11 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Liberative Ethics

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WHAT IS "RIGHT" OR "good" for lesbians, gay men, bisexual, and transgender ("LGBT" or "queer") people? That is the central question that an LGBT liberative ethics tries to address. This chapter will focus on what LGBT ethicists have said about what is "right" or "good" with respect to LGBT communities. This approach to LGBT ethics is liberative because it focuses on the ethical reflection of LGBT people themselves, as opposed to ethical reflection that is imposed on them by non-LGBT people. In other words, this approach lifts up the voices of the very people who are on the margins of power and privilege with respect to their sexualities and gender identities and expressions.

KEY TERM 11.1

Gay. A man who is sexually attracted to other men; may also be used sometimes to describe lesbians.

KEY TERM 11.2

Lesbian. A woman who is sexually attracted to other women.

KEY TERM 11.3

LGBT. Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender; umbrella term for individuals who engage in same-sex acts and/or gender-variant behaviors.

LGBT people differ from many of the other marginalized communities covered in this textbook because they often experience Christianity and the institutional church as the primary *source* of oppression and suffering. That is, instead of being a source of liberation and freedom (as in the case with many liberative theologies), Christianity and the institutional church are often experienced by LGBT people as being complicit with the very oppression that needs to be overturned and eradicated. For example, Christians are often the most vociferous opponents of LGBT nondiscrimination laws as well as marriage equality laws.

KEY TERM 11.4

Queer. Umbrella term for LGBT people; also refers to an ethical norm of transgression and/or deconstructing false binaries such as female and male or homosexual and heterosexual.

KEY TERM 11.5

Transgender. A person who identifies with a gender that differs from that person's assigned sex at birth.

Nevertheless, for nearly half a century—since at least the mid-1950s—LGBT Christian scholars and their allies have argued that Christianity is not intrinsically opposed to same-sex and gender-variant behaviors. Indeed, many of these scholars have articulated theological and ethical positions from the perspective of LGBT people. Accordingly, this chapter will trace the highlights of what these scholars have said about LGBT ethics and will examine the various ethical norms upon which LGBT people have relied to determine what is "right" and "good."

History and Development of LGBT Liberative Ethics

Although same-sex and gender-variant behaviors have existed in societies and cultures around the world for thousands of years, it has only been since the mid-1950s that LGBT Christian scholars and their allies have engaged in sustained ethical reflection on such behaviors. During the course of the last half century, such ethicists have articulated at least four strands of LGBT ethics: (1) affirmation ethics, (2) liberation ethics, (3) mutuality ethics, and (4) queer ethics. This section will provide a brief overview of each of these four strands.

KEY TERM 11.6

Allies. Individuals who are supportive of LGBT people but who do not identify themselves as LGBT.

The first strand of LGBT ethical reflection, "affirmation ethics," is based on the ethical norm that "gay is good." This strand of ethical reflection is a direct response to the traditional Christian condemnation of same-sex and gender-variant behavior as sinful and deserving of divine punishment. The traditional condemnation of such behavior is based primarily on two sources: the Bible and the natural law. Since the 1950s, LGBT people have engaged in LGBT affirmation ethics by refuting biblical as well as natural law arguments that condemn LGBT people. Specifically, the adherents of affirmation ethics make the argument that a careful reading of the Bible and a careful examination of the natural law should result in the conclusion that same-sex and gender-variant behaviors are morally neutral if not intrinsically good.

The second strand of LGBT ethical reflection, "liberation ethics," is based on the ethical norm that LGBT people must be liberated from political, religious, and other forms of oppression. This strand of ethical reflection arises out of the contextual theologies of the 1960s and 1970s, which include Latin American liberation theology and black liberation theology. A key moment of liberation for the LGBT community in the United States was the Stonewall Riots of June 1969, during which LGBT people fought back against a routine police raid on a New York City bar, the Stonewall Inn, and ignited the contemporary LGBT civil rights movement. Like the ancient Israelites who were led by God out of the slavery of Egypt to the promised land, LGBT people similarly are called

Fig. 11.1. Photo of the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, site of the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

by God to throw off the shackles of homophobia and heterosexism.

The third strand of LGBT ethical reflection, "mutuality ethics," is based on the ethical norm of mutuality or right relationship. This strand of ethical reflection is influenced heavily by the feminist theologies of the 1980s and 1990s. Instead of understanding relationships as hierarchical—that is, one person's having power "over" another person—an ethics of mutuality focuses on the need for equal power between the two persons. In rejecting hierarchical power structures such as patriarchy (that is, the worldview that men are intrinsically superior to women), an ethics of mutuality calls LGBT people to exhibit mutuality and justice in all of their relationships, sexual or otherwise.

The fourth strand of LGBT ethical reflection, "queer ethics," is based on the ethical norms of transgression and resistance to binary thinking. This strand of ethical reflection is influenced heavily by the rise of queer theory in the academy during the 1990s and 2000s. Queer theory challenges a binary view of the world with respect to gender identity, biological sex, and sexuality. For example, instead of understanding gender identity as consisting of only two choices (that is, masculine or feminine), queer theory deconstructs that binary and introduces a third concept: "transgender." Similarly, in order to challenge the biological sex binary of male and female, queer theory recognizes a third condition, "intersex" (or "disorders of sexual development"—DSD). Finally, in order to challenge the sexual binary of heterosexuality

and homosexuality, queer theory recognizes the third concept of "bisexual." Queer ethics, like queer theory, is also based on the ethical norms of transgressing categories and deconstructing false binaries of gender, sex, and sexuality.

As noted above, human beings have engaged in same-sex acts and gender-variant behaviors from the beginning of recorded time and in cultures around the world. The earliest known depiction of a same-sex couple, from 2400 BCE, depicts two royal manicurists in ancient Egypt who were buried together in the same tomb. The late Yale University historian John Boswell uncovered evidence of Christian liturgical rites for same-sex couples during the Middle Ages and documented such rites in his book *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*. There was even a flourishing culture of same-sex and gender-variant activity in the United States during the 1920s among African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance.

Nevertheless, it was not until the mid-1950s that Christian scholars began to examine and challenge the classical Christian ethical tradition that uniformly condemned same-sex and gender-variant behaviors as sinful and counter to the will of God. This section will trace the genealogy, or historical development, of the four strands of LGBT

KEY TERM 11.7

Bisexual. A person who is sexually attracted to both women and men.

KEY TERM 11.8

DSD. Acronym for disorders of sex development, a term frequently used by intersex people to describe themselves.

KEY TERM 11.9

Intersex. A person who has physical characteristics, genital and/or chromosomal, of both the male and female sexes.

KEY TERM 11.10

Polyamory. A person who has more than one sexual relationship at the same time with the consent of all involved.

BOX 11.1

Harvey Milk

Harvey Bernard Milk (1930–1978) was a member of the San Francisco board of supervisors and the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in the United States as a nonincumbent. Milk was born and raised in New York and served in the US Navy. Following his honorable discharge, Milk worked as an insurance actuary before moving to San Francisco and opening a camera store in the Castro neighborhood. Beginning in 1973, Milk took a leadership role in the neighborhood and was known as the "mayor of Castro Street." In 1977, Milk was elected to the San Francisco board of supervisors. As a result of receiving death threats, he tape recorded a message saying that "if a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door." On November 10, 1978, Milk and Mayor George Moscone were assassinated by former supervisor Dan White. In 2009, Milk was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his contributions to the LGBT rights movement.

Fig. 11.2. Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, two royal Egyptian manicurists buried together (c. 2400 BCE), are depicted embracing one another in this scene from their joint mastaba (tomb).

liberative ethics since the 1950s. Although these four strands—affirmation ethics, liberation ethics, mutuality ethics, and queer ethics—emerged in roughly chronological order over the course of the last half century, they are not intended to be mutually exclusive categories or to denote rigid time periods. Rather, these strands should be understood as models for classifying the different types of ethical reflection in which LGBT people engage today.

Affirmation ethics emerged in the mid-1950s, when Christian scholars began to question the traditional view that homosexuality was always sinful and intrinsically evil. In 1955, the Anglican priest Derrick Sherwin Bailey published his groundbreaking work *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. Bailey's book argued that the church's antihomosexual views were actually *not* supported by a careful reading of the relevant biblical, historical, and theological texts. Bailey's work helped to lay the groundwork for a new ethical norm that "gay is good." This new affirming perspective was reflected in 1964 by the founding of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) in San Francisco. The founding of the CRH was a significant event because, for the first time, it brought together leaders in both the religious and the homosexual communities who sought to find common ground with each other. In 1976 the Roman Catholic priest John J. McNeill published *The Church and the Homosexual*, which included a chapter about moral theology and the "positive contribution of the homosexual community." McNeill, a member of the Jesuit order, was silenced by the Vatican for his book, and he was subsequently expelled from his order in 1987, when he refused to cease his public ministry with LGBT people.

Liberation ethics emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, when LGBT Christian scholars were influenced by the emergence of Latin American, black, and other liberation theologies. These theologies focused on the exodus narrative and the Israelite journey out of Egypt as metaphors for political and social freedom for oppressed groups. LGBT Christian scholars were also influenced by the birth of the contemporary gay rights movement following the Stonewall Riots of June 1969. These events give rise to a new ethical norm of liberation that focused on freedom from the political and social oppression of gay and lesbian people. For example, in 1974, Sally Gearhart and William R. Johnson edited the anthology *Loving Women, Loving Men: Gay Liberation and the Church*. The anthology included an essay titled "The Good News of Gay Liberation," and it called for gays and lesbians, just like other oppressed minority groups, to revolt against all forms of discrimination, injustice, and violation of dignity.

Mutuality ethics emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, when LGBT Christian scholars were deeply influenced by feminist theologies of mutuality. These theologies of mutuality emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships of equal power between individuals, as opposed to the hierarchical nature of patriarchal relationships. Such theologies gave rise to a new ethical norm of mutuality. A key work in this area was Carter Heyward's 1989 book, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*. Heyward, one of the first women to be ordained to the Episcopal priesthood and currently a professor emerita at the Episcopal Divinity School, drew upon Audre Lorde's notion of the erotic as an embodied yearning for mutuality and making deep connections between people. Heyward argued that God is found in the sacred power of the erotic, as well as in mutuality and friendship. For Heyward, God is not above us but rather in between us.

Finally, queer ethics emerged in the 1990s and 2000s. This strand of LGBT liberative ethics was strongly influenced by the rise of queer theory in the academy, which gave rise to a new ethical norm of transgression. One influential book on queer ethics was Michael Warner's 1999 book, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. In that book, Warner—a professor of English at Rutgers University—defines an ethic of queerness as maintaining dignity in the face of shame. That is, Warner calls on LGBT people affirmatively to embrace "queer" behaviors that would normally invoke sexual stigma or shame. Queer ethics was also influenced by activism in the LGBT community. Starting in the late 1980s, radical queer activist groups such as ACT-UP and Queer Nation challenged societal apathy with respect to LGBT issues (such as HIV/AIDS) by disrupting, or transgressing, the status quo. For example, ACT-UP created a great controversy by disrupting Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City in December 1989. Queer ethical reflection by LGBT people continues to this day.

BOX 11.2

Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde (1934–1992) was a lesbian Caribbean American author and activist. She often described herself to her audiences as a "Black, Lesbian, Mother, Warrior, Poet." Born in New York City, Lorde received a master's degree in library science from Columbia University. In the 1960s, Lorde published a number of poems and was involved in the civil rights and antiwar movements. Lorde later challenged white feminists for failing to confront their own racism and failing to acknowledge the experiences of black women. For example, Lorde wrote an open letter that sharply criticized the radical lesbian feminist philosopher Mary Daly but never received a reply. Lorde published many books, including *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1983) and *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984). Lorde died in 1992 after fighting breast cancer and liver cancer for fourteen years. Her memory lives on through many groups, including the Audre Lorde Project, a New York City community-based organization for queer people of color.

Need for Liberation

As noted above, liberative ethics is defined as an ethic written from the perspective of those individuals who are on the margins of power and privilege. Thus LGBT liberative ethics is written from the perspective of LGBT people and *not* heterosexual individuals or cisgender (that is, non-transgender) individuals. Because LGBT liberative ethics focuses on marginalized people, it is by definition committed to overturning structures

of oppression that affect such people. Such an ethical approach is also committed to raising certain issues and questions relating to the liberation of such people.

Affirmation ethics, the first strand of LGBT liberative ethics, is committed to liberating LGBT people from oppressive readings of the Bible as well as oppressive uses of the natural law. For example, an affirmation ethics would be opposed to bibliolatry, or a fundamentalist reading of the Bible that refuses to take into account either the social context of the ancient Near East or the social context of today.

For example, an affirmation ethics would reject oppressive readings of the Bible that condemn LGBT people simply on the basis of biblical proof-texting (for example, the traditional LGBT "clobber texts" of Gen. 19, Lev. 18:22 and 20:13, Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9, and 1 Tim. 1:10). Although a close examination of such "clobber text" passages has been discussed extensively elsewhere, an affirmation ethics would contend that these passages were not addressing the loving same-sex relationships of today, but rather issues of male rape, sexual exploitation, and maintaining sexual patriarchy (for example, rejecting same-sex acts that blur the distinction between the "masculine" penetrator and the "feminine" penetrated).

Fig. 11.3. AIDS quilt spread out in front of city hall during Taiwan Pride 2005.

An affirmation ethics also would be opposed to an oppressive or dishonest use of the natural law. For example, even though natural law adherents claim that natural law principles are based on observing the created world, these individuals ignore the fact that there are hundreds of species of animals, birds, and insects in the animal kingdom that engage in same-sex and gender-variant behaviors. In sum, an affirmation ethics would conclude that same-sex and gender-variant behaviors do not violate the natural law.

Liberation ethics, the second strand of LGBT liberative ethics, is committed to liberating LGBT people from political and religious oppression. In a number of countries around the world, same-sex acts are punishable by the death penalty. Even in the United States, where same-sex acts are no longer subject to criminal penalties, there is a need for LGBT people to be liberated from oppression. For example, a liberation ethics would be committed to the passage of federal and state laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, and other matters. An ethics of liberation would also be committed to ensuring that LGBT people have equal access to civil marriage and the numerous rights and privileges—both federal and state—that come with civil marriage.

CASE STUDY 11.1

Recently, a member of the legislature in Uganda—encouraged by behind-the-scenes lobbying by evangelical Christians from the United States—introduced a "kill the gays" bill that, if passed, would make same-sex acts a capital offense. In other words, persons could be executed by the state for engaging in LGBT acts. This bill has resulted in international outrage, and has drawn the condemnation of leaders around the world, including the United States Secretary of State. Despite this outcry, the Ugandan legislature has not yet withdrawn the bill. How would you respond to this legislation from the perspective of each of the four strands of LGBT liberative ethics?

Mutuality ethics, the third strand of LGBT liberative ethics, is committed to liberating LGBT people from patriarchy, which is an ideology that perpetuates the view that men are intrinsically superior to women. Patriarchy is based on a hierarchical view of power; that is, men are naturally "above" women in the created order. This hierarchical view of gender roles is reinforced by the household codes in the New Testament (for example, Col. 3:18—4:1 and Eph. 5:29—6:1) that analogize the husband-wife relationship to that of a master-slave relationship. As LGBT scholars have noted, homophobia and transphobia are grounded in patriarchy. That is, what is particularly threatening about same-sex and gender-nonconforming behavior is that it reverses or blurs the "natural" order of men over women. Mutuality ethics, by contrast, would reject the entire framework of disparity in power between men and women. It would seek to establish an ethical norm of mutuality or right relationships between women and men—and, in fact, between all relationships.

Queer ethics, the fourth strand of LGBT liberative ethics, is committed to liberating LGBT people from shame as well as from false binary thinking. For example, a queer ethics refuses to accept the toxic shame that traditionally surrounds nonreproductive sex acts. Christian theology has traditionally stigmatized such acts because they are grounded purely in pleasure and are not justified by the "good" of procreation. A queer ethics would challenge this erotophobic view and seek to reclaim the goodness of embodied pleasure in its many forms. A queer ethics is also about challenging false binaries that divide the world into dualistic categories (for example, masculine and feminine, male and female, and homosexual and heterosexual). Such an ethics would open up a third space between such categories and embrace transgender, intersex, and bisexual identities.

In addition to being committed to overturning structures of oppression, an LGBT liberative ethic raises a number of larger issues and questions. Not surprisingly, each of the four strands of the LGBT liberative ethics discussed above focus on slightly different issues.

For example, affirmation ethics raises the question of how to read biblical texts that on their face seem to condemn same-sex and gender-variant behaviors. That is, to what extent should scholarly discoveries about the broader social context of such behaviors in the ancient Near East—and how they differ from our own context today—influence such readings? Such an approach also raises the question of how to apply natural law principles to such behaviors. That is, to what extent should scientific discoveries about the natural world—including the existence of same-sex and gender-variant behavior in the animal

BOX 11.3

Christine Jorgensen

Christine Jorgensen (1926–1989) was a leading spokesperson for the rights of transgender people and the first person to achieve international fame for undergoing sex reassignment surgery. Jorgensen was born in New York City as George William Jorgensen. Jorgensen served in the US Army and later trained to be a medical and dental assistant. In the early 1950s, Jorgensen traveled to Europe to seek sex reassignment surgery. While in Copenhagen, she underwent a series of surgeries and transitioned to being a woman. In December 1952, when she was still in Europe, the *New York Daily News* ran a front-page story about her. She became a celebrity upon her return to the United States, in 1953. In 1970, a film, *The Christine Jorgensen Story*, was made about her life story. She toured college campuses in the 1970s and 1980s to speak about her experiences, and she also worked as an actress, singer, and nightclub performer. Jorgensen died in 1989.

kingdom—influence interpretations of natural law principles?

By contrast, liberation ethics raises the question of what kind of political, religious, and other forms of oppression face the LGBT community and how best to liberate the LGBT community from such oppressions. As noted above, one unique question faced by the LGBT community is the role of Christianity and churches in contributing to such oppression. Unlike many of the other marginalized groups discussed in this book, LGBT people often experience a great deal of discrimination and rejection from the institutional church. What would it mean, therefore, to use liberation ethics to critique particular aspects of the church that are oppressive to LGBT people?

Mutuality ethics raises the question of how to define ideal relationships, sexual or otherwise. What does it mean to live out an ethics of mutuality in the context of same-sex relationships? What would it mean if friendship—and not marriage—were the central relationship for LGBT people? Would that change the way LGBT people relate to each other? Does mutuality always mean monogamy, or can an ethics of mutuality accommodate other forms of relational configurations such as consensual open relationships? What does an ethics of mutuality have to say about safer sex practices and barebacking? What about alternative sexual practices such as bondage, discipline, and sadomasochism (BDSM)?

Finally, a queer ethics raises the question of how to preserve marginal or transgressive norms as a positive value for the LGBT community. To what extent does an ethics of queerness privilege BDSM, kink, or leathersex over "vanilla" sex? To what extent should such a queer ethics seek to preserve marginal sexual practices such as sex clubs and public cruising areas? To what extent should an ethics of queerness—to the extent

KEY TERM 11.11

Barebacking. The practice of two men having unprotected anal sex (that is, without using condoms).

KEY TERM 11.12

BDSM. Acronym for bondage, discipline, and sadomasochism; sexual practices relating to consensual role play involving power and pain.

that it is committed to deconstructing binaries—ensure nondiscrimination with respect to transgender and intersex folk who fall outside of the conventional gender and sex binary system? To what extent should an ethics of queerness challenge the invisibility faced by bisexual people?

Leading Scholars and Figures

Having covered the ways in which the four strands of LGBT liberative ethics seeks to liberate LGBT people from structures of oppression, this chapter now turns to the work of leading scholars in LGBT liberative ethics. There is an increasing number of scholars who are writing in the field of LGBT liberative ethics. This section will first highlight the work of leading scholars in each of the four strands and will then explore possible future trends, with a particular focus on intersectional ethics, which addresses the connections between sexuality and race.

Affirmation Ethics

One leading scholar with respect to LGBT affirmation ethics is William Countryman. Countryman, who is an Episcopal priest and a professor emeritus at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, is the author of the 1988 book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*. In that book, Countryman argues that New Testament sexual ethics—including sexual ethics relating to LGBT people—must be understood in the context of the purity laws and property laws of Jesus' day. Countryman concludes that, in light of such purity and property laws, the Bible should *not* be used to condemn LGBT people. For example, Countryman argues that Jesus' extensive intersections with unclean people in the New Testament releases Christians from the traditional purity codes of the Hebrew Bible, including the prohibitions of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. However, the one purity ethic that does remain, according to Countryman, is one's purity of heart with respect to hatred.

LIBERATIVE ETHICS IN ACTION 11.1

Liberative Ethics in Action: The Issue of Same-Sex Marriage

As of August 2012, six states (Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont) and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. However, these jurisdictions are the exception and not the rule. Numerous states have passed legislation and/or constitutional amendments that expressly prohibit same-sex marriage. Furthermore, Congress has prohibited the United States federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages under the Defense of Marriage Act, which was enacted in 1996. As a result, same-sex couples who are legally married under state law are denied over one thousand rights that are otherwise available to opposite-sex couples under federal law. From the perspective of LGBT liberative ethics, same-sex couples should have the right to marry and to receive the same legal rights as opposite-sex couples. This is especially true with respect to the strands of affirmation ethics, liberation ethics, and mutuality ethics. Although the strand of queer ethics does not oppose same-sex marriage rights for LGBT people per se, it would caution against the unintentional creation of a new "norm" that would further marginalize LGBT people who engage in nonnormative sexual acts or are in nonnormative relationships.

Another leading scholar with respect to LGBT affirmation ethics is the late Gareth Moore. Moore, who was a Roman Catholic priest in the Dominican Order and a lecturer in theology at Oxford, published *A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality* in 2003. In that book, Moore questions the Roman Catholic Church's traditional reliance on natural law in order to reject same-sex and gender-variant acts. For Moore, the central question with respect to natural law analysis must be, Is it true? Thus he asks whether it is true that same-sex acts are always a moral evil. Are such acts always intrinsically disordered? In the absence of convincing evidence that same-sex and gender-variant acts are always intrinsically disordered (for example, within a loving same-sex relationship), Moore argues that the Roman Catholic Church should not use natural law to condemn LGBT people.

Liberation Ethics

A leading scholar with respect to LGBT liberation ethics is Robert Goss. Goss, an ordained minister with the Metropolitan Community Church and a prolific queer theologian, published *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* in 1993 as a response to the institutional church's shocking apathy and indifference with respect to LGBT people as well as the HIV/AIDS crisis. For Goss, LGBT liberation ethics is found in a *basileia* (that is, kingdom) ethics that ushers in the reign of God. Goss argues that such a *basileia* ethics requires LGBT people to be constantly engaged in the struggle for sexual justice. This includes challenging those ecclesial institutions that, through their teachings, perpetuate homophobia and violence against LGBT people. For Goss, the heart of LGBT liberation is freedom from such oppression.

Another leading scholar with respect to LGBT liberation ethics is the late Robert Williams. Williams was one of the first openly gay priests ordained in the Episcopal Church, and he published *Just As I Am: A Practical Guide to Being Out, Proud, and Christian* in 1992, shortly before he died from complications of HIV/AIDS. In that book, Williams builds on the work of black and feminist liberation theologians in constructing his own LGBT liberation ethics. According to Williams, God is never neutral. Rather, God is always on the side of the oppressed, as demonstrated by the exodus and the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. As a result, God is always on the side of LGBT people and against heterosexual privilege. Furthermore, this means that LGBT people must define their own ethical norms and not be bound by the ethical norms of non-LGBT people.

Mutuality Ethics

A leading scholar with respect to LGBT mutuality ethics is Mary E. Hunt. Hunt, the cofounder and codirector of the Women's Alliance for Theology,

CASE STUDY 11.2

St. Cecelia's Church, a Roman Catholic parish located in the South End of Boston, which is a predominantly gay neighborhood, planned to offer a Mass during LGBT Pride month that was advertised as welcoming all persons, regardless of sexual identity or gender identity. The archdiocese of Boston unilaterally canceled the Mass after it received complaints from conservative Roman Catholics who objected to the Mass on the grounds that same-sex and gender-variant behaviors are sinful. How would you respond to the archdiocese's actions from the perspective of each of the four strands of LGBT liberative ethics?

Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), is the author of the 1991 book *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*. According to Hunt, friendship—and not marriage—should be the ethical norm for all relationships, including LGBT relationships. Hunt builds on feminist notions of right relationship to create an ethic of justice-seeking friendship. By doing so, Hunt decenters marriage as the primary ethical norm for relationships. This opens up the possibility of a much broader variety of relational configurations, including friendships with sexual components. Furthermore, Hunt's ethical norm of justice-seeking friendship applies not only to relationships between human beings but also to relationships with the entire created order.

Another leading scholar with respect to LGBT mutuality ethics is Marvin M. Ellison. Ellison, who is a professor at Bangor Theological Seminary, is the author of the 1996 book *Erotic Justice: A Liberating Ethic of Sexuality*. In that book, Ellison argues for a sexual ethic that refuses to eroticize power relationships of domination and submission (that is, patriarchal relationships). Instead, Ellison argues for a sexual ethic of erotic justice that eroticizes mutual respect and pleasure. For Ellison, such an ethic would transform sexuality into a power that affects our everyday lives as human beings. Ellison also coedited, along with Kelly Brown Douglas, the second edition of the *Sexuality and Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection* anthology, which was published in 2010 and contains a number of provocative essays about contemporary LGBT sexual ethics. Ellison's newest book on sexual ethics, published in 2012, is *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times*.

Queer Ethics

A leading scholar with respect to LGBT queer ethics is Kathy Rudy. Rudy, a professor of women's studies and ethics at Duke University, is the author of the 1997 book *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics*. In that book, Rudy proposes a queer ethical norm of hospitality, which is a reversal of the sin of inhospitality that God condemned by destroying Sodom and Gomorrah. (That is, the men of Sodom exhibited the sin of extreme inhospitality by trying to rape the angelic visitors who were staying as guests at Lot's home.) Under Rudy's ethic of hospitality, sexual acts that would normally be shamed or condemned—such as anonymous or public sex—could be affirmed as long as such acts exhibited hospitality toward the other partner or partners. Similarly, the fact that a sexual act occurs within the context of a marriage or a long-term relationship does not necessarily mean that it is hospitable. According to Rudy, the relational quality of the sexual encounter—as "queer" as it might be—is what matters, not the form.

Another leading scholar with respect to LGBT queer ethics is W. Scott Haldeman. Haldeman, a professor of worship at Chicago Theological Seminary, has written about rethinking fidelity in the context of queer relationships. In his essay "A Queer Fidelity: Reinventing Christian Marriage," which appears in the second edition of *Sexuality and the Sacred*, Haldeman argues for moving away from an ethics of exclusivity and toward an ethics of self-care and truth-telling. For Haldeman, an ethics of self-care and truth-telling would take responsibility for one's own desires and permit safe, consensual, and nonexploitative sexual encounters with third parties outside of marriage, especially if one spouse has more need for physical intimacy than the other.

Other queer ethicists, including Michael Warner—the English professor at Rutgers University—would go much further than both Rudy and Haldeman in terms of constructing an LGBT queer ethics. As noted above, Warner proposes an ethics of maintaining dignity in the face of shame. That is, Warner would embrace behaviors that

are normally seen as transgressive and shameful, including nonvanilla sex acts such as BDSM, kink, and fetishes. Not surprisingly, Warner is critical of the single-minded focus by the LGBT community on legalizing same-sex marriage and obtaining marriage equality. For Warner, such a focus is ultimately problematic because it creates a new definition of "normal" that will further stigmatize a large part of the LGBT community that engages in nonnormative sexual acts.

Possible Future Trends

One possible future trend in the area of LGBT liberative ethics is that of intersectional ethics. Intersectional ethics relates to situations in which a person is a member of intersecting oppressed groups (for example, to be both a queer person *and* a person of color). Thelathia Nikki Young, a recent graduate of the doctoral program at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, has proposed a black queer ethics (BQE) that critiques traditional African American views of family and that also provides a more nuanced view of love and justice. According to Young, the BQE approach would lift up and privilege black queer voices and experiences, as well as bridge the existing gaps between womanist, feminist, and queer ethics.

In recent years, there has been an increase in religious and theological scholarship about intersectional issues involving LGBT people. For example, Roger Sneed, a professor at Furman University, recently published the 2010 book *Representations of Homosexuality: Black Liberation Theology and Cultural Criticism*, which addresses intersectional issues with respect to race, sexuality, and religion within the African American community. Similarly, Patrick S. Cheng, a professor at the Episcopal Divinity School, has published a number of works, including the 2011 essay "'I Am Yellow and Beautiful': Reflections on Queer Asian Spirituality and Gay Male Cyberculture," on intersectional issues with respect to the LGBT Asian American community. The work of Young, Sneed, and Cheng points to a possible future role for intersectional ethics in LGBT liberative ethics.

Finally, another possible future trend in the area of LGBT liberative ethics is that of transgender

BOX 11.4

Gloria Anzaldúa

Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa (1942–2004) was an author, activist, and leading independent scholar of chicana and queer studies. Anzaldúa grew up on the Texas-Mexico border, and she coined the term *new mestiza* in her writings to describe a person who uses her multiple identities to challenge a binary, or either-or, view of the world. She also wrote many of her works in "Spanglish," a mixture of several Spanish and English dialects, in order to reflect her borderlands identity and complex linguistic background. Anzaldúa coedited *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) with Cherríe Moraga, and she wrote *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). She also wrote poetry and fiction, and her writings addressed various intersecting issues relating to race, sexuality, and spirituality. Consistent with her writings, Anzaldúa viewed herself as having multiple racial, sexual, and spiritual identities. Anzaldúa, who died in 2004, was posthumously awarded a PhD in literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

BOX 11.5

Kiyoshi Kuromiya

Kiyoshi Kuromiya (1943–2000) was a prominent gay Japanese American civil rights and antiwar activist. Born in an internment camp in Wyoming during World War II, Kuromiya was raised in a Los Angeles suburb and moved to Philadelphia for college. On July 4, 1965, he participated in one of the first public gay rights demonstrations, which took place in front of Independence Hall. Kuromiya was an assistant to Martin Luther King Jr., and he also served as an openly gay delegate to the 1969 Black Panther convention at Temple University. Kuromiya was a founder of the Gay Liberation Front in Philadelphia and was active with ACT-UP Philadelphia. He founded the Critical Path Project, which was one of the earliest sources of treatment information for people living with HIV/AIDS. Kuromiya was an advocate of free speech on the Internet and was a plaintiff in the successful lawsuit against the 1996 Communications Decency Act. He died in 2000 from complications relating to AIDS.

and intersex ethics. In recent years, there has been an increase in transgender and intersex theological reflections by individuals such as Justin Tanis, Virginia Mollenkott, and Susannah Cornwall. However, these reflections have been primarily theological in content. It will be interesting to see what develops in the future with respect to transgender and intersex ethics. One ethical issue for parents and doctors, for example, relates to postponing genital surgery on an intersex child until she or he is old enough to make a choice about such surgery.

In sum, a number of significant works about LGBT liberative ethics have been published since the mid-1950s, when Derrick Sherwin Bailey published his groundbreaking work *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* in 1955. Since then, a number of different strands relating to LGBT liberative ethics have arisen, including affirmation ethics, liberation ethics, mutuality ethics, and queer ethics. Each of these four strands poses slightly different questions, although all four arise out of the perspective of LGBT people. Some possible future trends in this area include intersectional ethics as well as transgender and intersex ethics.

CASE STUDY 11.3

In November 2011, the Massachusetts state legislature passed a bill that provided civil rights protections to transgender people with respect to employment, housing, education, and credit. It also amended the state's hate crimes laws to include gender identity. During a ten-month period during 2009 and 2010, a transgender advocacy group received nearly three hundred requests for help from transgender people who had experienced harassment or discrimination. As of June 2010, fifteen states and the District of Columbia included protections for gender identity and expression in their state laws. Numerous people testified both for and against the bill. How would you have assessed this legislation from the perspective of each of the four strands of LGBT liberative ethics?

Study Questions

1. Name and describe the four strands of LGBT liberative ethics and one or two scholars in each strand.
2. Which strand or strands of LGBT liberative ethics speak to you the most? The least? Why?
3. Describe some of the oppressive structures the LGBT community faces and how an LGBT liberative ethics addresses such structures.
4. How can allies of the LGBT community benefit from a knowledge of LGBT liberative ethics?
5. Name some possible future trends of LGBT liberative ethics.

Suggested Readings

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Williams, Robert. *Just as I Am: A Practical Guide to Being Out, Proud and Christian*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1992.