Civil Rights in a Queerly Political Era: Revisiting the Viability of the Ethnic Identity Model to Achieve Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Rights

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California State University, Monterey Bay
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Abstract

This research explores the ethnic identity model's use as a viable option for achieving equal civil rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. Building on social theory, queer theory, and queer politics, I explore the ethnic identity model as it was used for civil rights in the 1960s. Specifically, I revisit the model's viability for LGBTQ rights since the introduction of queer theory and queer politics. Queer theory has problematized identity and challenged the notion of fixed identity categories. Queer politics is changing the nature of our society's relationship to our sexual and gender identities. Views, assumptions, and opinions regarding those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer have changed a great deal. I have looked to academic literature and implemented a critical analysis of that literature for this discussion. Drawing on this body of literature, I revisit the practicality and the limitations of the ethnic identity model as it was applied to the gay liberation movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s, then I explore the possibility of applying the model to the queer movement of the 1980s and 1990s. I conclude with a discussion of the shortcomings of the model for its future use in equal rights for queers.
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Introduction

Despite Our Differences

In the last three decades there have been several attempts in gay politics to gain equal civil rights in the United States. Yet there seems to be a lot of disagreement regarding how to go about gaining those rights or how to define those rights. Some even argue that the queer community is asking for special rights. Within the queer community we continue to argue with each other about our politics. We question whether assimilation is something that could serve to liberate us. We question whether it is liberation that we are even seeking. We argue about how we should identify and about the use and meaning of the terms that we are going to identify ourselves with. We argue that our needs are different within the movement based on our gender, our sexuality, our desires, and our identities. We criticize each other for the differing politics we implement in an attempt to secure our rights. We accuse one another of speaking unjustly for an entire group meanwhile some of us choose to remain silent. In the end all of this proves counter productive. In the end we still don’t have equal rights. We are denied many of the rights enjoyed by those who follow the rules of heteronormativity.

Ultimately, we come together as a community in the face of adversity. We build lasting and meaningful relationships with others at these collaborative events. We support each other during rallies, activism, sustaining necessary AIDS programs, and candle light vigils when one of us falls in the name of justice. Despite our differences we are connected—to each other, to those around us, to the cause, to a means of civil rights and freedom, and to an end of the discrimination we face.
The Ties That Bind

Those of us who do not follow the moralistic rules of heteronormativity are bound together by a politics of sexual shame. We are seen as sexually deviant and this categorizes us as “Other.” Regardless of how we portray ourselves when we operate outside the realm of heterocentricity we all have one thing in common—we don’t share the same equal civil rights that are provided to those who enjoy heterosexual privilege. I see all forms of oppression as linked; however, I realize that oppression varies in degree. It is an issue of power. I believe that uniting within the queer community would enable us to empower ourselves. I am aware that sexual and gender identity oppression are not exactly the same as oppression experienced by other groups. The prejudice comes from the same basic premise that people of color, women, queers, and everyone else that have been “Othered” are an inferior version of some sort of original, desired, or preferred model of folks that belong to the dominant culture. I am also aware that even within an identity category there are subcategories, and that we all have multiple identities.

Throughout this paper I will refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community (LGBTQ) using the encompassing terms “queer” or “gay.” I will try to refer to the LGBTQ community as “queer” or “queers” for the most part because the term “gay” usually implies gay males. In some instances the term “gay” may be more appropriate, so I will use it then. Other times it might make more sense to use the acronym “LGBTQ.” There are also varying degrees of transgenderism, so I may refer to those terms in their appropriate degree. Gender expression and identity does not always reflect biology or assigned gender roles. I will attempt to keep all of this as clear as possible, but at times it becomes confusing to me as well because some of the terms used to address the LGBTQ community are still evolving.
The Complexities of Identity

I am very aware that many folks will not appreciate the use of the term “ethnic” or use of the ethnic identity model, in reference to the LGBTQ community. This has been an impasse for many who have written about, discussed, and participated in civil rights and gay rights movements. I am also aware that there are many who have opposed the notion that LGBTQ issues are similar to, or even comparable to, the oppression that people of color face. In addition, there are those who identify as bisexual or transgender who do not think the LGBTQ movement represents them or deals with the issues that they face. Furthermore, there are those who have multiple identities who do not feel that any single movement addresses the discrimination they face and, therefore, often feel pressured to identify more with one identity vs. the other. I am aware, too, that many folks who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender might not also identify as queer. My use of the term “queer” is mostly political.

Terms like “homosexual” are still attached to pathology. The term “lesbian” has Eurocentric roots stemming from the Sapphic Isle of Lesbos in Greece. The term “bisexual” carries with it notions of discrimination in that those who identify as such many be seen as trying to keep their heterocentric status and/or heterosexual privilege. Both the heterosexual and queer communities often see those who identify as bisexual as outsiders because they are viewed as promoting the notion that sexual identity is a choice. In the early stages of the AIDS Crisis, when AIDS was still considered a “gay cancer,” (Hallet, 1997, p. 120) bisexual practices were blamed as the link that transmitted the disease between the queer and heterosexual cultures. The term “transgender” has also been pathologized and is often confused with transsexual, transvestite, or intersexed folks. I use queer in an attempt to have an inclusive discussion and relieve some of the stigma attached to all the labels and categories. I am aware, too, that queer is still used as an epithet.
Conversely, there are those who are attempting to reappropriate the term. I see the term "queer" as inclusive to anyone who does not identify with heterocentric culture.

In short, I am aware that this is a highly sensitive topic and I will do my best to write about it ethically, be mindful of the audience, recognize my privilege, and be conscious of the effects of my work. In no way do I mean to imply that race, class, or gender do not play important roles in identity. I realize that there are issues that people of color face or that women face within the gay movement that are not experienced by those who are white, socio-economically advantaged, men, or otherwise privileged. I do not mean to invalidate those issues. I am trying to work from the position that power and powerlessness have similar effects on all folks regardless of the situation. My interest is in civil rights and human rights for all folks. The issue of why we all don’t have the same rights is a complex and multi-layered one.

I can only start from my personal experience as a white woman who identifies as queer. From this positionality, I will approach the topic of whether the LGBTQ community constitutes an ethnic group based on the qualifications and criteria of suspect and quasi-suspect class. These criteria have been previously implemented for both the rights of women and the rights of people of color. I am not seeking to create an entirely new legal and judicial system but to simply be recognized as a group rather than a deviant behavior. The model, for me, could be a means to obtain rights and not just a means of assimilation.

In other words, within lesbian and gay liberation politics there is a danger in trying to gain civil rights as an ending point to our politics. That danger is assimilation. It is not just about gaining rights but having the right to choose to exercise those rights, while also keeping our culture, our identity, our history, and our ethnicity in tact. I do not necessarily want these rights but I want to have the choice and to be able to make those decisions for myself. I do not want to
keep reading about the crimes, discrimination, and even deaths of those who do not fit into what our society considers normal.

Revisiting the Use of the Ethnic Identity Model

Addressing the issue of queer rights is, minimally, a tri-fold approach. First, it seems as though it is still accepted on some level that we do not have the same equal civil rights as those who identify as heterosexual. Second, in the last several years there have been many anti-gay initiatives passed. Third, we still don’t have our basic civil rights yet there are those who argue that we are asking for special rights. Clearly, there are dissenting views on which rights are more important, if we are asking for special rights, or how we should go about getting those rights.

By means of mainly queer theory and social theory I am researching whether the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community can use the ethnic identity model to obtain equal civil rights. Additionally, I am interested in the hegemony of heterosexuality and the underlying legal parameters in which it exists. I will explore the ethnic identity model’s use as a viable option for achieving equal civil rights for the queer community. I think we need to take another look at the ethnic identity model’s viability for gay rights.

I chose to study the ethnic identity model’s use for queer civil rights for several reasons. The idea of using the ethnic identity model for gay rights certainly isn’t a new one. I am working from the assumption that the political climate has changed since the model was considered for gay rights in the early 1970s. In addition to the change in the political climate we now have queer theory/politics to work with. Another relevant incident since the model was first suggested for gay rights has been the AIDS Crisis. This event in our history has changed significantly the
way we look at rights. Early on the largest population affected by AIDS was the gay population. Political rhetoric told us that AIDS was a gay disease. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer activists became the leaders in the fight against AIDS. This changed the way our politics were viewed. It also changed the way others viewed us. The undercurrent was that we were an expendable community. We were forced to speed up our political agenda. In many ways this worked against us.

Using the ethnic identity model in conjunction with queer theory/politics will undoubtedly look different than it did in the 1970s. I think the key to coming up with a model that will work is to be flexible. There is still a lot of room in queer theory to take a critical look and expand upon it. There is also a lot of discussion, in queer theory, surrounding assimilation and social construction and whether one is better than the other or whether we should reject one or both. Part of the concern of queer theory is that it has problematized identity categories; however, this has also been seen as one of its strengths. There needs to be some kind of systematic approach to the issue of civil rights because the reality is that civil rights have been socially constructed and exist inside a categorized institution.

This research is an attempt to address these and other issues. At times the discussion lends itself to the abstract theories of the politics associated with identity, sexuality, and equal rights. I offer some concrete explanations for these abstractions in the chapters to follow. In Chapter One I discuss, in greater detail, queer theory and queer politics as it relates to the queer movements in the latter part of the 20th Century. Additionally, I explain the need for equal rights, and a possible means of achieving those rights. In Chapter Two I explain the ethnic identity model as I have utilized it for this project. Chapter Three discusses the methodology that I employed for the
analysis of the literature. In Chapter Four I analyze that literature. Chapter Five discusses those findings and provides discussions, implications, and recommendations for further study.
Chapter One

Looking Back: A Brief Historical Overview

"Freedom is indivisible or it is nothing at all besides sloganeering and temporary, short-sighted, and short-lived advancement for a few."


The homophile movement gained recognition in the 1950s and 1960s. Hogan and Hudson, (1998) suggest that the term “homophile” was originally used as an alternative to the term “homosexual.” Eventually both terms were replaced by the term “gay.” The Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society were the first groups to organize in the United States (D’Emilio, 1983; Kennedy and Davis, 1993). The homophile movement set out to promote tolerance and understanding of homosexuality. The movement was based on the theory that homosexuality was a character trait and a psychological abnormality. The homophile movement “sought to abolish the homosexual as a distinct social identity. They intended social assimilation” (Seidman, 1997a, p.111). There have been many important happenings in the gay movement before the Stonewall Riots. These pre-Stonewall events shaped the current queer culture, however, the Stonewall incident is often thought of as the start of the gay liberation movement. I included some historical data from the end of the 19th Century, when medical publications started to include sexual identity as a pathology, to post World War II identities, and identities in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

The gay liberation movement in the United States was brought to the forefront in 1969 when the police in New York City raided the Stonewall Inn, a bar in Greenwich Village. For the first time, gays fought back as a group. The liberation movement set out to
“abolish a sex and gender system that privileges heterosexuality and men” (Seidman, 1997a, p.114). It was an attempt to challenge the dichotomies of male/female and homo/heterosexual gender roles and to establish a social identity for those who were lesbian or gay. It was also a “gender revolution.” In the early 1970s the goals of gay liberation were to reveal that the established social order was fundamentally corrupt, to reject the notion that homosexuality was a psychological abnormality, and to reject assimilation politics.

In 1973 the American Psychological Association removed homosexuality from its second edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-II). Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders, however, remain in the forth and most recent edition of the DSM, the *DSM IV*. Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders include Fetishism, Sexual Masochism, Sexual Sadism, Transvestic Fetishism, and a general Gender Identity Disorder. (DSM-IV, 1994, p. 526-538). Included in the definition of Gender Identity Disorder for children is the desire to play with toys or wear clothes intended for the other gender. In adults Gender Identity Disorder is recognized by the preoccupation “with their wish to live as a member of the other sex” (p. 533). These definitions still imply that anything other that heteronormative desires should be classified as a pathology and that those “inflicted” require treatment.

By the mid 1970s an alternative to the liberationist model for lesbian and gay rights was gaining popularity. An ethnic model of identity for the lesbian and gay movement “emphasized community identity and cultural difference” (Jagose, 1996, p. 59). In contrast to the liberationist model, the ethnic identity model was seeking an established identity for lesbians and gays as a legitimate ethnic group so that equal rights could be
gained. Gay politics in the 1970s took more of a transformative approach where the arguments centered on how liberation was defined as a transformation between all sexual and gender relationships.

In the latter part of the 20th Century, the lesbian and gay movement has transformed tremendously and the politics have changed dramatically, yet there continues to be controversy within the movement itself. The ethnic identity model emphasized unique values within each group, thus, started the creation of the subgroups within the gay community. The subgroups were initially divided into the categories of “lesbian feminists” and “gay men.” Within those categories many subgroups of lesbians and gays emerged. At the same time the ethnic model united the lesbian and gay community and created a unified gay identity. This new unified identity alienated those with multiple identities, forcing them to choose between their “sexual orientation ethnicity” and any other ethnicity that might be part of their identity. With the advent of queer theory and queer politics, in the early 1990s, many have attempted to address these controversies.

Queer Theory

To define queer theory we must first define “queer.” The arguments still continue regarding what it means to “be” queer. Most dictionaries define queer as “odd,” “unconventional,” “deviating from the expected or normal,” “fake,” “feeling ill,” “strange,” or “counterfeit.” These definitions bring up many questions themselves. First, do we want to align our politics with a word that has historically been seen in this light? Second, how do we define things like “unconventional” or “normal” and then measure deviation from this place? Third can a theory that is based on problematizing all forms of normative and deviant identity as socially
constructed lend its use to a model that is based on identity categories? Socially constructed terms and ideas can and do have very real effects on culture and politics and ultimately on individuals. Many have theorized that sexuality and gender are socially constructed terms and ideas. And so then the notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality have been constructed as well. The discourse that gets attached to these terms that renders them powerful or powerless seems to be as fluid as the terms themselves.

In 1892 when Dr. James G. Kiernan published an article in a Chicago medical journal using the word “heterosexual,” heterosexuality was not perceived as “normal” the way it is today. Heterosexuality was defined as, “abnormal manifestations of the sexual appetite” and “sexual perversions proper” (Katz, 1995, p. 20). This definition of heterosexuality was associated with the medical condition “psychical hermaphroditism.” In just over 100 years the term has gone from being a perversion to the driving force behind political arguments, by declaring heterosexuality as “normal.” In 1893 Richard von Krafft-Ebing, a professor of psychiatry and neurology, published a book with his own definition of heterosexuality. His terms served to pathologize sexuality. He defined non-procreative desire as, “pathological sexual instinct” and “contrary sexual instinct.” He referred to reproductive desire as “sexual instinct” (Katz, p. 21).

The foundation of queer theory is that it challenges not only socially constructed categories but categories in general and specifically bi-oppositional categories. Queer theory rejects the notion that identity and specifically sexual or gender identity are essentialist categories. As Gayle Rubin (1984) points out, “It is impossible to think with any clarity about the politics of race or gender as long as these are thought of as biological entities rather than as social constructs” (p. 10). Additionally, it is impossible to think about sexuality in a clear fashion when we not only talk about sexuality in biological terms but in negative terms as well.

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In the United States our cultural relationship with sex is that it is something that we shouldn’t and don’t really talk about. And when we do talk about it we should use euphemisms that make it sound “nice.” There is an undercurrent in our culture that sex and sexuality are bad, dirty, deviant, and should only be practiced for procreation and even then not enjoyed too much. Sexuality is often suspect when expressed in ways that deviate from this normativity. Queer sexuality then, by way of these definitions, is automatically suspect.

Addressing gender and gender identity within the equation of queer theory only further complicates the concept. When speaking of gender the conversation can get somewhat confusing. We start using terms like “sex,” “sexuality,” “gender bending,” “gender fuck,” “gender outlaw,” “gender queer,” “gender blending,” “transsexual,” “transgender,” “transvestite,” “daddi,” “boi,” “butch,” “femme,” “androgynous,” “dyke,” and many other terms. There is still the issue that, regardless of how we choose to identify, others might place us in a different category based on outward appearance or our political practices. Queer theory, then, according to Theresa de Lauretis (1991) “was arrived at in the effort to avoid all of these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols, not to adhere to any one of the given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, but instead to both transgress and transcend them—or at the very least problematize them” (p. v). This brings us back to the question of identity, identity politics, the politics of identity, and the ethnic identity model.

The action of socially identifying is such a complex one that we cannot simply identify as part of a group and then just move forward with that identity forever. There are assumptions and sometimes responsibilities that we take on as part of a particular identity. Every day we struggle with the need to identify and the politics, reactions, and consequences of that. Part of identifying is figuring out your relationship to that identity.
When I am among a group of primarily heterosexuals I oscillate between feeling silenced and the need to announce proudly my identity and what it means to me. Among a group of primarily gay men I sometimes feel the need to clearly mark the difference between their gayness and my lesbianism. Among other lesbians I sometimes feel the need to further clarify my lesbianism into butch and femme or queer. Throughout all of these experiences there are questions of what transgender really means and should I lay any claim to that identity. In its simplest definition transgender means to travel between gender roles. If gender is something that has been constructed, then wouldn't it make sense that we are all transcend gender to some degree?

**Queer Politics**

Queer politics is not necessarily replacing lesbian and gay politics but, rather, attempting to be more inclusive. While queer politics is still striving for the elimination of discrimination, social assimilation is not one of its main goals. It does not seek tolerance, but rather questions and challenges the institutionalized power that has come to be known as the dominant culture. It focuses more on the social reflection (or lack) of the cultural construction of the discourse of privileged status. In other words, queer politics focuses on the cause of the cause. Queer politics questions whether it is queers who don’t fit into the system or whether the system was created to include only a selected few.

Historically, sexual identities have been politicized. Our politics continue to change and the gay community continues to disagree on what “equal rights for gays” means, and whether or not that includes assimilation into marriage, the military, and other such social functions of our society or simply embracing the diversity we share as a group. Rather
than looking to assimilate into mainstream culture queer politics is seeking a more inclusive, more liberated way of being. Queer politics and the ethnic identity model have the potential to employ a more encompassing politic. Queer politics is not asking for a place at the table, but instead questions whether or not we should even want a place at that particular table.

The Need for Equal Civil Rights

Queers need the right to own property or have access to housing without the fear of discrimination based on our identity. We need custodial rights in adoption and to our biological children. We need the right to express ourselves, without fear of repercussion, outside of the binary terms that have been constructed for gender. We need the right to feel safe and have some comfort in knowing that we will not be assaulted simply for being queer. We need the right to engage in activities that presently only serve to marginalize us further. We need the right to keep our history and culture and to be able to share it with others. Otherwise we run the risk of it fading away or being discounted. Minimally, we run the risk of becoming assimilated into mainstream culture and even if we keep some of our queer culture it blends into what would then be a new culture. This new blended culture—a combination of queer culture and dominant culture—would still be different than the current queer culture. This is not only an act of assimilation but also a demand that we change our identity to coincide with this new blended culture.

Several things occurred in our history that may have hindered the attempt at using the ethnic identity model successfully for gay rights. Many anti-gay, anti-racial, anti-woman, and anti-gender based movements were a part of the Reagan Era. The gay community has
also had to channel a lot of energy into the AIDS Crisis. However, even shadowed by the AIDS pandemic our politics keeps changing. The need for civil rights for those who identify as lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transgender, or queer is not about special rights; it is about equal rights. We deserve the same dignity, respect, and protection that others enjoy based on their access to civil rights.

Evidently, The Constitution of the United States does not represent all citizens. The Fourteenth Amendment, which was supposed to give everyone “equal protection under the law,” clearly does not apply to queers:

Amendment XIV - Citizenship rights. Ratified 7/9/1868.

1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

In May of 1996 the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives to ensure that legal same-sex marriages in Hawaii could not be upheld in other states under the Full Faith and Credit clause of the U.S. Constitution. DOMA was passed by overwhelming margins in both the House and the Senate and was signed into law by President Clinton in September 1996 in the middle of the night” (Sullivan, 1997, p.201). This is the first bill to ever regulate marriage at the federal level. In the November 1998 elections, the same-sex initiative was on the ballot in Hawaii, it too was overwhelmingly voted down.

On March 07, 2000 California passed the Knight initiative, enforcing the law that queers cannot marry one another. The Knight Initiative set out to regulate marriage stating that
“marriage is a union between one man and one woman.” Through the rhetoric of politics, the Fourteenth Amendment was not employed to protect our rights—because technically we didn’t have the rights to protect. The Knight Initiative pointed out that we are still divided among ourselves and that we have not organized as a group. When the Knight initiative passed, it opened up the political leverage for all gay rights to be federally mandated; thus we will probably be fighting for the same rights again and again in individual states.

The issue is about rights and not marriage. The issue is about choices and who gets to make them for whom. The issue is about the moral judgment placed upon our humanity and the ethical implications of that judgment. Patterns of discrimination have been used historically against many different groups depending on the political climate. Wolfson (1996) speaks to one of these patterns when he says, “People today forget how the language now being used against same-sex couples’ equal marriage rights not so long ago was used against interracial couples—denying people’s equal human dignity and freedom to share the rights and responsibilities of marriage” (p. 131). In Loving v. Virginia an inter-racial couple were convicted of violating Virginia’s miscegenation law, the law stated that “All marriages between a white person and a [sic] colored person shall be absolutely void without any decree of divorce or other legal process” (Wolfson, 1996, p. 130). The ruling against Loving v. Virginia took place in 1969, only 27 years later in 1996, we have seen similar patterns and language with the passage of DOMA against queer rights to marry.

Queers are denied equal protection under the law everyday. Perhaps the most unsettling is when we see it in the reluctance to call crimes against us hate crimes. When Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone were assassinated in 1978 the defense was that the assailant, Dan White, had eaten too much sugar and basically couldn’t help himself. He was, apparently, rendered
temporarily insane. He claimed he had been having some emotional difficulty for several days and had consumed a large quantity of Twinkies. His defense became known as “The Twinkie Defense.” It worked. He only received a 6-year sentence (only 4 of which were served) and his crime was reduced to manslaughter, even though White had planned beforehand to murder both men. He walked straight into their offices, after entering through a basement window to avoid metal detectors, and shot Mayor Moscone, he then proceeded to walk down the hall and shoot Harvey Milk (Shilts, 1988).

Two decades later, in 1993, Brandon Teena who formerly went by the name Teena Brandon was assaulted and one week later he was murdered (Gabriel, 1995). Brandon Teena had been born biologically female but had been passing and living as male. The police printed Brandon’s biological identity in a local paper after he was charged with a minor offence. Upon discovering this, John Lotter and Marvin Thomas Nissen kidnapped, assaulted, and raped Brandon. Then they threatened to kill him if he reported the assault to the police. Brandon did report the assault, but the sheriff focused his investigation on Brandon’s gender identity and status as a gender outlaw rather than on the assault.

The assailants subsequently murdered Brandon and two of his friends. They confronted Brandon who was staying with friends and shot him and the two others. They repeatedly stabbed Brandon after he has already been shot. The defendants claimed that they were “enraged” at their discovery that Brandon was biologically female. Even after Lotter and Nissen were convicted for Brandon’s murder they were never charged with the rape. There has never been any further investigation into whether the police played a role in Brandon’s murder by either publishing his identity or failing to arrest Lotter or Nissan earlier.
In 1998, when Matthew Shepard was murdered his behavior, too, immediately became suspect. The media proposed that he might have somehow provoked this attack with his behavior preceding the event. There were also questions regarding whether or not this was simply a robbery that got out of hand. The assailants tied Matthew Shepard to a fence and beat him with the butt of a gun while he pleaded for his life. It was only after he was unconscious that they took his wallet and his shoes and left.

The reluctance to recognize this as a hate crime then allowed attorneys for the defendants, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, to try and employ the “gay panic defense.” McKinney’s attorneys argued that McKinney “flew into a drug-influenced rage” against homosexuality because of its moral corruptness (Black, 1999). The premise was that McKinney who had suffered an alleged childhood trauma at the hands of a “homosexual” was enraged when confronted with Matthew Shepard’s gayness and so he went temporarily insane and killed him. Fortunately, the judge didn’t allow this defense. The fact that McKinney and Henderson’s lawyer would even suggest such a defense is not only a “blame the victim” strategy but an insinuation that being gay is so offensive that it can lead one to commit murder.

Most recently in January of 2001, in San Francisco, Diane Whipple was mauled to death in the doorway of her apartment. The dog, which was one of two dogs that lived in the same apartment building, attacked and killed Whipple as she opened the door to her apartment one afternoon. The guardians of the dogs, Robert Noel and Marjorie Knoller, both attorneys, later speculated that Whipple might have been responsible for the attack by not lying still as she was being attacked, or by not retreating into her apartment (Williams, 2001). They further suggested that the dog was not aggressive and perhaps Whipple, who was a lacrosse coach, may have been taking steroids or wearing pheromone-based perfume (Adams, 2001). Again, we see an
underlying assumption that somehow Whipple must have provoked this attack. Whipple’s life partner, Sharon Smith, is preparing to sue in a landmark wrongful death suit. During the pending case Smith will have the monumental task of trying to justify that her relationship with Whipple was as relevant as a heterosexual relationship.

We do not even have equal rights, yet there are those who argue we are asking for special rights. Special rights would be rights in addition to the rights that all others enjoy. Using this argument then it would make sense that everyone else already has special rights. Yet the queer community still lacks many basic civil rights. We will never have equal rights if we spend all of our time fighting for each individual right one at a time. That is just bad politics and will only serve to wear us down as a community—however defined.

The Politics of Identity

Identity politics, as it has come to be known, is what was once referred to as the “ethnic model” or “ethnic identity model.” Use of the ethnic identity model for gay liberation is not a new concept. An ethnic identity model for gay liberation started gaining recognition in the late 1970s in the gay liberation movement. The ethnic identity model was intended to provide unity between lesbians and gay men within the community based on the idea of “a common homosexual experience, identity, and interest” (Seidman, 1997b, p. 190). The gay liberation movement was the beginning of the connection to the civil rights model. Although the gay liberation movement is based on the racial model the similarities are limited.

Even though the ethnic identity model proved effective in creating unity between some lesbians and gay men its application to the gay community also exemplified a white, male, and middle class bias in whom it was representing. Seen in this light, the use of the ethnic identity
model in gay liberation implied a collective homosexual experience and identity. While identity politics is most effective within a collective identity, the definition of such an identity, in this case, could be more beneficial if it was loosely referred to as queer. In other words, it could be defined as anything that isn’t mainstream ideology. If we change its parameters, the ethnic identity model could provide that collective identity for queers, much like it did for African Americans during the civil rights movement, without the risk of assimilation.

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the use of the ethnic identity model for gay liberation. The controversy has been approached from many angles. Essentially, the opinions expressed are that lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered, and queer folks are choosing to engage and exhibit deviant behavior and then asking the government for “special rights” that other groups are not entitled to. If gayness is deemed an ethnicity then it could also be assumed that those identifying as LGBTQ would share identities with others represented within the community. The goal of the use of the ethnic identity model in gay liberation is for those who are gender and sexuality “outlaws” to have access to the same civil rights that are enjoyed by other groups in the United States. Included in that goal is the recognition and enforcement of the same anti-discrimination laws that apply to other groups.

The notion that homosexuality is ethically, morally, or socially wrong allows further rhetoric that we are asking for special rights and, therefore, corrupting the moral fabric of society. It brings up the point, too, that identity is a complex issue and perhaps the solution needs to be more complex then simply identifying as an ethnic group. I am not arguing totally against assimilation and not simply for tolerance, but for freedom and fluidity of the diversity within queer culture instead of creating so many different subcultural categories. The ethnic identity
model can be a means of attaining this diversity as well as bringing all of the subgroups together for political strength.

The ideology that a movement cannot be fluid but that it needs to have rigid guidelines is perhaps the difficulty the gay movement is facing. Rather than trying to achieve rights within those guidelines we might propose new guidelines as a basis for the beginning point of our argument. Since most of the conversations taking place in the public sphere regarding queer rights are mainly in educational settings or political areas, it may be appropriate to reintroduce the ethnic identity model into our politics through academia, through queer studies and queer theory.

In this chapter I have given a brief overview of the history of the gay movement and addressed the need for equal rights. I have introduced queer theory and queer politics as a basic example of how I will refer to them in this research. With this research I intend to address the question of whether or not queer theory and queer politics will be a useful addition to the ethnic identity model in resolving the issue of equal civil rights for the LGBTQ community.

In Chapter Two, I will describe ethnicity, ethnic groups, and ethnic identity models as I have approached them in relation to this research. There have been several identity models created in several different disciplines. I discuss their qualities and limitations in the next chapter and define what I am referring to as the ethnic identity model in greater detail.
Chapter Two

The Ethnic Identity Model

It is important to be clear about what the terms "ethnic," "ethnicity," and "ethnic group" mean. They mean different things to different groups of folks. Often the term "ethnicity" is used interchangeably with the terms "race" or "culture." I have presented several different viewpoints and definitions of ethnicity and ethnic groups that have been explored. From there I move into a discussion of who qualifies as an ethnic group; I, then, offer the definition(s) of the term(s) and model(s) as I have used them; this is followed by an evaluation of the ethnic identity model for LGBTQ rights; and finally I explore the possibility of applying queer theory and queer politics to the identity model(s).

Definition of an Ethnic Group

The following definitions of ethnicity are rooted in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, law, and political science. There are many definitions of ethnic identity and ways in which one identifies. Each discipline has its own theories of identity. There are also many explanations offered to how/where/when ethnicity or identity begins or evolves. Aside from self-identity, identities can include ethnic, racial, political, national, and cultural elements. Additionally, the theories include whether identity is formed by these elements or merely influenced by them.
I begin with these definitions of ethnic identity in an attempt to demonstrate that many definitions do not necessarily relate ethnicity to racial or national origin. Although most folks understand and use the concepts of ethnicity as defined in relation to race or nationality, they are not always used in that context. As Jeffery Weeks (1995) points out, "Concepts of national identity have been intricately bound up with notions of appropriate gendered or sexualized behavior" (p. 36). If ethnicity is seen in relation to national origin then Week’s notion of national identity poses a problem for the queer community to identify as an ethnic group with a national identity. Within the queer community there are many different gendered and sexualized roles as well as other elements that contribute to identity. Additionally, queer identity tends to vary geographically. For instance, in sections of the country where there are gay ghettos (i.e., San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, and so on) queer identity is quite different than it would be in a location where there is an absence of queer culture. This brings up the question of whether ethnicity is then an identity based on external physical proximity or internal self-actualized identity.

In his book *Economy and Society*, Max Weber (1978) describes ethnicity by stating that:

> ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind. 
particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity (p. 389).

Everet Hughes (1994) describes ethnicity in his book *On Work, Race and the Sociological Imagination*, as:

> An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups: it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in it and the people out of it know
that it is one; because both the *ins* and the *outs* talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group. This is possible only if there are ways of telling who belongs to the group and who does not, and if a person learns early, deeply, and usually irrevocably to what group [sic] he belongs. If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group (p. 91).

The first definition refers to ethnicity as politically based and as a belief, which implies that a member of that ethnic group has a choice of whether or not to join the group. The second definition tells us that a true ethnic group is one that people intrinsically belong to but must become conscious of this sense of belonging.

Richard Jenkins (1997), in his book *Rethinking Ethnicity*, claims that we need to rethink the social constructionist model of ethnicity that is supported within social anthropology. He presents a model of identity as support for his claim. He adds that while the following points are fundamental they are not meant to be an all-inclusive description of ethnicity:

- Ethnicity is about cultural differentiation (bearing in mind that identity is always a dialectic between similarity and difference);
- Ethnicity is concerned with culture—shared meaning—but it is also rooted in, and the outcome of, social interaction;
- Ethnicity is no more fixed than the culture of which it is a component, or the situation in which it is produced or reproduced;
- Ethnicity is both collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and internalized in personal self-identification (p. 165).
These definitions move from politically based to a collective identity with a sense of belonging to a cultural, collective, and self-identified meaning. Based on these examples it is still unclear as to what ethnicity “is.” Although Jenkins includes both internal and external experiences to define ethnicity there is still an underlying assumption in these examples that queerness still may be categorized into biology or choice. The definitions provided leave plenty of room for this discussion.

Who Qualifies as an Ethnic Group?

The question of qualification as a member of an ethnic group is a complex one. Depending on the definition of ethnicity there can be cultural, social, political, individual, and collective criteria included in the concept of ethnicity and ethnic groups. Paisley Currah (1997) offers one such concept in her essay *Politics, Practices, Publics: Identity and Queer Rights*. She claims that identity is constructed through practices that take place in both the public and private sphere. She presents the relationship between liberalism and queer rights in a public sphere. She notes that one of the critiques of liberalism is that its practice has not always lived up to its theory. The flawed elements of liberalism have led to the “politics of difference” rendering “the political claims of identity-based groups non-negotiable” (1997, p. 235).

This speaks directly to the division in politics within the gay liberation movement. If we are trying to operate within a movement that takes our private actions and places them in a public sphere we open ourselves up to a critique by those who oppose our politics. This limits us in so many ways. By publicly presenting our political needs we are, in a sense, requesting feedback. Our action of disagreeing with one another no longer becomes the focus in the public sphere but, rather, the issue of our civil rights becomes the focus. Status as an ethnic group could have a
positive effect on an argument that we have long been facing in the gay community. I am referring to the debate of whether we choose to “be” gay or if it is an innate function.

Sexual theories have long been preoccupied with social constructionism and essentialism—neither of which accurately describes the politics of identity for queers. The process by which one comes to know one’s identity or how one’s identity is created is often the subject of debate. Frequently, the debates are centered in the dispositional categories of “psychological reductionism” and “social reductionism.” In addition to individual identity these concepts can be applied to ethnic identity based on the definitions we saw earlier in this chapter. One such polar debate is the essentialist-constructionist debate of identity. This debate is most notably referred to when the question is posed regarding whether sexual identity or gender identity is a choice or is based in biology. Essentialists theorize that identity is a fixed characteristic that comes from within and generally must be discovered. Social constructionists theorize that the formation of one’s identity is an unconscious choice based on specific social roles and can vary over the course of one’s life. Not all theorists have accepted the explanations for either one category over the other. For example, Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue, “identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society” (p. 174). Psychologist Erik Erikson (1974) theorized that identity is constructed relationally through interactions with significant others and integration into communities.

During the 1970s, a “new ethnicity” was announced by social scientists at the same time that lesbian and gay identity began its comparison to ethnicity. The core of Stephen Epstein’s (1987) essay Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity: The Limits of Social Constructionism, is his analysis of the essentialist-constructionist debate and how these theories shape identity. He explores the possibility that gay identity can be measured by social theory. In referring to the LGBTQ

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community as an ethnic group, the issue of primary and secondary socialization is raised by those who construct social categories. If we follow the cultural model of ethnicity then ethnicity is something that is inherited generationally and viewed as a "primary socialization." A form of queer culture, in contrast, is usually acquired later in life after one has already had the experience of primary socialization; therefore, it is viewed as a "secondary socialization."

To summarize Epstein's examples: 1) the new ethnicity becomes instrumental in the pursuit of sociopolitical goals; 2) ethnic-group activity takes place in relevant communities; 3) the new ethnicity is "forward-looking" while the old ethnicity is "backward-looking"; 4) the new ethnicity is not a new group but an individualized group that is still part of society; 5) the new ethnicity is inclined to appeal to hegemony on issues of equality; and 6) the new ethnic politics will address local and community issues.

The "new ethnicity" seemed to be a very politically motivated model of ethnicity while incorporating social and cultural group identities. The very performative nature of the roles occupied by heteronormative society and the queer community allows for the exchange of identity positions between both groups. Identity, then, becomes not a tool of oppression but a means of political leverage.

What is the Ethnic Identity Model?

There have been several identity models developed for various reasons. Racial models were developed in response to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, others grew out of the feminist movement that demonstrated lesbianism as an active choice, and several group and individual models have been developed for psychological and sociological concerns. Most of the models have been presented as typology or stage models. In their article *Revisioning Sexual*
*Minority Identity Formation*, Susan R. McCarn and Ruth E. Fassinger (1996) review several existing models of lesbian and gay identity, racial identity, and women’s identity development.

The following models are a sampling of their examples.

The most often cited model of racial identity formation is that of Cross (1971). It was created to describe the liberation of Black activists into a positive Black identity:

1. pre-encounter, involving political naiveté and dependence on White dominance;
2. encounter, involving a challenge to the individual’s view of self and other Blacks;
3. immersion-emersion, involving immersion in the Black world and hostility toward whites;
4. internalization, involving the incorporation of learnings into the self-concept; and
5. internalization-commitment, representing a transformation to conscious anger, self-love, Black communalism.

The most widely cited model for lesbian and gay identity development is that of Cass (1979). The model demonstrates six stages of lesbian and gay identity that, according to Cass, result in self-conceptualization:

1. identity confusion, involving questioning assumptions about one’s sexual orientation;
2. identity comparison, involving feelings of isolation and alienation from both prior assumptions and nongay others;
3. identity tolerance, involving seeking out other gay people and tolerating a lesbian/gay identity;
4. identity acceptance, involving selective identity disclosure to others;
5. identity pride, involving immersion in lesbian/gay culture and rejection to heterosexual values; and

6. identity synthesis, in which lesbian/gay identity becomes one aspect of the self instead of an overriding independent identity.

Sophie (1985-1986) created the first known model developed specifically for women. It was created to be a linear model:

1. first awareness
2. testing and exploration
3. identity acceptance
4. identity integration

Troiden (1989) created a sociological model by synthesizing several lesbian and gay identity models and came up with his model:

1. sensitization
2. identity confusion
3. identity assumption
4. identity commitment

Several identity models have been developed so that counseling psychologists can work with patients to predict issues that may arise so that they can be "properly recognized and treated as normative developmental issues, rather than as indications of pathology" (McCarn and Fassinger, p. 509). These models focus on the individual’s relationship to society and how that individual can relate to the different phases/stages of realization. Then the implication is that the individual
must "learn" to operate successfully within this system. The models don't take into consideration that it may in fact be the system that the individual is reacting to. Once among others who think, feel, and act as they do the model's usefulness becomes a mute point. There is nothing for the individual to come to terms with.

Evaluation of the Ethnic Identity Model for LGBTQ Rights

I didn't find the stage models use for psychological implications helpful because they focus more on the individual. Rhetoric like "identity acceptance," "identity confusion," and "identity tolerance" suggests that there is a heterocentric norm. There is a danger in these models in that they serve to repathologize homosexuality by implicitly stating that one must come to terms with these alternate identities and then accept it. Further statements imply that developmental "issues" must be normalized implying that there is a normative to follow and conform to. Stage models can set us up for failure in that they require that everyone go through all the stages in a certain order. What if one doesn't experience one or more of the stages? What if one experiences all the stages, but in a different order? What if one experiences different stages along with or instead of the proposed stages?

Racial models, like the psychological models for sexual identity, have been defined by stages where it is implied that one discovers their inadequacy, learns to deal with and accept it, and moves into an assimilationist ways of being. It would be a much more productive if an identity model were created by self actualizing with the culture that one belongs to instead of trying to "measure up to" or "fit into" a model that only represents a segment of the population. Unlike counseling models, ethnic and racial models can provide an identity without necessarily expecting the individual to "come to terms" with anything about themselves. The counseling
models make assumptions that the socialized norm is the preferred way of being and that the individual is striving to be part of that norm. The implication is that there is something that needs to be "fixed" and that individuals who identify as LGBTQ are striving for normalcy.

Two important works that address the issue of normalcy are Andrew Sullivan’s (1995) *Virtually Normal* and Michael Warner’s *The Trouble With Normal* (1999). As the titles might suggest Sullivan is striving toward "normalcy" where Warner is pointing out that an effort to normalize maybe problematic. Sullivan says in reference to his childhood memories "I was, in other words, virtually normal. Like many homosexuals, I have spent some time looking back and trying to decipher what might have caused my apparent aberration" (p. 9). He makes three assumptions that I can see in that brief passage. First, he assumes that there is a "normal" way of being and that he was only "virtually" so. Second, he assumes that his homosexuality was a result of something that went wrong in his identity development that caused this "aberration." And third when he assumes that many other homosexuals have done similar reflecting and come to the same conclusion: homosexuality is something that must be discovered, and therefore essentialist.

Warner disagrees with Sullivan’s quest for normalcy. Most notably they disagree politically. Sullivan believes that if same-sex marriage laws are passed then this will somehow normalize the LGBTQ community and the gay movement will be over—assuming that the movement is something that needs to end. Warner sees marriage as unethical and discriminatory. He states that marriage seeks to normalize same-sex couples. His overarching concern and the problem he sees with normalcy is that “People who are defined by the variant set of norms commit a kind of social suicide when they begin to measure the worth of their relationships and their way of life by the yardstick of normalcy” (p. 59).
The connection I am trying to make here is that attempting to normalize the LGBTQ community is still oppressive. Although there may be some members of the community who are seeking normalization there are many who are not. Normalizing is just another form of assimilation. I would like to note that while I have presented these two works in opposition there are several other ways to identify within the queer community. It is a mistake to say that we must choose one collective way. My vision of an identity model is more fluid and inclusive.

Omi and Winant (1994) in their book *Racial Formation in the United States*, talk about racial identity paradigms rather than a model of identity. In particular they talk about the racial paradigm, which has passed through many stages.

1. A pre 1930s stage that challenged a biologicist approach that claimed that whites were superior, and white skin was the norm and other skin colors were exotic mutations that needed to be explained. Most notable, for the purposes of this research, were the distinctions between intelligence, temperament and sexuality of people of color that were a part of this stage in the paradigm.

2. The next stage, from the 1930s to the civil rights movement, that developed a concept of cultural pluralism, was introduced in opposition to the biologicistical theory of race and assimilation became an avenue to explore. Assimilation was viewed as a logical and natural response to racial dilemmas and suggested that there was a pathological aspect to Black culture that assimilation would cure.

3. In the post 1965 phase people of color rejected ethnic identity in favor of racial identity, which demanded group rights and recognition rather than assimilation. The civil rights movement, of course, influenced this phase of the paradigm.
I include this explanation from Omi and Winant to illustrate two points. It is one of many models of identity that is not an individual stage model, but more of a collective group model. The second point is the similarity in the language and ideologies that were used to describe Black culture and the parallels in the language and ideologies still used to describe the LGBTQ community. A socio-political approach to using the ethnic identity model for LGBTQ rights seems like it makes the most sense.

In this chapter I have presented several models that have been used to describe identity and I have pointed out their shortcomings for queer politics. In the next chapter I will provide a critical analysis of the literature that I consulted for this research. The question I will explore is not just the viability of an identity model but the viability of an identity model for LGBTQ rights that doesn’t further oppress identities.
Chapter Three

Who Speaks for Whom?

My primary goal was to find out if the ethnic identity model, or any model, was a viable option for the LGBTQ community in regard to equal rights. My goal was not to prove or disprove any existing theories used to talk about the ethnic identity model but, rather, to give an in-depth account of why the model has or has not worked in the past. Throughout the process of gathering information regarding the conversations that are taking place concerning the use of the ethnic model for equal rights for queers, I have gained an understanding of the opposition or support for the use of a model in LGBTQ rights.

Methodology and Body of Literature

I focused on the gay movement in the United States from the period between June of 1969, the Stonewall Riots, to the end of the 20th Century. There were several turning points in the gay movement during that time period. I looked at the use of the ethnic identity model as it was applied to gay liberation in the 1970s; how queer theory and queer politics was applied to the movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s; and I revisited the use of the ethnic identity model in the present queer movement.

I gathered sources by looking for scholarly works that included the terms “identity,” “ethnicity,” “ethnic model,” “ethnic identity model” and “civil rights.” I analyzed 20 works all together. Of those works 12 were books and 8 were essays. I was particularly looking for pieces that connected all of these terms to the ethnic identity model or at least to each other in relation to equal civil rights. I found some difficulty in that identity,
ethnicity, and ethnic groups and how they are formed have as many different ideologies as there were authors discussing it.

Analyzing the Literature

I implemented a critical analysis of scholarly literature on civil rights for queers. I examined the scholarly writings relating to queer politics, the ethnic identity model, and identity formation. I chose to examine the scholarly writings because as a relatively new politic, queer politics is often discussed in relation to queer theory, which has its origins in academia. Since the advent of queer theory into academia, queer politics has had profound affects on the gay movement. My assumption was that these elements had not only altered our political climate but would provide a basis for the ethnic identity model to be a viable option in achieving queer rights. I examined the literature through the lens of queer theory. I specifically applied the following questions:

1. How does the author describe identity? Is identity self-actualized or compared to dominant identity ideology? Perhaps identity is compared to another who identifies similarly. Is your identity determined or defined by your relationship with another? For instance, if one identifies as “lesbian” does that identity change in the public sphere or the private realm? In other words, is it possible to identify for example as lesbian privately, queer politically, and as a lesbian feminist in the public sphere? How are identity categories inclusive or exclusive? At what cost should one change one’s identity in exchange for safety in certain situations? Should one choose an identity and stand firmly by it and the politics it represents? Is identity a choice? In the case of queer identity is it who we choose to be intimate with, how we self-identify, what we look like, how we act, or where we live? If so, do we all need to have the same collective identity?
2. How is the author defining ethnicity? Did the author use the terms ethnicity, culture, and race interchangeably? What do the terms used to describe queers really mean? Do those terms constitute an ethnic identity? Can a sexual identity be an ethnicity? What about those who already have an ethnic identity? For instance, should people of color be forced to choose their cultural ethnicity over their sexual or political ethnicity, or somehow find a balance between ethnicities?

3. According to the author, who is considered an ethnic group and why? Who gets to decide on the definition of ethnicity/ethnic groups? What are the advantages or disadvantages of identifying as an ethnic group? For example, is it self-imposed or do others get to label us? Can queers be an ethnic group, if some of us can move in and out of queer space? Some queers find it necessary to “pass” whether it is at their jobs or with family or friends who do not know about their self-identity. What allows for this passing to happen and when is it appropriate to do so? What happens to the queer ethnicity at that time? Can heterosexuals be queer?

4. According to the author, what are the advantages or disadvantages to using the ethnic identity model or any identity model? How can we be inclusive without attaching unwanted labels on folks in order to put them in nice neat packages? Some argue that culture, ethnicity, and even race have been socially constructed so why not socially construct queerness as an ethnicity? How could the ethnic identity model provide us with equal rights for the LGBTQ community? Can we protect ourselves from the discrimination of the dominant culture simply by defining queerness as an ethnicity?

In the next chapter I will analyze a body of literature using the questions I have outlined here. Based on that analysis I will move into a discussion of the viability of an ethnic identity model for LGBTQ rights.
Chapter Four

Analysis of the Literature

The analysis of the literature was a complicated process because not all of the authors spoke to all four questions. I felt that if I only looked at works that spoke to all the questions I would be creating a bias in that I wouldn’t have any opposing views, or at the least I would be leaving out references that were important simply because they did not cover all four concepts. Additionally, so many of the terms used to describe ethnicity and identity are used interchangeably that it is hard to know if the author is using the terms as I would use them or if they are being used in a different context. In the works that I analyzed the authors had differing views on the description of identity. All agreed that identity is something that is developed with some awareness on our part. Whether we self-identify or someone else identifies us, we still perform our identities to some degree. There is, of course, some overlap on those views.

How does the author describe identity?

All of the authors whose works I analyzed discussed identity in some form. Some discussed identity explicitly as the main focus, and others described it implicitly as background information to their discussion. When the authors explicitly discussed identity they seemed to describe identity in relation to already existing socialized assumptions. Most agreed that identity formation is a complicated process. Even though the authors had different ways of approaching identity and identity formation there seemed to be two main processes that occur in their definitions of identity. First, there seemed to be an identity process where one defines one's
identity in relation to a dominant identity. Second, the identity process seemed to be defined in those binary terms.

Some of the authors in this section described identity in contrast to the mainstream assumption that heterosexuality is an original concept of sexuality and is still recognized as the dominant identity. For example, Butler (1990/1999) argues that gender is not the rightful property of sex and that male and masculine or female and feminine only exist in a compulsory system. Within that compulsory system, then, where heterosexuality is set up as original, true, and authentic we construct the illusion that sexual or gender identity is an essential or innate characteristic.

Butler addresses the issue of the constructed nature of all identity categories. She focuses on the particular issue of what it means to identify oneself as “lesbian.” She talks about the problems of categorizing and in particular the discourse of coming out. She questions the notion that if someone comes out if she is subsequently free from subjectivity. For Butler the discourse of being out places the subjectivity of that aspect of queer identity in question. Does being out just further change what it means to be out to others who are out and those who do not come out or have yet to come out? In other words, if one chooses to be an “out” lesbian can that individual still maintain any heterosexual identifications? Most often those who ascribe to the notion that being out is the first step in liberating oneself are not usually those who are feeling the affects of that ascription. In theory, being out and promoting visibility, therefore, creating a familiarity in mainstream culture is a means to tolerance and acceptance. Quite often those who are out are the most likely to be the target of subjectivity. One the other hand, those who are out can serve as an inspirational source of hope and support for those who cannot come out.
Jagose (1996) suggests that lesbian and gay identity might reinforce a new normativity, or a better understanding of the relationship between identity and power, where Anzaldúa (1998) felt that it was most important for identity to be self-actualized, for if another names you— you become subsumed under that category. She then describes when others define her identity for her she experiences that as, “I am from her group but not as an equal, not as a whole person— my color erased, my class ignored” (p. 263). Whether we self-actualize or someone names that identity for us, it was essentially agreed upon that identity is multifaceted. Even a self-actualized identity can be measured in relation to dominant society, but as D’Emilio (1983) points out, identity and identity formation has changed over the decades.

Browning (1996) suggests that the act of identifying is itself very limiting. He suggests that we have already begun to limit ourselves once we attempt to find an answer to the question: Who am I? Once we answer that question we have excluded all of the things that we are not. This brings up the notion of bi-oppositional categories again. The assumption is that once we have named our identity then we have excluded any other aspect of identity that we have not named. Isn’t it possible instead that we could have several components of identity that work together to form a core identity?

It is possible that determining our identity is defined relationally. According to Seidman (1997b), there is “dependency of heterosexuality on homosexuality” (p. 193) in that heterosexuals rarely give credit to the role that homosexuals play in American culture. His implication is that heterosexuals define themselves as “normal” and homosexuals as the “other.” This suggests, too, that identity is defined in binary terms. Ruth Colker (1996) on the other hand proposes that identity is not only fluid, but also that challenging categories or living in the “gap” unsettles people. Recognizing that identity can be fluid moves us away from the assumption of
bi-oppositional categories. Through a new model of identity that recognizes that identity can be fluid, we could deconstruct the bi-oppositional categories and build more inclusive or fluid categories.

We might look at identity in terms that it has been “heterosexualized” rather than saying one must choose or accept only one identity. In the case of sexual identity since heterosexuality is the norm there is a tendency to measure all other sexual identity against it. Faderman (1991) points out that aside from medical models and opinions, most working class lesbians had nothing else to refer to in constructing their sexual identities other than the model provided them by heterosexuality.

Similarly women, queers, and people of color have all had to rise to challenge their marginalization to define themselves across the boundaries of gender, sexuality, and race. Rich (1980) speaks to this issue when she suggests the possibility that heterosexuality is imposed on women. She credits several books for promoting a heterocentric view of relationships and states that even feminist journals focused on equal partnerships between men and women. These writings simultaneously pass over or fail to recognize, at all, the emotional and psychological identification of women with other women. She points out that women have enjoyed this kind of essential bonding throughout history, regardless of the gender of their sexual partners. She critiques heterosexuality as a social construct with a specific political and economic agenda.

Identity can be based on many factors and the process of coming to know one’s identity varies. The process can certainly be dictated by experience and includes an individual’s response to those experiences; therefore, it cannot be explained in binary terms or in comparison to another identity. Utilizing mainstream assumptions seems to be the easiest way to identify, and this requires little or no self-reflection. However, it is no wonder that many of those who do
identify as LGBTQ spend a great deal of time comparing ourselves to the dominant identity—it is instilled in every aspect of our lives. Even if we continue to live with the notion that heterosexuality is a preferred and natural existence, we still need to address the segment of population who do not identify as such. One way of doing so would be to “categorize”—however problematic at this point—individuals who do not identify as heterosexual as an ethnic group.

How is the author defining ethnicity?

Ethnicity, like identity, can be relational, self-identified, or socially imposed. As we saw in Chapter Three there are many different ways to define ethnicity. The authors’ works that I analyzed referred to ethnicity in relation to cultural, racial, and political ethnicity. Even when defined in those categories the definitions vary. Perhaps part of the issue with the viability of an ethnic identity model lies within the differences in the definitions of ethnicity. In the works I analyzed, there was a range of definitions for ethnicity, when the authors explicitly discussed it at all. Most of the authors implied that ethnicity was a product of a common racial experience. In one account, ethnicity as it was attached to race, was defined in opposition to queer politics. From these works it was not made clear exactly what ethnicity is, but it was clear that it could either be helpful or harmful to queer politics and queer rights depending on which definition is used.

Anzaldúa (1998) states that as a woman of color her ethnic community lies in her relationship to her Chicana background. She explains that there is a profound difference between the experience of being a “queer” woman in the Chicana community and being a “queer” woman as a white woman. In this sense queer ethnicity functions as a secondary socialization following cultural ethnicity. The community to which one belongs, then, defines queer ethnicity but also
challenges the boundary lines of that community. Bawer (1993) on the other hand claims that
several people refuse to acknowledge prejudice against homosexuals by stating that gays are not
a "legitimate minority group." Bawer's argument that there are those who don't see gays as a
legitimate minority group implies that gays can be a minority group without subscribing to an
ethnic group identity. Without describing the parameters and dimensions of ethnicity, Bawer's
argument implies that ethnic status is separate from minority status. Bawer is a proponent of
assimilation. Assimilation requires that one becomes part of the dominant culture by assimilating
and, therefore, ridding themselves of ethnic minority status. Ethnicity, then, for Bawer is a
subsumed category under race and is not a legitimate category for sexual identity. He criticizes
queer politics by saying that queer activists have appointed themselves as the spokes people for
the queer community. He fails to see that he has appointed himself as the spokes person for how
to "be" gay. This brings up the question about being too gay or not gay enough.

This question has been echoed in issues of race and ethnicity. One might be accused of not
being Latina/o, enough for example, if they do not speak the language. One might be accused of
being too Black if they talk about discrimination issues "too much" or speak to the anger of
oppression. These parameters that have been set up within these communities are just as
oppressive as the dominant cultures limitations. The question remains who gets to decide the
definition of ethnicity?

Seidman (1997a) talks about gay ethnicity in the 1970s in opposition to queer politics in the
1990s. He describes gay politics as having a "one-dimensional agenda of legitimating a
homosexual gender preference" (p. 195). He points out that this is exclusive to many including
bisexuals, transgendered folk, sadomasochists, man/boy lovers, and transvestites. Absent in his
observation, though, is the "invisibility" of those that identify as bisexuals, transgendered folk,
sadomasochists, man/boy lovers, and transvestites. While he notes their exclusion in politics, he fails to note that because they do not fit into the binary categories of “heterosexual” or “homosexual,” the identities of these groups are considered non-conventional sexualities and often omitted from mainstream consciousness altogether. This approach to ethnicity is clearly political where ethnicity is not a component of race or culture but a component of sexual politics.

The theory behind queer politics is that it is a more progressive politic than gay politics was in the past. Gamson (1996) discusses the key dilemmas in identity politics by using internal debates from lesbian and gay politics. He points out that there are difficulties of identity-based organizing and that queer theory brings up the issue of both individual and collective identities. And by, in fact, refusing to identify as an ethnic group that is the key to our liberation. While I think that he brings up some interesting arguments I do not agree with his point that refusal to identify as an ethnic group will be the key to our liberation. Gamson also points out the similarities to the gay rights movement and the civil rights movement in that public collective identity proved to be one way of fighting for rights. His main point is that by building a collective identity we are constructing binary categories for ourselves thus recreating the basis for oppression.

Collective identity movements do require a shared experience, but I am arguing that a sexual or political identity that is anything other than heteronormative is a collective identity. Queer theory and queer activism claim that anyone can be queer and anyone can be a queer activist regardless of how they sexually identify. I agree with this notion but I also think it is important to point out what might already be obvious to some. One can identify as heterosexual but not subscribe to heteronormative hegemony. In this sense the collective identity is not a binary
category because there are several ways to identify within the collective identity categories of queer ethnicity.

Even if we do identify as an ethnic group is that identity cohesive enough to accomplish our goals? Bell (1995) states that maybe ethnicity is not enough. The reality, Bell says, is that despite the civil rights movement and certain victories, Black Americans are not equal to whites. He continues on to say that racial equality is not a realistic goal and in fact always striving for what is unobtainable has caused frustration despair and self-defeating rigidity for Blacks in a racist America. Bell talks about the new movement of Racial Realism instead of racial equality. He describes it as a “legal and social mechanism on which Blacks can rely to have their voice and outrage heard” (p. 302). He says that with Racial Realism the realization is that even if oppression is never overcome that the humanity of Black folks can survive and grow stronger through resistance to that oppression.

Simply identifying as an ethnicity is not going to resolve the issue of our lack of the queer communities civil rights. It is a beginning, however, as a source of recognition to identify as a “legitimate” group. Otherwise we leave ourselves open to the criticisms that we currently face. Those criticisms include that we are asking for special rights and that we are “choosing” to “behave” contrary to heteronormativity, and therefore should not be recognized as a separate group.

According to the author, who is considered an ethnic group and why?

Most ethnic groups don’t demand participation in their ethnicity. If the LGBTQ community is considered an ethnic group in the future that doesn’t necessarily mean everyone needs to subscribe. If being “ethnically queer” is a way for us be legally recognized and gain rights—why
shouldn’t we do it? Not everyone within the community agrees that it is an appropriate avenue. The authors in this section had differing viewpoints on ethnic grouping. These viewpoints ranged from assimilation ideology where ethnicity would be a mute point to constructed language, to geography, and also to the cultural constructions of groups.

Bawer (1993) says that to be a “good homosexual” is just to be invisible and blend in with everyone else. His message says just try to be as “normal” as you can so as not to draw any unnecessary attention to yourself. Bawer talks throughout his book about how the outrageous charades of flamboyant queers are going to have unfortunate effects on young people contemplating “coming out” either now or years from now. I argue that his book could have a similar affect on someone contemplating their identity. If his book is the only thing they read they might think that the only way to “be” gay is by assimilating or oppressing one’s true feelings. His naming of the “false images” of homosexuality might be an image that someone relates to but then thinks they are wrong to relate to it, or even think that they must not be gay if they relate to it. These conflicting messages can be very confusing to someone who is contemplating their sexual identity.

For Bawer identifying as an ethnic group is an opposition to his assimilationist politics. He makes several assumptions though when he suggests that all queers can simply assimilate into conventional lifestyles. His biggest assumption is that he fails to note the obstacles that discrimination may have placed in front of many in the queer community. For instance, those who are transgendered or visibly queer may have suffered the consequences of that by not being able to find steady employment, or not being able to acquire adequate health care, or housing. These things alone place these individuals in a different category than the conventionality Bawer’s politics requires for becoming a “good homosexual.”
Butler (1997) talks about the power of language to injure us and subjectify us in the form of interpellation. This language is used to identify us with a phrase or word and then give that word the power to be used against us. Language, she argues, can only cause us harm after we have assigned it the power to do so. Essentially, we are interpellated by giving certain words such different degrees of power. During the process of naming, we attach meaning to who we are. We then extend this interpellation to other words that are associated with us and who we are or have become. She argues that we become the subject of "performative language" (p. 49). These words include things that are used to categorize us such as our own names and words like "woman," "man," "girl," "boy," "heterosexual," "homosexual," and many other descriptive titles.

Interpellation, then, is directly related to the power relations that Foucault (1978) is talking about when he says, "[power] is a certain strength we are endowed with; it is a name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society" (p. 93). There is power in ethnicity. An ethnic group provides a foundation where one can reference certain parts of their identity. Queers might not be a "traditional" ethnic group but there is a part of our history and culture that we can reference—if we know where to look for it. Often this history and culture gets imposed upon us by the media's portrayal of queers, or institutionalized power, or culturally constructed interpellation that is part of dominant culture.

In addition to being culturally constructed there is the issue of regional construction. Queer tolerance depends on ones location in the United States. Browning (1996) suggests, "More than any genuine ethnic group, gay people owe their existence as a separate people to geography" (p. 2). His use of the term "genuine" implies two things in regard to ethnicity. First, it implies that gay folks do not or cannot constitute an "authentic" ethnic group. This notion draws from
Weber's definition of ethnicity that we saw in Chapter Two that says that ethnicity is a political community. The implication is that as queers we spend a great part of our lives searching for people and places where we can fit in and be comfortable. Sometimes after spending all that time and becoming comfortable the politics of our movement change—and then we might no longer "fit in" to that space. This leads us to a new search. In this sense queer ethnicity becomes defined by differing queer cultures. Within the queer movement as we separate our politics by deciding where to place the political emphasis (i.e., queer rights, transgendered rights, lesbians who want to sleep with men, but still retain their lesbian identity, rights to same-sex marriage, and so on) we change the definition of queer ethnicity.

Second, it implies that ethnicity is formed by proximity to others who share commonalities. While there are many shared commonalities within queer culture, there are also dominant voices, images, and ideologies that are not shared by everyone. Clearly, those living in urban areas with gay ghettos that are highly populated by those who are LGBTQ, have a different experience than those living in a rural America. I would argue that there is a shared queer ethnicity that is rooted in queer history, queer culture, and shared experiences—no matter where one resides. Certainly, there are differences in geographic locations as to how we can express ourselves but those differences are linked directly to issues of safety rather than issues of queer ethnicity. This is not to say that geography has no effect on queer ethnicity just that it might not be a primary factor in defining queer ethnicity anymore than it would be in defining any other ethnicity.

In contrast, Jagose (1996) defines lesbian and gay identity, in terms of ethnicity, as those who are a "distinct and identifiable population, rather than a radical potential for all" (p. 61). This definition leaves more room for queer ethnicity to be shaped by the members of the group regardless of their geographic experiences. There is a point where all queers can relate to each
other's experiences whether they have shared dominant queer experiences or not. That point is
drawn by the experiences of navigating through a social system that says you are different.

Anzaldúa (1998) doesn't speak directly to this notion but she describes the differences in
identity and ethnicity between lesbians of color and white lesbians and how lesbians of color are
"Othered" by the definition of white middle-class lesbian definitions. All of this speaks to a
different kind of fluidity of identity. It implies that queer identity is already fluid and is based on
the relationship of the socio-economic class status, racial status, or geographical location of
others. This further complicates the definition of queer ethnicity and brings up the issue of
multiple ethnicities.

The Supreme Court uses the color-blind constitutionalism to cover four areas of race: status-
race, formal-race, historical-race, and culture-race. Gotanda (1993) states that these categories
were constructed to presume that there was at one time "pure races" and that because these
schemes are symmetrical there is nothing to suggest equality or subordination between races.
Gotanda argues that in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that became known as the "separate but
equal" case the courts turned a "blind eye to history" it presumes that racial classifications
created by the United States legislation are not connected to social status or historical experience.
Gotanda also points out that on the other end of the extreme is the color-blind assimilationist
argument for race. This argument is basically that racial differences should be irrelevant. The
danger in this argument is that it devalues culture, community, and ethnicity. The absence of
queer ethnicity as a recognized category suggests the same "blindness" for queers.

Rather than construct a category of ethnicity that is exclusive to a rigid identity category,
my vision of a queer ethnicity is one that is inclusive of multiple definitions of group identity,
historical grouping, and/or is defined by racial, cultural identity. This is not to say that that queer
ethnicity should follow the same color-blindness used in the "separate but equal argument" but, rather, to include any member who wishes to claim queer ethnicity instead of just queering current definitions of ethnicity.

According to the author, what are the advantages/disadvantages to using the ethnic identity model or any identity model?

Throughout the literature folks refer to an ethnic model as the ethnic model. Most authors disagreed with the use of an ethnic model for identity. Additionally, their definition of a model varied. Several authors expressed their description of an ethnic model that draws upon either a politicized identity model or a culturally identified model for ethnicity. For instance, Seidman (1997a) describes how the ethnic identity model developed from a cultural dominance in the gay liberation movement. The "culture," however, was not a dominant one in that is represented the lesbian feminist and gay male communities versus the dominant heterosexual culture, but "individuals whose experiences and interests were not represented in the dominant gay identity constructions criticized the ethnic model as exhibiting a white, middle-class bias" (p. 117). Other authors (Epstein, 1987; Currah, 1997; Jenkins, 1997) define culture in yet another way and also describe politicizing identity regardless if that identity stems from culture.

Escoffier (1998) speaks of a model in terms of both. He problematizes the constructed nature of identity categories, raising in particular the question of what it means to identify oneself as "multicultural." This raises the delicate question of whether or not queer culture exists and if so: can it be included in the definition of multicultural? The queer community cannot simply adopt the politicized ethnic identity model for gay liberation unless we take into consideration within the queer community that there are those with "multi"cultural identities. According to Escoffier,
the hegemonic culture challenges the constructed identities of a culture and their values. One of the limits of multiculturalism is the political belief only some folks have overlapping identities. For multiculturalism to work there must be a public sphere where common discourse can take place.

Escoffier’s criticism of the queer community for politicizing identity and then trying to use an ethnic identity model is interesting in that he points out several of the areas in which we defeat our own politics. This argument lends itself to the argument against assimilation from outside of the queer community. The notion that there is a hierarchy of privilege causes those who think that homosexuality is ethically, morally, or socially wrong to further the rhetoric that we are asking for special rights and, therefore, taking something away from someone else. It brings up the notion, too, that identity is a complex issue and perhaps the solution needs to be more complex then simply identifying as an ethnic group or included in multiculturalism. Escoffier further argues that the discursivity of the queer community is its weakness and that the “ethnic model” is too limited to defeat the religious Right’s agenda to deny the gay community of “special rights.” Anzaldúa (1998) sees the current models as exclusive and that even the definition of queer isn’t always inclusive to “colored queers.”

Epstein (1987) on the other hand, points out that the analogy of gays and lesbians as an ethnic group is a relevant one because identity of gays and lesbians is moving away from being a “sexual category” and becoming a “human identity.” If gayness is deemed an ethnicity then we can talk about gay liberation and the ethnic identity model. Otherwise, it seems that without a collective identity we are just going to be seen as deviating from the norm and then asking for special rights. On the other side of that debate is a different view of collective identity. Gamson’s (1996) reference of categories and collective identity being too narrow versus being fluid is just
another example of how the construction of social movements is restricted to socially constructed ideas.

D’Emilio (1983) claims that when approached from a historical perspective the ethnic identity model defeats its purpose. He acknowledges that it may be tempting to use an identity model but that by identifying as a minority group, that group runs the risk of reinforcing the oppression that it is seeking to dissolve. A view that coincides with that is Seidman’s (1997b) main criticism of the model is that an ethnic identity model that is organized around a concept of a unitary homosexual identity was just as socially oppressive as “the very mechanism that straights used against gays namely ‘normalization,’ which controls through silencing, marginalizing, and pathologizing difference” (p. 192). His argument is that the ethnic model only creates tolerance of queers as a marginalized subculture leaving heteronormativity intact. He suggests moving from the ethnic model to queer politics. Queer politics has focused on the inclusion of anyone who exists in the margins of categories or in the gaps between them.

Jagose (1996) points out all the limits of the ethnic identity model as it was used in the 1970s. She cites as her main points the limits of the model on lesbians and gays of color who did not feel like they were represented in the model. She also points out the model, as it was used then, had a particularly binary component where there were either non-normative or normative sexualities and heterosexuality and homosexuality. She explains that the model further pathologized those who were already marginalized, for example, those who were prostitutes or practitioners of S/m, bisexual, butch, femme, transvestites, transgendered, or transsexual.

Although Bawer (1993) doesn’t speak directly to the model itself his argument is a shining example of the opposing views within the queer community. His argument implies that queers do not need to utilize any model for queer rights or even identify as an ethnic group but, rather,
simply quietly move into an assimilated position in society as defined by the dominant group. He further implies that to accept one's identity as queer as a "difference" carries with it a false sense of acceptance. His implication is that we should move toward an assimilationist model and away from queer politics.

This chapter has emphasized the differing author's views on identity, ethnicity, the ethnic identity model, and queer politics. All of the arguments presented here accurately represent the many differing opinions reflected in queer politics. There is not one single answer to achieving our rights. To impose a single strategy or a single politic is as oppressive as trying to fit into any of the already existing ideologies. It is clear that within the LGBTQ community we have diversity in identity and certainly in our politics. What is not clear, however, is a means to relating to one another across these differences. I am not proposing that utilizing the ethnic identity model will resolve all of these issues. I am proposing that some shade of resolution be reached before we continue in our quest for equal rights. This needs to be defined within the community in a way that feels representative to all, rather than attempting to resolve the same issues in several different ways without consulting others and by speaking for others. In the next chapter I evaluate the ethnic identity model for LGBTQ rights in relation to the analysis of the literature.
Chapter Five

Looking Forward: The Future of Queer Rights

Some say that the use of a model is limiting and that queers should just assimilate into the dominant culture. They feel that "normalizing" queerness will eventually gain us our civil rights. Despite the ethnic identity model's shortcomings there remains a need in the queer community for equal rights. Without the benefit of some kind of model to represent our needs we are seldom included in the legislature in a positive light. As Sedgwick notes "The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century" (p. 48). Even though an ethnicity model might not be the best solution at this point, it might enable the dismantling of the oppressive structure of the closet by providing rights, freedom, and liberation to the LGBTQ community.

The LGBTQ Community as an Ethnic Group

I realize that all oppressed groups may not have the same experiences, however, I do feel that the societal oppression and prejudice are comparable. It is rooted in a commonality that all those who are not part of the dominant culture are lacking something, are less than, are different from, and should be treated and seen as such. The experience of powerlessness is the issue that I am addressing. The absence of voice, the absence of freedom, and the notion that one is less than---these are similar issues. The queer community shares these experiences with members of other groups. Additionally, there are those who are part of the queer community who are part of other communities too. Queers are seen as deviant. In its basic and simplest form, deviancy is an implication that there is a norm that has been deviated from. This deviation is applied to all of those who do not practice heteronormativity--lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered,
practitioners of S/m, sex workers, and so on—that all by itself puts us all into another (similar) category, whether we agree that it is a shared experience or not, others have placed us all together.

Establishing a definition of what makes up an ethnic group is a debate that has multiple viewpoints that both oppose and support the ethnic identity model for its use in queer rights. In turn, again, to Currah's (1997) discussion of whether or not gayness can be deemed an ethnicity. She states that currently we do not qualify as a "suspect class" or even a "quasi-suspect class" (p. 239). The Supreme Court has designated race as a suspect class while gender has been designated as a quasi-suspect class. Those that belong to a suspect class receive equal protection under the law.

Drawing upon Currah's description of who qualifies as a suspect class the guidelines are as follows: suspect class status is achieved if the following three criteria are met: 1) historical suffering of discrimination; 2) political powerlessness; and 3) possession of distinguishable immutable characteristics. Currah argues that to base the ethnic identity model on sex and sexuality as a deciding factor perpetuates the oppression of homosexuality and homophobia. According to Currah, to use a politicized ethnic model under the current definitions of ethnicity imposes an ideology that gays are defined by their actions, not by how they identify.

Currah approaches the ethnic identity model from rhetorical and legal positions. These positions are equally important when we talk about gay rights. Groups like the religious Right have relied heavily on the use of rhetorical attacks against us to "inform" others that we are asking for "special rights." These attacks have successfully kept the gay movement from achieving civil rights by implying that we are asking for special rights in an attempt to elevate
our “lifestyle,” to a higher status than heterosexuality. Keeping us as the Other and unprotected by many laws has not only stopped us from achieving our rights—but our humanity as well.

The Pros/Cons of Using the Ethnic Identity Model

The ethnic identity model, as it was used in the civil rights movement, was successful in gaining many rights for African Americans; however, it did not necessarily produce equality or eliminate discrimination (Bell, 1995). One of the strengths of the model is that it recognized African Americans as a group and as having a history and culture that should remain intact and not be lost through assimilation into dominant culture. It provided an affirming identity that bound people together for solidarity and strength. Something that serves as both a strength and a weakness is that the existing model provides a means of protest against the normalization of racism. One of the limitations of the existing ethnic identity model for racial civil rights is that it called for rights to be won through the judicial system. Although African Americans gained rights through the civil rights movement they were not always enforced. However, the movement and, therefore, the model, provided inspiration to other movements such as the women’s movement and the gay movement.

Gaining rights through the courts may be the long-term goal; legislation may not be the initial place to start as legislation has the ability to make decisions that affect others without ever having experienced the oppression of being the Other. Such legislation for gay rights, then, implies that there is one way to “be” queer. That, then, becomes an emulation of the population at large in that the dominant culture within the community becomes the picture of “normalization,” thus eliminating immediately those who have multiple identities, are bisexual, transgendered, practitioners of S/m, or otherwise not “mainstream.”
Viability of the Model in its Present Form

As the analysis points out the ethnic identity model, as it exists now, is still not inclusive enough to represent all aspects of a one's identity, therefore, cannot be a viable option for the LGBTQ community. The ethnic model being proposed at this point is restrictive and requests that our identity be created and sustained in relationship to others versus starting from a self-identity and relating to others from there. This doesn’t really even allow all who identify as queer to utilize the model let alone those that have additional identities such as gender and color. The social identity of those that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender come to be defined by their sexual identity. We are, then, viewed foremost through that identity. For example, s/he is a gay doctor, lawyer, teacher, actor, and so on. Initially the person is seen as gay and then as a doctor, lawyer, teacher, or actor and assumptions are then made as to the person’s character and abilities as a professional.

The current ethnic identity model applies the abstractness of the universal rules of dominant culture. These rules are being imposed upon the gay community to create categories that are used to make decisions about ethnicity--thus maintaining the hierarchy of oppression. Individuals are expected to identify in relation to the heteronormative model of sexuality and gender roles (Seidman, 1997a). If one of the criteria for qualifying as an ethnic class is “distinguishing immutable characteristics” (Currah, 1997) the criteria start to become fuzzy. Does one who identifies as bisexual change “characteristics” simply by changing sexual partners? What of the post-op transsexual, how do they fit into an “immutable” category? The ethnic identity model as seen through this lens is a constrictive model that does not allow for personal freedom or recognize our differences. What is needed is the recognition that those who fall outside of the
heteronormative model are entitled to the same civil rights, dignity, and basic privileges as others.

The current ethnic identity model shows further limitations for gay liberation because it does not take into consideration the differences within the community. While we share some common issues gay men do not face the same issues as lesbians. Transgender folks have different issues of identity than bisexual folks and so on. The model needs to be expanded to meet the changing needs of all of those who identify as queer. A new model, one that recognizes that identity can be fluid, would make more sense. Within the new model, consideration that gender and gender roles do not flow parallel to biological sex should be given more attention (Butler, 1993). In addition to lesbian and gay theory and feminist theory, a reconceptualized model would draw upon the fundamental principles of queer theory—where the use of categories is considered limiting and separational and therefore doesn’t bind a community together.

Where Does the Model Fit into Queer Politics?

I am arguing for equal civil rights, however, I am not arguing for assimilation. Assimilation brings with it further complications in explaining what it means to be queer. Being interpreted through the understanding and familiarity of heteronormativity is problematic. If we are expected to act like the mainstream in order to fit in we are not able to hold on to the very thing that we were fighting to keep—our own identity. Shane Phelan (1997) argues in her article The Shape of Queer: Assimilation and Articulation, that “wholesale rejection of lesbian-feminism and gay liberation is a mistake” (p. 1) in furthering queer activism. But isn’t that a form of assimilation? If we are using the theories of lesbian-feminism and gay liberation we are still assimilating into something or trying to assimilate something into queer theory.
Queer Theory—no matter how inclusive and encompassing it tries to be—can still be interpreted as binary: queer/non-queer. Queer theory in this sense could be seen as a form of assimilation. It requests that one assimilate away from mainstream assimilation. This assimilation still expresses itself in binary terms. Striving for any assimilation is not the answer to achieving equal rights. The notion that assimilating into heteronormativity will simply gain queers access to rights assumes that all those who identify as heterosexual currently possess heterosexual privilege. The reality is that women, people of color, and those who have multiracial identities, and who also identify as heterosexual have not always been entitled to heterosexual power and privilege. Nor is it a reality that assimilating into heterosexuality is going to provide everyone with the same experience. Queer theory and queer politics have certainly provided a framework for queer activists to work from, this is not an ending point but, rather, a point from which to move forward. As Phelan (1997) also notes, “The energy and excitement of queer politics and theory lie not in their answers but, in the questions they raise” (p. 71).

Some relationships may be affected by the notion that those who already enjoy the comforts of civil rights—or those who are at least are allegedly protected by civil rights laws—could view themselves as having to give something up so that queers can have the same rights. This assumption is reached through the bi-oppositional categories that our legal system relies so heavily upon. Our justice system implies that there is only either right or wrong. As Sedgwick (1990) notes, “The most obvious fact about this history of judicial formulation is that it codifies an excruciating system of double binds, systematically oppressing gay people, identities, and as by undermining through contradictory constraints on discourse the grounds of their very being” (p. 47). Consequently, we have laws explicitly stating how we can and should conduct ourselves.
Under these guidelines there is not much room for creativity when figuring out how to identify in relationship to society. And these concepts lend themselves to the scarcity of resources theory further promoting the "special rights" argument.

The pressure to identify in restrictive categories creates all kinds of interesting situations in our society. Instead of focusing our attention on binary categories perhaps it would be best to spend some time focusing on the bridges that could connect the gaps between categories. The danger in focusing on binary categories is that we make the assumption that everyone in that category shares a similar experience. A new model that perhaps finds some guidance from the ethnic identity model but proves to be more inclusive without categorizing, offending, speaking for others, silencing folks, appropriating identities, or making generalizations that exclude folks might be a better approach. A new model could perhaps focus on the fluidity of identity and how to live comfortably, ethically, and respectfully within those changes or gaps. Through a new model of identity that recognizes that identity can be fluid, we could move from the bi-oppositional categories to building more inclusive or fluid categories. The danger of bi-oppositional categories is that they promote assimilationist politics by suggesting that one must choose between the two categories instead of creating a new relationship with those categories.

Queer theory does, in fact, change the viability of the ethnic identity model for queer rights. Even though queer theory addresses the issues of the fluidity of identity and specifically addresses performativity (i.e., gender, identity, and so on); unfortunately, it still limits the inclusion of all queer folks. Perhaps using queer theory in conjunction with other theories could create a more inclusive approach. Transgender theory, for instance, is more narrative and subjective (Halberstam, 1998), this certainly allows for inclusively. Perhaps a combination of
these theories and also revisiting feminist theory and racial theory might be an option for a viable model.

Hopefully, the reader has seen the complexity of the many layers of discrimination as the reason for the models failure in the past. It is also my hope that a future result of this project will be a synthesized solution for a new model; a model that can be modified or newly created to both ethically fit into queer politics and be successful in achieving our rights. This research has been an attempt to provide exemplars for progressive political action in the queer movement. It has only been in the last several years that we have been able to research such topics with such openness. I see this as progress. I hope this project will inspire others to join the conversation and perhaps further this or related research projects regarding queer rights.
Glossary of Terms

Androgynous. One who is neither particularly masculine nor feminine, regardless of their sex

Boi. A woman, generally a boyish lesbian, who usually plays the role of the bottom or submissive partner in a relationship; also used for men but usually spelled as: boy

Bottom. The partner in the relationship who is passive, or prefers to be the recipient; someone who is usually submissive; there are many different kinds of bottoms

Butch. A woman, generally lesbian, who exhibits culturally constructed masculine gender expression. The term can also be used in reference to men.

Daddi. A woman, generally lesbian, who usually plays the role of the Top in a relationship; also used for men but usually spelled as: Daddy

Dyke. A term used to describe a lesbian; it is used as both a derogatory epithet and has also been reappropriated and used as a self-identifying term for lesbians

FTM. A female to male transsexual (see transsexual)

Femme. A woman, sometimes lesbian, who exhibits culturally constructed feminine gender expression

Gender. Culturally constructed and established set of rules that correlate with biological and the presentation of the self. Gender and sex are often used interchangeably. They are not synonymous terms.

Gender bending. Used to refer to anyone who acts outside the culturally accepted “norms” of gender behavior, often expressed by the way s/he dresses.

Gender fuck. A conscious refusal, both theoretically and practically, to conform to culturally constructed binary gender roles or sex roles.

Gender outlaw. One who lives ambiguously between genders; passing as their preferred gender often carries with it the risk of harassment by police and the courts

Gender queer. More of a political position; also referred to as postmodernism and queer theory.

Gender blender/blending. Also known as transgenderism; it is a blending or mixing of various aspects of culturally constructed masculinity and femininity.

Heterocentricity. The belief that heterosexuality is the preferred and normal way of being
Heteronormativity. The ideology that heterosexuality is the norm and everything else is measured in relation to that.

Intersexed (formerly hermaphrodite). The term most often used by folks born with both female and male genitalia and primary sexual characteristics. It was standard for children born with “ambiguous” genitalia to be routinely operated on as infants to “correct” whichever characteristics the family or surgeon decided would be appropriate. There is a movement to stop this practice and give individuals the right to make these decisions later—if in fact they choose to.

LGBTQ sometimes as GLBTQ. Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer; when the term “gay” comes before “lesbian” it is usually understood to be a gender-specific way of writing or speaking but is not necessarily so

MTF. A male to female transsexual (see transsexual)

Sex. The biological definition based on outward primary sexual characteristics. Sex and gender are often used interchangeably. They are not synonymous terms.

Sexuality. An expression of desire, eroticism, and intimacy toward another

Top. The partner in the relationship who is active, or giving, someone who is usually dominant; there are many different kinds of Tops.

Transsexual also abbreviated as TS. One who takes steps to align their physical sex to coincide with their gender expression; this does not always have to but may include and is not limited to: physical and/or hormone therapy, and surgery

Transgender(ed) also abbreviated as TG. Used as an umbrella term for anyone who transcends gender roles or expressions. Included under the umbrella are drag queens, drag kings, male-to-female (M2F, or MTF), female-to-male (F2M or FTM), transsexuals, transvestites; can include post-op pre-op, non-op transsexuals, feminine males, and masculine females, or anyone who transgresses the binary vision of sex and gender

Transvestite also Cross-dresser. Often used to describe men since it is acceptable for women to wear clothing that is “traditionally” male, like pants or suits. One who identifies as a transvestite is often not seeking sex reassignment surgery and often identifies as heterosexual

Queer politics. Progressive politics that seeks inclusivity, rather than try to exclude sub-communities within the queer community.

Queer. A term used in an attempt to be inclusive when speaking of lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender, transsexual, omnisexual, or pansexual individuals.

Queer theory. The theory that seeks to deconstruct gender and sex labels and sexual activity as an identity
References


