise in the first place, the act of entering a burning building is a moral obligation that a firefighter does have. In this case, if I am a firefighter, then I have a moral duty to enter a burning building.

This line of argumentation could lead one to the conclusion that I have a moral duty to come out that stems from the supererogatory act of being a Lighthouse. If it is the case that an individual can commit to be a Lighthouse, then it follows that an individual would have a further duty to perform a related action. One could argue that coming out is the action that one would need to perform in order to act as part of the supererogatory action of Lighthousing. For this reason, it could be argued that coming out would qualify as a moral duty for a Lighthouse, in much the same way that running into a burning building is a moral duty for a firefighter.

However, I disagree with this interpretation of the relationship between Lighthousing and coming out. In the case of the firefighter and the promise, the duty to run into the burning building and the act of keeping the promise is the end result of those supererogatory actions. However, the duties that follow from these supererogatory actions are not in the same category as the action of coming out of a closet. Coming out is necessary in order for individuals to act as a Lighthouse, but that means that coming out is a necessary component of being a Lighthouse. Rather than being a duty borne from the choice to be a Lighthouse, coming out is part of the act of becoming a Lighthouse.

The promise example helps to highlight how this interaction works. If I promise my mother to tell her when I am sick, I then have the duty to tell her when I am sick (Heyd, 2015). In order to have this moral duty, however, I must make the promise to my mother. In this case, I must communicate (either by word, writing, or some other means) that I am making a promise. In order for the promise to exist, and thus the moral duties accompanying it, I have to make the promise. But coming out is not a duty generated by the choice to be a Lighthouse. Rather, coming out is the action that is required to become a Lighthouse. In the same way that I must communicate in order to make a promise, I must come out in order to be a Lighthouse. This is not the same as the way in which, once I have signed up to be firefighter, I must enter the burning building. So I do not have a duty to come out that stems from having "signed up", as it were, to be a Lighthouse. Rather, as part of *becoming* a Lighthouse, I have to come out.

[84] It is conceivable that I could be blameworthy for non-moral reasons, such as it being a family tradition, but these are outside the scope of this analysis.

This is a practical consequence of *what it is to be a Lighthouse,* and not a moral duty that arises from becoming a Lighthouse.

The cases of the Closeted Ally and the Steel Lighthouse

One of the important conclusions of this chapter has been that there is never an instance where a person is morally blameworthy for not acting as a Lighthouse. It follows from this that the decision not to come out is never morally blameworthy. However, there are two scenarios where this position seems to encounter some problems. These scenarios are the case of the closeted ally and the case of what I will call the 'Closeted Steel Lighthouse'. Both of these scenarios present important objections to the underlying assumption of a lack of moral blameworthiness of remaining in the closet.

I start with the weaker objection. The case of the closeted ally explores the possibility that a strong ally of the queer community is actually queer themselves. For whatever reason, through either difficult circumstances or a general desire, this queer individual has decided to remain in the closet. They continue to be a strong activist for queer rights. However, they are never able to step into the role as a queer Lighthouse because of the fact that they have never decided to come out. Is it the case that the closeted ally is doing something wrong? We could argue that by coming out, they can enhance their activism and serve as a greater help to their queer community.

The problem with this is it is based on several assumptions. Part of being a Lighthouse is that one is adding a responsibility to their life. It could be the case that the closeted ally has made the decision that being out complicates their allyship. Perhaps, because they can leverage their perceived privilege of being a part of the cultural norm, they have decided that coming out would actually limit their ability to help queer people. Further, it might be the case that the closeted ally might think that their experience would make them a bad Lighthouse. In such cases, regardless of if the closeted ally has an accurate assessment or not, it seems odd to say they are doing something blameworthy. Even if we grant the fact that they believe coming out would make their allyship easier, it still seems like nothing morally blameworthy has happened in this scenario. A queer ally who decides to stay in the closet is no more blameworthy than a queer person who is in the closet but decides not to be a visible ally.

In contrast, the stronger version of this objection is the case of the Closeted Steel Lighthouse. In this scenario, a Steel Lighthouse is similar to a steelman argument. A steelman argument references an argument that is as strong as possible to serve as a good interlocutor. In this way, a Steel Lighthouse is a Lighthouse where the person who is Lighthousing is as strong as possible. A simple example of this is an idealized person who could serve as a Lighthouse. Imagine a wealthy television personality who, as part of their show, runs a question time segment where they answer mail from their wider audience, or simply from their studio audience. They are a beloved figure of their community who lives in a queer friendly area and they have an incredibly supportive family. I could continue these descriptions, but the important feature of the Steel Lighthouse is that there is literally nothing that would negatively impact them if they decided to be a Lighthouse and then come out. Further, they are in the greatest position to help other queer people, and thus would make for an incredibly effective Lighthouse. Even in such a perfect scenario, would we still consider such a person blameless for not choosing to act as a Lighthouse?

My position would still be no, a Steel Lighthouse would still not be morally blameworthy if they did not come out of the closet and actually serve as a Lighthouse because the supererogatory nature of Lighthousing accounts for the fact that people do not need to commit to being a lighthouse regardless of circumstance. Privilege does not demand that a person come out. They are not failing in their moral duty to come out by not serving as a Lighthouse. However, there is a possibility that they could be morally blameworthy for another reason. For example, we could consider the Steel Lighthouse morally blameworthy because they are failing to improve their natural talents as this imperfect duty would be neglected (Kant, 1997, pp. 32-33). Further, we could argue that they have denied themselves the opportunity to flourish, and thus they are denying themselves the fulfilment of helping others. But in the same way that I argued that one can still flourish without coming out to everyone, so too can a Steel Lighthouse flourish without actually being a Lighthouse.[85] Regardless of how one argues for it, their failure to come out is not in itself morally blameworthy. At most, they are blameworthy for other reasons unrelated to their choice not to Lighthouse.

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[85] See chapter two for more on Cooley and flourishing.

The case of a Personal Sense of Duty

A question that arises when I articulate why this project is so important to me is the question of a personal sense of duty. Often, I will say that I felt compelled to act as a Lighthouse.[86] The idea that I could help other queer people, especially at little cost to myself, is something that I feel compelled to do. One could argue that this sense of demand is indicative of something that ought to be considered as a moral duty, rather than merely considering it supererogatory.

Vanessa Carbonell (2012) addresses such a worry. In her paper, she explains that there is often a "persistent agent-observer disparity" (Carbonell, 2012, p. 231) between those individuals who feel compelled to do supererogatory acts (what she describes as saints), and those individuals who witness those acts being performed. She argues that while these saints are mistaken about the moral demands of their actions, they have good reason for this erroneous belief. She argues that "we should remain open to the possibility that they know something we don't know" (Carbonell, 2012, p. 232).

Carbonell points out that one of the features that are necessary for the existence of these moral saints is the fact that not everything we value bears a direct personal benefit to us. Some of the things that are important to us cost us something. She argues that without this fact, it would be impossible to have the concept of a moral saint at all (Carbonell, 2012, p. 235). A saint must sacrifice something of worth (whether they think it is something minor or major) in pursuit of their values. Further, while the agent might consider the results of their sacrifice to cause a net gain in their overall well-being, this does not take away from the fact that they are experiencing a sacrifice. She concludes by pointing out that this persistent agent-observer disparity is caused by the fact that while the agent feels the positive satisfactory effects of their sacrifice, the observer mainly sees the parts that have been sacrificed (Carbonell, 2012, p. 237). Thus, this causes this supposed disagreement between the moral saint seeing their actions as obligatory and the observer seeing it as the optional sacrifice that it is.

In much the same way, the worry that a person feels obligated to be a Lighthouse, and therefore that it cannot be a supererogatory act, can be assuaged. Returning to myself as an example, the fact that I have been so open about my various queer identities and my life

[86] Although at the time I would have used some other phrase to mean the same thing, as I did not come up with the term Lighthousing until late into the project.

experiences through the course of this dissertation is a kind of sacrifice. In the effort to be a Lighthouse (and write this dissertation), I have tied my academic work to my queerness. This means that I have given up some of my privacy in the pursuit of being a Lighthouse, and thus this results in my ability to help other queer people. However, if someone were to try and convince me of that fact up until this point, I would have scoffed at the idea that I was truly making a sacrifice or that it would have been fine for me not to be open in this way. The fact that this work is in service to gaining my doctorate would have felt like a net gain. Furthermore, because I like being able to help other queer people, I would have felt no real sacrifice was taking place. But this does not take away from the fact that there is a sacrifice, and thus Lighthousing is still a supererogatory act, even if I *feel* a demand to do it.

VII. Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I laid out what I think is the strongest argument in favor of there being a moral duty to come out. I argue that our need to combat queer erasure is a strong motivation for thinking that there is a moral duty to come out. This putative moral duty to come out links back to the necessity of coming out in order to act as a Lighthouse for other queer people. This act of Lighthousing is what allows a person to combat the queer erasure that continues to constitute an injustice to queer people by preventing them from understanding themselves and finding their way out of the closet. At the base of this argument is the idea that we all (regardless of whether or not we are a part of the queer community) have a moral duty to combat this queer erasure, as queer erasure is inherently unjust. For queer individuals, we can combat this erasure through the act of Lighthousing. Therefore, if we have a moral duty to serve as a Lighthouse to facilitate other queer individuals' coming out, flourishing, providing resources for this process, etc, then we have a moral duty to come out. However, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, the argument that queer individuals have a moral duty to act as a Lighthouse fails to hold up to scrutiny. We cannot classify it as a universal demand, as the potential risks and harms of Lighthousing can cause negative effects ranging from loss of important relationships to an individual's death. Even Cooley argued that it was not justifiable to demand this kind of sacrifice (Cooley, 2012).

I argued that classifying Lighthousing as an imperfect duty looks like it might provide a solution to the worry about being too great of a demand. However, this classification creates what I call "the pendulum problem". If we believe that the most dangerous environments align with the least demand, this leaves us with the problem that the safest environments align with the highest demand. But this also means that Lighthousing is most required where it makes the least difference, and that this seems like it is the reverse of how a moral duty ought to operate. Therefore, it does not make sense to simply classify Lighthousing as an imperfect duty.

The pendulum problem is solved when we consider Lighthousing to be a kind of supererogatory action. This allows us to classify the highest moral impetus as existing within the most dangerous environments. Thus, the praiseworthiness of Lighthousing is in line with the danger or costs that coming out presents. Further, it allows us to avoid demanding that queer people have some kind of obligation to place their lives in mortal or emotional peril. Individual queer people have the choice to place themselves in a level of danger that they have the capacity for. There is no moral blameworthiness for someone’s inability to Lighthouse under adverse circumstances.

However, this means that Lighthousing cannot motivate a moral duty to come out. This is because by placing the act of Lighthousing outside of a categorical imperative, we strip it of its ability to be a moral duty. If Lighthousing is not a moral duty, then coming out in order to serve as a Lighthouse is also not a duty. Thankfully, Lighthousing can still be morally good to do even if it is not a moral duty. We should consider the act of coming out to be a supererogatory act. If one wishes to serve as a Lighthouse for queer individuals, then those choosing to Lighthouse may choose to perform the supererogatory action of being a Lighthouse. This means that the accompanying act of coming out is also a supererogatory action. Thus, while I argue that we ought not to think of coming out in order to Lighthouse as a moral duty, we should consider it a supererogatory action: a praiseworthy act which is motivated by a desire to help other queer people on their journey of self-discovery and acceptance.

Conclusion

"There is too much, let me sum up."

- *Inigo Montoya, The Princess Bride.*

I. Summary

In this dissertation, I have examined the question of whether or not we have a moral duty to come out. I have argued that we do not possess this kind of moral duty. Rather, I argue that at best, the act of coming out is a supererogatory action. Rather than being morally obligatory, the act of coming out is only morally praiseworthy. The reason why coming out is supererogatory is because of its connection to the concept of Lighthousing. Lighthousing is the highly beneficial act of being visibly queer in an effort to help guide other closeted queer people. Because queer people must come out as a part of being a Lighthouse, coming out in order to Lighthouse is also supererogatory.

In my first chapter, I examined and described various categories of queerness. This included the various groups under the acronym of LGBT+, as well as those outside of this acronym. In addition, I addressed several questions related to queerness. These included the question of whether or not there is a distinction between sexual orientation and sexual identity, whether or not there is a distinction between sex and gender, and the question of what gender is. In addition, Chapter One examined reasons why queer people come out. This included the obstacles that those individuals coming out often need to deal with.

In my second chapter, I looked at Dennis Cooley's arguments in favor of a moral duty to come out. Cooley argues that an individual ought to come out for two reasons. The first argument is that the act of being in the closet is deceptive, as it denies others the ability to identify you as queer (Cooley, 2012, pp. 48-49). The second of these reasons is that by not coming out, a queer individual is cut off from the queer community and is denied the ability to flourish (Cooley, 2012, p. 48). Both of these arguments fail to hold up to scrutiny. The first fails because the misidentification of a queer person is not a deliberate act of deception, but rather the error of the individual that misidentified the queer person in question. The second fails because of the nature of coming out. Rather than a binary choice, coming out is a deliberate act that is done from moment to moment and person to person. Thus, one is not denied the ability to flourish when one chooses not to come out. However, Cooley does provide a useful distinction between these two kinds of coming out. These are external drives and internal drives. External drives to come out are motivations to come out for the sake of other individuals' interests, while internal drives to come out are motivations to come out for the sake of one's own interests.

In Chapter Three, we looked at one of the internal drives to come out. This internal drive is the possible moral duty to be authentic. Especially in the case of queer individuals, there is often praise for living as one's authentic self. This chapter sets out several guard rails for how to examine authenticity as a method for generating a moral duty to come out. This included the requirement that being in the closet necessarily entails that an individual is inauthentic, the need for malleability within a theory of authenticity, and the problem of gender norms and their influence on authenticity. However, the problem that this chapter highlighted is that authenticity is not inherently a moral good. Because of this reason, it cannot generate a moral duty to come out.

In Chapter Four, I explained how the concept of queer erasure could present a plausible avenue for investigating the duty to come out. Queer erasure is the systematic removal of information related to queer individuals and the concept of queerness. This could be as extreme as burning research or as unremarkable as omitting queer themes from various kinds of media, such as film and literature. Both of these kinds of erasure present a hermeneutical injustice to queer people, as queer erasure limits the kinds of representation that queer people have access to. This kind of injustice has the potential to generate a putative duty to come out.

In my fifth and final chapter, I explored how this kind of queer erasure could be combated. One of the ways that we can combat queer erasure is through the act of Lighthousing. Lighthousing is the act of deliberately showing one's queerness in an effort to serve as a beacon for other queer people. Further, this beacon guides these queer individuals to a safe harbor, as the out queer person can offer guidance to queer people around them. However, due to the potential demandingness that Lighthousing would require, it could not be considered a duty, either perfect or imperfect.

Rather, I argue that the act of Lighthousing is a supererogatory act. This solves the worry that being a Lighthouse places too great of a demand on those who choose to Lighthouse. Queer individuals do not have a requirement to place themselves in harm's way in order to help other queer people come out. Rather, the act of Lighthousing is a praiseworthy act in service of helping facilitate other queer people's coming out. This means that we should not consider the act of coming out as a moral demand. Rather, the act of coming out is supererogatory, specifically in virtue of being the act that allows someone to be a Lighthouse.

II. Future Research

There are several directions that I would have liked to pursue with this research. Unfortunately, I did not have the time within this dissertation to fully examine these possible directions. The first of these is the dangling thread of how one ought to communicate the fact that they are a Lighthouse. How are people supposed to know that I am someone that they can come to for help? This is what I call the broadcasting requirement.

One obvious problem with this broadcasting requirement returns us to the arguments against Cooley from Chapter Two. In order for people to know I am a Lighthouse, I have to be visibly queer. However, if I have a duty to be visibly queer, this can result in some problematic responsibilities. For instance (to use an obviously over the top example) does a gay man who has taken on the role of a Lighthouse need to wear a feather boa in order for them to adequately qualify as being visibly out?[87] To use a less obvious example, I have a lesbian pride flag hanging on the back of my wall in my apartment. I have deliberately positioned it in such a way as to make it visible when I am in a videocall. This was done for the same reason as in the feather boa example. By projecting the fact that I am a lesbian, I am providing a visible demonstration of my queerness, and thus I am broadcasting the fact that I am a Lighthouse. Why is it that the first scenario is intuitively and obviously absurd, while the second seems to be more defensible? Because this topic is so complex and does require some deep analysis, I hope to touch on this problem (as well as other possible moral duties that stem from Lighthousing) in my future research.

In addition, another fascinating direction for future research is on the question of outing other people. In short, is it ever morally permissible to out other people? For members of the queer community, it is often considered taboo to out other people. Usually, if someone is in the closet, there is often a good reason for it. However, there are some exceptions that I think are worth highlighting. These three cases highlight why this is a worthy pursuit for future research.

The first example is the case of those members of the queer community who are openly predatory. If we imagine a case where a person has experienced some kind of violence at the

[87] This humorous example was provided by my secondary supervisor Ben Colburn. While it obviously seems over the top, it does illustrate how moral duties associated with Lighthousing can result in problematic requirements, much in the same way as the grocer example from Chapter 2.

hands of a queer person, then it is reasonable that said person deserves justice for such violence. But a problem occurs when the perpetrator of such violence is queer, in the closet, and the target of the violence is somone who would have to out the perpetrator in order to disclose the wrongful behaviour. I would argue that outing the perpetrator is not just permissible, but morality would demand it of us.

The second example is one that we can extrapolate from Cooley (2012). Cooley posits the idea of an anti-gay politician who is gay and in the closet. Cooley argues that the politician in question has a moral duty to out himself (Cooley, 2012, p. 48). While I disagree with Cooley, such a scenario presents another objection to the question of outing. Is it morally acceptable to out another person who is causing harm when that harm is related to their queerness? My inclination would be no. It would be morally unjustifiable to out the politician, even when revealing their queerness would help other queer people. But this intuition seems at odds with my previous example.

Finally, a third example has to do with outing the dead or comatose. Mark Chekola (1994) provides an example. He outlines an example of Karen Thompson, who was denied the ability to care for her comatose partner Sharon Kowalski. This denial of care was because of the fact that Karen outed her partner Sharon in her attempt to argue for her right to act as Sharon's carer (Chekola, 1994). This example seems absurd. It would be impossible for Karen to have been awarded the role of guardian without outing her partner, because otherwise she could not have established the fact of the partnership. Again, my intuition tells me that outing Sharon was the morally acceptable thing to do. These three scenarios seem to provide a conflicting demand, and therefore these three examples provide an interesting focus for future research.

III. Storming the Castle

This dissertation has been more than a simple project to me. As a queer woman, both transgender and a lesbian, *who I am* is intrinsically linked to this topic. Further, the question of my own moral duty to come out has been an ever-present question on my mind. While the initial goal of this project was to examine how queer identities can help us to examine authenticity, a task that I still managed to explore within this broader topic of coming out, this project served in the end as a way to answer a question that is personal to my own experience of coming out. This question was to figure out what kind of obligation I have to come out.

The impetus for this line of inquiry is rooted in the Jack example at the start of the second chapter. Jack was a friend of mine during my undergraduate philosophy course. His influence was an important part into my first introductions into philosophy. But, more importantly for this dissertation, Jack is a transgender man. He was quite open about his queerness. He was both openly as well as visibly transgender. This was a part of his identity that he did not feel a need to hide from me. This visible representation of queerness was invaluable to me. Jack was the first, and at the time only, transgender person I knew.

I realized I was transgender during the summer before my last year of my undergraduate program. The realization of the fact that I was transgender was similar to the experience of other individuals in my position. If I had some cultural knowledge of transgender individuals, I may have had the opportunity to realize that there was something different about me. While I may not have had a neon sign over my head, in hindsight it is impossible to deny that I was a transgender woman, or if I had been given the chance, a transgender child. Unfortunately, my realization was sudden and came in a state of isolation. I felt miserable and depressed, as I did not know how to navigate my situation. While I may have been able to navigate a situation where I realized I was a queer man, I lacked any cultural or intellectual grounding for my actual realization. And I worried that this would be the state that I found myself in for the rest of my life.

Thankfully, I realized that I did know someone who was (and still is) transgender. While I do not have a way of checking other worlds to see if there were other options, the fact that I knew Jack was what saved me from a lack of knowledge about being transgender.[88] The fact that he was so visibly out in his queerness made me feel comfortable asking him about his experience. And it was his advice that allowed me to ground myself in my own queerness. I was able to ask him questions and gain support from him in my own journey of self-discovery. It was his support and his encouragement that allowed me to examine who I was and undertake the journey of my transition. And it was his support that I could lean on when I came out to my friends and family. From this point, however, I was left pondering a problem. I, at the very beginning of my journey, wondered what kind of obligation Jack had to be so open in his queerness. My flourishing and coming out was directly facilitated by his openness about his identity. Nevertheless, I questioned whether Jack *ought* to have been so visible in his queerness for the benefit of other queer people just like me. Further, I was left to wonder what

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[88] We could say that knowing Jack saved me from "knowing jack" about being transgender.

obligation *I* had to help other queer people in their journeys to come out and to understand themselves.

And so this question was left to simmer in my mind as I finished my undergraduate and my masters program. But finally, I could no more avoid this topic than I could deny my own queerness. Upon discovering Cooley's (2012) paper, the one that I so critically argued against in my second chapter, I knew that I had to figure out the answer to this question, or else I would be haunted by it. At this point, I feel satisfied that I have found that answer, and it will haunt me no more.

But finally, this is not an answer that I am content to let sit between these pages. As I have articulated at numerous times throughout this dissertation, I am open about my queerness. My hope is to continue this trend of highlighting my queerness in my work. In doing so, I wish to put into practice the very thing I have argued for. At various points throughout this dissertation, other queer people have come to me seeking advice and directions about their journey. By being so visibly out in my professional life, my goal is to serve as the Lighthouse I have so strongly argued for. Rather than placing my queerness as something I keep to myself in an effort to fit in and pass, I feel that my comfort and certainty in my identity means that I can act upon this answer. And further, I hope that my work can serve as a way of showing others the ways in which they can help closeted queer people on their own journeys.

So then, having explored this topic, if someone were to ask me if they have a duty to come out, my answer would be that they should only come out if they feel moved to help other queer people to come out. In other words, to echo Westley from *The Princess Bride,* you should come out…

As You Wish.

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