

INCLUDING (AND EXCLUDING) THE HETEROSEXUAL “ALLY”
IN LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER
IDENTITY MOVEMENTS

by

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This project problematizes the inclusion of heterosexual “allies” in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender organizing and activism through observations and theory. Dissension regarding the addition of allies to the LGBT social movement divides organizers, suggesting heterosexual inclusion is an act of bureaucratic means to expand membership, budgets, and resources. LGBT statewide, regional, and national conferences were attended from September 2006 through March 2008 to gather participants’ perspectives. Data was also collected through participant observation at local student organization meetings at a state university in the Midwest.

Three major research questions were addressed by interpretation of collected data:

1. What are the goals of LGBT activism and how do they use a bureaucratic approach?
2. Why do LGBT movements include heterosexual allies?
3. Is it possible to achieve liberation given the movement’s capitalist framework?

Results confirmed opposition among the movement’s participants as well as ideological incongruence regarding heterosexual ally inclusion. The discourse and interconnectivity between varying social movement organizations implied the bureaucratization of activist goals and the absence of a material critique of capitalism and its inherent inequalities. Repercussions of the project’s findings suggest that sexual

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“You are special; you are the same . . . You need to form a self-reliant community; you want to be incorporated into the mainstream. You need to separate, you need to integrate . . . You want massive social change, but you don’t want to tamper with the class system. You want gay liberation but you don’t want to look at the causes of gay oppression.”
(Chasin, 2000, p. 50)

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Sitting at a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) student organization meeting, I noticed some of the members rolling their eyes with annoyance. We were in the midst of group introductions to welcome new members when several first-time participants introduced themselves saying, “Hi. My name is _____, and I’m an ally.” While sharing this information, they raised their hands up in the air, as if to let everyone know, “I’m innocent!” The expressions of annoyance I noted on the faces of long-time members who had heard these statements, however, proved to be much more than minor irritations.

The next day, as we discussed the happenings of the semester’s first meeting, someone exclaimed, “I’m so tired of people coming to our meeting and saying, right away, ‘Oh, I’m an ally.’ Like, ‘don’t worry, I’m not gay or anything.’” Another added, “They act like it’s an insult or something if someone thinks you’re gay.”

Frustrations such as these are only the beginning of a long list of disputes among LGBT activist and organizing activities, clearly illustrating that the LGBT social movement does not share single, solitary ideas or goals. How, then, can liberation be achieved when positions of race, nationality, sex, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic class exist even within the particular, but variable, LGBT social movement?

Organizations on the local, regional, and national levels, as well as on university campuses, have been formed for the purpose of reaching liberation through social change. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender organizations have likewise become more visible and widespread. Despite the development of these formal organizations, inequalities persist, commonly confining activists into a narrow means by which to understand, address, and conceive solutions for such social problems.

In association with my own involvement in LGBT organizing on the local level, specifically at a state university in the Midwest, but in addition to regional and national conferences and meetings, I have experienced immense frustration with the lack in material progress towards the liberation of queer people. In the last 10 years of mainstream LGBT activism, an “A,” signifying the inclusion of heterosexual or “straight” allies, was added to the movement’s acronym (personal communication with director of a university LGBT center, n.d.). The focus of this project is to problematize the use and emphasis of identity in the LGBT social movement and, more specifically, to study the contradictory inclusion of the “ally,” or supportive heterosexual, identity in the movement’s perception of liberatory goals. This paper questions whether someone involved with LGBT activism as a heterosexual ally can disagree with whom they are allied, problematizing the lack of clarity regarding the movement’s requirements for becoming, and remaining, an ally.

This project addresses the phenomenon of how social movements, namely the LGBT movement, have used a bureaucratic approach to organize and expand membership, budgets, and resources. This project also problematizes the specific

political ideologies that the movement has embraced within a capitalist system, seeking to answer whether liberation is possible under the capitalist system and whether heterosexual allies contribute to the possibility of liberation given this framework.

The significance of identity is, therefore, examined and critiqued by theoretical analysis, using current literature, to reveal the problems associated with the formation of organizations when the foundation of social movements rests on fluid, changing, and socially constructed identity. These constructed self-identifications of gay, lesbian, bisexual, as well as transgender persons, have been co-opted by capitalism and thereby commodified and/or incorporated into a set of power relations, which only further divide communities, specifically the LGBT community and the development of an ideological ally identity. The insistence of a self-defined identity, overlooking the influence of social factors, serves to further perpetuate the ways in which capital accumulation pits individuals against one another while maintaining wealth and power in the hands of a few elite as the remaining population competitively struggles to survive.

When individual interests, propelled by individual identities, serve as the motivation for social justice, the needs of the collective and common good are sacrificed. The *common good* refers specifically to what will serve as beneficial to all persons, regardless of how social relations and factors have identified them, and aims to directly address processes of capitalist political economy which serve as the basis for material inequality. Despite the presumption that identity matters or can contribute to the already disputed and complicated goals of seeking social justice, the tunnel-vision focus on sexual identity ultimately results in separating the people as a means of “divide and

conquer” to keep wealth, power, and access to human needs, in the hands of a small minority.

At the micro level, social movements based upon a collective albeit socially constructed identity, such as LGBT rights, are frequently divided both internally and externally through relations with other identity-based groups. At the macro level, these divisions result in pursuit of individual interests that are ineffective at directly challenging a structural, economical, political system which is at the root of social inequality. In the midst of seeking individual group interests based on a notion of identity that is socially constructed, social justice activism loses sight of the real issues—which are ultimately about material, economic resources, and competing interests that create social inequality. The challenge that must be considered is how barriers can be removed and competing interests conquered so that social justice movements can unify for the common good. Identity politics alone does not adequately answer this question, necessitating the need to point out how bureaucracy and capitalism have co-opted social movements by making identity a commodity to be consumed and yet another source of social division.

Capitalism’s commodification of identity, particularly sexual and gender identities, is essential to understanding how processes of identity formation create new hegemonies and exclusions, and whether the concept of an ally identity is necessary, effective, or even realistic to include in social justice movements. All proclaimed progressives and liberals who work for social justice within an identity-based movement, whether racial, gender, disability, or sexuality identities must continually

critique and analyze their methods, understanding, organization, and execution of seeking social justice.

This project considers the efficacy of the LGBT social movement when it has incorporated and used a complex bureaucratic approach to achieve its goals for sexual and gender liberation. Unlike some studies that focus on identity as empowerment, “the current politically correct way to talk about helping” (Agustín, 2007, p. 158) with aims toward social inclusion, this project characterizes the use of identity, particularly an ally identity, as ideologically incompatible with the goal of full liberation and LGBT equality. I draw upon my own observations of LGBT activism locally, regionally, and nationally, on a state university campus at student organization meetings and events, in addition to conference workshops and keynote speakers. The inquiry of this paper rests on the ideological incongruence of aligning or “ally-ing” with a movement that is secured in an identity recognition contradictory to heterosexuality, and questions whether sexual and gender liberation is possible in capitalism.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The goals of LGBT social movements are not monolithic. The debate on same-sex marriage, for instance, has contributed to division within LGBT movements. While statewide organizations may seek to freeze bans on same-sex marriage and advocate for marriage as the ultimate expression of social justice for sexual minorities in the United States, not all LGBT movements agree. Beyond Same Sex Marriage: A New Strategic Vision for All Our Family and Relationships is one such group which hopes “to move beyond the narrow confines of marriage politics as they exist in the United States today” (Beyondmarriage.org, 2006). This organization views the marketing of same-sex marriage as a stand-alone issue and a tactic of wedge politics that divide movements seeking change beyond traditional forms of social acceptance. Although allowing same-sex marriage would economically benefit more couples in the United States, it would not secure everyone since “LGBT movement strategies must never secure privilege for some while at the same time foreclosing options for many” (beyondmarriage.org, 2006). This expression of dividing movements exemplifies the fragility of identity-based organizing because the LGBT movement, for instance, does not seek homogenous goals. “Identity-based” organizing describes movements seeking social change through the use of a collective identity, one that is socially constructed but materially and tangibly deficient.

There are three prominent themes in the literature on identity and organizing. These topics dovetail with the respective research directions of this thesis. The first theme is a critique of the social movements as enmeshed in bureaucratic institutions that function to legitimate their own self-reproduction and self-interests. As social movements are co-opted by bureaucratic institutions, they are more easily commodified by capital, thereby contributing to the deepening of inequality under capitalism. The second theme problematizes the political approach of identity-based movements by calling attention to their inherent contradictions, de-radicalization, and reproduction of inequality and hegemonic ideologies. Relatedly, the third theme involves an ideological assessment of how a proclaimed progressive movement can base itself in socially defined and historically shaped understandings of identity while failing to acknowledge real, historically shaped material inequalities. An ideological assessment continues in the final theme that highlights the ideological incongruence of how one can align or ally with a movement that is secured in identity recognition contradictory to heterosexuality.

BEGINNINGS OF DIVISION

The Gay Left

There is no universal position (Escoffier, 1991) and it becomes clear “that speaking for anyone else or claiming community as absolutely one’s own are highly problematic, if not impossible undertakings” (p. 69). LGBT movements have not always concentrated on identity. The movement of the 1950s “began with a Marxist-influenced agenda of sex-class struggle, and was quickly overtaken by accommodationist tactics”

(Gamson, 1995, p. 395). Marxist gay liberation group Red Butterfly, as well as the Gay Socialist Action Project, determined “coming out” as an “inadequate strategy for social change in itself” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 45) because it divided personal liberation from the overarching social conditions that evoked gay oppression. These groups and others of the 1970s Gay Left made use of Marxism for a framework to link sexual oppression to global capitalism, essentially stating that “sexual oppression probably wouldn’t be eliminated under capitalism,” making it “essential for gay people to relate their oppression to the wider system of exploitation and oppression that capitalism operates” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 47). In opposition to a “political interest group,” Naples (2004) centered on the “politics of recognition” (Naples, 2004, p. 1110) and when there was a time that LGBT movements sought to move beyond the narrow confines of politics.

Vaid (1995) critiqued political movements’ employment of a rights-based model that has resulted in arguing to be “just like straight people” (p. 181), and suggested that rather than wasting time trying to convince one another of how victimized we are, that we “should imagine a world in which we can cohabit as free beings” (p. 190).

Unfortunately, as Hennessy claimed (2000), the Gay Left’s missing theoretical analysis of lesbian and women’s issues created glaring problems and led to these socialist and Marxist groups being short-lived on a wide scale. Bernstein (1997) explained that by the end of the 1970s, the lesbian and gay movement had experienced internal change.

Activists no longer emphasized challenging of gender roles; an interest-group model emerged that replaced the liberation model.

Problems in Categorical Divisions

Just as a perceived omission of lesbian rights was problematic for the activism of the Gay Left, so has a trend of divisions persisted. The very name of LGBT based movements, centers, groups, and organizing concentrates on defining and combining identities simultaneously. An individual is essentially obligated to an identity of lesbian, gay man, bisexual, or transgender person, which limits the spectrum of sexuality and additionally separates members of the movement. Sexuality is complex; “there are many possible configurations of the relationships between desire, practice, and identity—many more such configurations than there are social categories to describe them” (Stein, 1992, p. 40). Hennessy (2000) agreed stating that “one of the most remarkable features of the history of sexual identities is the lack of any consensus over how to understand precisely what sexuality is” (p. 37). Despite this lack of agreement and continuous dispute over who is included or omitted and under which circumstances, sexual object choice has become the distinguishing feature of sexual identity and made the mere notion of sexual choice into seemingly full consent to one’s entire self-identity.

Prior to more recent organizing efforts, the inclusion of bisexual and transgender persons was questionable as bisexuality in particular was seen as a political and personal threat to gay and lesbian movements (Escoffier, 1991). Since many lesbians and gay men view the formation of a heterosexual relationship, especially if economic benefits such as marriage are received, as a form of social—and personal—abandonment, bisexuality poses as a reminder of sexuality’s fluidity and gives impermanence to the concept of a stagnant and chosen identity. The use of the word “queer” during the

emergence of queer activism similarly challenges the differential identities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (Gamson, 1995).

Even the use of “transgender” has come under debate as too specific, calling for personal identifications as “gender queer” to more thoroughly describe individual identities. Gamson (1995) described these disagreements and debates over membership conditions and group boundaries of the letters as “border skirmishes that spotlight the possibility that sexual and gender identities are not the solid political group they have been thought to be—which perhaps accounts for the particularly frantic tone of the letters” (p. 398). Compared to the organizing strategies of the Gay Left, for instance, mainstream queer organizations focused on self-identification and shifted their priorities “from seeking political goals . . . to emphasizing cultural and mobilization outcomes at the possible expense of achieving political goals” (Bernstein, 2003, p. 366).

Bureaucratization

These border skirmishes involve far more than debates over who may or may not belong under a particular identity umbrella. Border skirmishes illuminate the bureaucratization of social movements that seek to expand membership under the pretense that expansion of categories will result in greater control through rational efficiency. Since LGBT social movements attempt to combat many issues simultaneously due to the complexity and impermanency of their various identities, they are forced to streamline a smorgasbord of issues into a manageable goal. In the process of streamlining, social movements stumble into a bureaucratic organization and, as

Weber (2003) stated: “the fully developed bureaucratic apparatus compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the nonmechanical modes of production. Precision, speed . . . [and] strict subordination” (p. 21) are optimum, just as a profitable corporation becomes efficient and grows in strength. In the process of becoming more bureaucratic, however, so must the organization increase its membership to the widest spectrum in search for maximum profit or, as often the case in social movements, budget expansion; a presupposition for structures in a money economy (Weber, 1969). With the establishment of formal bureaucratic organizations also comes the need for these budgets to compensate the salaries of organization officials. Weber (1969) explained that the “principles of office hierarchy” means a “firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones” (p. 197); the supervision of which supersedes any well intentioned or progressive official or member. A bureaucratic organization, after all, is “technically the most highly developed means of power in the hands of the man who controls it” (Weber, 1969, p. 232).

Piven and Cloward (1979) articulated this process of maintaining membership rolls and budget monitoring over mobilization as a cost of formal group organization. The result of continual self-monitoring as a fully developed bureaucratic apparatus (Weber, 2003) is that the organization must expand its membership for the sake of productivity and sought-after power, even at the risk of acquiring minor border skirmishes along the way. It is ultimately in the best interest of any bureaucracy to expand for the sake of its continued legitimacy, and minute disputes that arise in the process are merely part of LGBT movements missing a solid political stance. The

movement is a large bureaucracy “recruiting customers for the cause” (Chasin, 2000, p. 56) similar to financial institutions in our market economy.

Adding Heterosexuals: Bureaucracy at Work

The addition of heterosexuals for membership to the queer community further expands the umbrella of queer activism, highlighting the impermanence of identity-based organizing. When heterosexual allies are added to the acronym, separation is intensified by dividing not only the queer community, but the heterosexual persons who claim solidarity. Allies, too, are expected to undergo a process of contradiction and division from LGBT activism in which they must simultaneously surpass heterosexual privilege and reclaim their heterosexual identity. Although the most advanced step in the development of an ally identity involves *redefinition*, an “establishment of a positive heterosexual identity defined by more than rejection of heterosexist beliefs . . . to establish an identity independent of normative heterosexist definitions” (Evans & Broido 2005, p. 45)—a clear declaration of being heterosexual—the ally must also discount the social norms of heterosexuality. This is clearly a confusing concept, as the ally is assumed to be LGBT based upon their involvement in the movement to surpass heteronormativity, but must also clearly announce that their involvement is based on a heterosexual’s commitment to develop “positive attitudes necessary to become an ally to LGB individuals” (Evans & Broido, 2005, p. 47) and *not* because they are, in fact, part of the sexual minority they claim to represent.

Thus, one more category of ally identity is added to the already complicated and divided movement, making the loss of a clear set of vision and goals more likely in the bureaucracy of the movement. The inherent result of all these divisions is, therefore, an exaggeration of difference that overlooks at the minimum, and ignores at the most, similar experiences and conditions. The highlighting of differences “that divide us in the hierarchical rather than the egalitarian way” (Howard, 2006, p. 15) and give “us little reason to unite” (Malik, 1997, p. 113). Members of the movement are distracted by major goals and separated into distinct categories with, or without, the individual’s consent, and behind it all “is the devout belief that homosexuals are constitutionally different” (Rist, 1992, p. 424), allowing permission to emphasize such difference. Confusion surrounds the existence of whether lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender persons should be striving for separation or assimilation to the status quo.

Herein lies the contradiction

of seeking social change without changing the class system. You are special; you are the same . . . You need to form a self-reliant community; you want to be incorporated into the mainstream. You need to separate, you need to integrate . . . You want massive social change, but you don’t want to tamper with the class system. You want gay liberation but you don’t want to look at the causes of gay oppression. (Chasin, 2000, p. 50)

Further following bureaucratic procedure, the movement reaches a level in political activity in which its members become an electoral constituency. The addition of heterosexual allies to the movement’s community is thus made further available for co-optation by bureaucratic politicians who seek to expand their own electoral constituency. Like the 1960s Civil Rights Movement explained by Piven and Cloward (1979) in which

Black Americans were targeted by the Democratic Party for the sake of increasing voting numbers, numerous politicians have today taken interest in LGBT issues. Unfortunately, they have done so for their professional gains to secure a strong civil rights plank. The available options for LGBT and ally activists are additionally deradicalized under the negotiations, terms, and rules of political groups, political process, and the distractions of wedge politics that undermine the detrimental impacts of capitalist enterprise. It is questionable that the benefactors from the inclusion of allies or any other social-identity based groups is the LGBT movement, but more so wealthy politicians and a political process produced under the capitalist system.

Costs of Formal Organization

By succumbing to “reform through organization and electoral pressure” (Piven & Cloward, 1979, p. 77), it is likely that activists will forfeit “local disruptions and [become], however inadvertently, collaborators in the process that emasculate[s] the movement” (p. 77). In other words, while the rioters at Stonewall and the Gay Left of the 1960s sought radical social *and* economic transformation through the full rejection of social norms that included capital accumulation, the bureaucratic expansion of today’s LGBT movement has traded local disruptions for organized, corporate-sponsored pride parades.

Adapting to national electoral influence that seek change through the set rules of legislation, activists have built countless national and local organizations. With the rational construction of these institutionalized organizations, activists are “preoccupied

with trying to build and sustain embryonic formal organizations in the sure conviction that these organizations will enlarge and become powerful . . . and becoming increasingly subservient to those on whom it depends” (Piven & Cloward, 1979, p. xxii) for funding, legitimization, and recognition. These formal organizations that echo “the credo of officialdom itself” (Piven & Cloward, 1979, p. 91) are not necessarily the vehicle for change, however. While the Stonewall rioters of the 1960s spontaneously dissented, the 1993 gay marchers at Washington, D.C. were plagued by budget disputes (Goldstein, 2000). The adoption of formal organizations, as Piven and Cloward (1979) described of past social movements, results in activists’ co-optation by bureaucratic procedures and expansion at the cost of radicalism and productive change.

Ideological Definitions of Ally

A fundamental issue in the movement also arises over a clear definition and explanation of the role of a heterosexual ally. Some of the most visible national LGBT organizations, such as Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) all promote the inclusion and involvement of “heterosexual people called on to be advocates for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force). What is unclear is how a straight ally advocates for LGBT people. According to GLAAD, “Allies are some of the most effective and powerful voices of the LGBT movement. Not only do allies help people in the coming-out process, they also help others understand the importance of equality, fairness, tolerance and mutual respect”

(Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, n.d.), but how “equality, fairness, tolerance and mutual respect” is understood and expressed is not one-dimensional. Although the HRC describes a straight ally as someone who advocates for “GLBT equal rights and fair treatment” (Human Rights Campaign, 1980), would they applaud an ally who disagreed with an end goal of same-sex marriage? Or who disagreed with the use of identity as the central political frame for LGBT movements?

INCONSISTENCY OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

The existence of identity is fragile, delicate, and historically shaped. Heterosexuality only existed because homosexuality does as its “perverse” opposite. The distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality lies in mere sexual object choice, or the “distinguishing feature of sexual identity” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 99). Vaid (1996) stated that gayness as an identity has been rooted only in sexual behavior, which are not matters of personal experiences alone, but “socially instituted norms” (Hennessy 2000, p. 115). Same-gender sexual object choice did not exist until the creation of the word “homosexuality.” Rather, varying sexual behaviors have long been part of personal experience. It is not until more recently that these personal experiences have been adapted into a self-contained sexual identity.

Social movements reduced to an identity-based framework risk simplifying the complexity and changing characteristics of individuals. Wood (1997) criticized identity politics’ key supposition that “our identities are so variable, uncertain, fragile, that there can be no basis for solidarity and collective action founded on a common social

‘identity’, a common experience, and common interests” (p. 7). As multilayered creatures, people cannot be deduced to single identities, particularly when identity is “local, contingent, and freely chosen” but “rights of identity are absolute” (Ahmad, 1997a, p. 63) and offer little room for change. The Wood (1997) and Ahmad (1997) critiques of this postmodern identity principle is that it fails to acknowledge how economic class is capable of bringing together varying individuals, groups, and experiences for the goal of emancipation.

An individual “constructs and presents any one of a number of possible social identities, depending on the situation” (Malik, 1997, p. 116) and need not necessarily choose or align with a single identity. Many groups would claim to align, or ally, with an identity group for the sake of equality, but equality is also an historically specific idea “which has had different meanings in different social contexts” (Malik, 1997, p. 120). While the goal of equality may conceivably advocate “justice for all,” a movement based on identity will inevitably exclude any individual who does not fit in with that specific group. Hennessy (2000) agreed that in the case of a movement with a labeled identity, people’s interests are compromised by placing an emphasis on the individual at the cost of the collective.

Postmodernist Impact

This focus on the recognition of one’s individual identity found in the LGBT social movements is greatly shaped by a postmodernist theory, and one too frequently referenced without the realization that the ability to develop a collective identity has

been made through the expansion of capitalism. Fraser (2000) stated that the move towards “claims for the recognition of difference” away from a redistribution of material goods occurred within a context of “aggressively expanding capitalism” (p. 108). The advancement of capitalism, and on a global level, has accelerated economic inequality. Postmodernism is able to de-emphasize these material inequalities only by focusing on a recognition of individual and collective identity differences that serve “less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistributive struggles than to marginalize, eclipse and displace them” (Fraser, 2000). Eagleton (2003) explained that it is amidst “the grand narrative of capitalist globalization” (p. 72) when intellectuals should be thinking most in political terms, that the postmodernist theorists emphasized perversity, disruption, and sensationalism. Postmodern thought made “a fetish of difference” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 46) while it simultaneously promoted the erasure of distinguishing “between image and reality, truth and fiction, history and fable, ethics and aesthetics, culture and economics, high and popular art, political left and right” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 46). Instead of recognizing the possibilities for unification based on real, material interests, Stabile (1997) criticized the postmodern rejection of Marxism in favor of the “privileging of the notion of ‘difference’” (p. 137).

Thus, the cultural emphasis of postmodernism made identity, one’s own self-conception, more important than material reality. For LGBT activists, this meant a focus on “ways of feeling and forms of representation” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 47) as validated motivation and reason to organize. Social change was no longer based on material or political emancipation, but a search for LGBT persons to “engage their desires and

weave its way into their sense of identity” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 46), made possible through a so-called cultural revolution. Eagleton eloquently summarized the impact of postmodernism on political activism by stating that “the point was not to change the political world, but to secure one’s cultural niche within it” (p. 47), and people were “prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to be themselves” (p. 49).

Distracted by a spotlight on personal contemplation, postmodernism had failed to address how the circumstances of advanced global capitalism had provided the opportunity for such contemplations. In the midst of increasing economic gaps and “exacerbating economic inequality” (Fraser, 2000), followers of postmodernism, typically from educated and upper class backgrounds, wallowed in their own “misrecognition.” Eagleton (2003) stated that in the absence of material impoverishment, “we had grown accustomed to our angst, and had begun to hug our lack of chains” (p. 66). The blame was no longer on a lack of material equality, but on the lack of recognizing “an authentic, self-affirming and self-generated collected identity” (Fraser, 2000). Fraser explained that the proponents of a culturalist theory faulted misrecognition as the source of maldistribution which denied egalitarian respect or esteem of LGBT people. Explicitly, an emphasis on recognition of difference came at the cost of acknowledging the uneven distribution of material goods, which is the real source of inequality for LGBT people. This cultural, postmodern dialogue impacted LGBT organizers who now considered a valuing of identity versus material redistribution as their political goals, in clear opposition to a Marxist perspective because, as Ahmad (1992) postulated, “a theoretical position that dismisses the history

of materialities . . . is, in the most accurate sense of these words, repressive and bourgeois” (pp. 35-36).

THE INFLUENCE OF CAPITALISM

If sexual identities are not naturally occurring or established, then how have they only recently been adapted into categories and subdivisions of a movement claiming to organize for social change? Hennessy (2000) explained that the “heteronormative sexual identity is an historical component of labor/labor power as it organizes forms of consciousness into which social divisions would depend” (p. 104). It is not sexual minorities themselves who have launched the concept of a sexual identity, but a matter of the human capacity for sensation, like any material need, that has been shaped, produced, and “disciplined in the organization of labor” (p. 214). This emphasis on labor is a clear connection to the basics of capitalism, a system in which the worker is only worth the power of their labor to expand value. Marx (1990) stated that labor,

as the creator of use-values, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself. (p. 133)

Simply put, in capitalism, labor is all we have to offer.

The labor Marx (1990) described, however, is also one of social process that is dominated by how labor is valued under capitalism’s definition, since labor independent of a measure has no value. It is also not labor power itself that has value, but the value of the labor’s resulting function, such as the specific form of the labor. If the form of labor

provided by women is socially considered less valuable, and thereby measured in lower wages, then a heterosexual household is most rational under capitalism. It is, thus, human labor that is self-actualizing and labor through which human beings create use-values, maintain existence, and define themselves in society.

The Division of Labor and Social Identity

Understanding capitalism's influence on sexuality should additionally be an important aspect of LGBT movements because, according to D'Emilio (1993), "gay men and lesbians have not always existed . . . their emergence is associated with the relations of capitalism" (p. 468) which allowed large numbers of men and women to see themselves as part of a community and, consequently, organize politically on the basis of that community. As household systems of production ceased to be independent, the family-based economy became a "fully developed capitalist free labor economy" (D'Emilio, 1993, p. 469). As wage labor spread and individuals made their living through a division of waged labor, it became "possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity" (p. 470), but *one that was nonetheless based in capitalism's divided and waged labor*. It was not, after all, the sexual behavior that created an identity, but "the ability to remain outside" (p. 470) the family, and most importantly, to reach self-actualization through use-value in the form of wages that formed 'identity.' Although an individual is able to labor independently from a household system, they are still dependent upon the exchange of products as commodities (Marx, 1990). Chasin (2000) explained that "gay identity and community,

then, are functions of the rise of advanced capitalism and the industrialization of advertising” (p. 108) that even allowed a gay social life to emerge.

It is nonetheless necessary to analyze how capitalism harnesses heteronormativity to the endless expansion of value. In a capitalist system, value is created only through surplus of production resulting from the labor of workers. Again, labor power is all individuals have in a capitalist society, regardless of sexual orientation, and

the organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance. The constant generation of a relative surplus population keeps the law of the supply and demand of labour, and therefore wages, within narrow limits. (Marx, 1990, p. 899)

In other words, the notion of laboring for wages is normalized because persons realize the only means of survival is through their labor, and it is necessary to measure one’s needs against ways of making sense of them (Hennessy, 2002).

Heterosexual relationships are an ideal product of the normalization of labor for survival within capitalism. Ferguson (2002) stated, “Sex/affective production” explains the social organization of labor and exchange that occurs between men and women “in the production of children, affection, and sexuality” (p. 130). By ordering the production of capital, a sexual division of labor serves to socialize people as gendered, which results in ideal characteristics of male/female. One of these ideal characteristics is heterosexuality where households serve “as units of production with sufficient resources to reproduce themselves” (Stacey, 2002, p. 97) both materially and socially.

Heterosexuality is thus compulsory under the capitalist organizational frame of wage, labor, commodity production, and consumption (Hennessy, 2002).

Privatization and Restriction of Sexual Behavior

The restriction of sexuality is additionally part of capitalism's requirement of workers' self-discipline. Sex is repressed, according to Foucault (1978), because it is "incompatible with a general and intensive work imperative" (p. 6) required for capital accumulation. An individual must practice self-discipline of sexual gratification for the sake of the intensive labor required for survival in a market economy. The family is thus a social and economic structure where sexuality is diminished as much as possible, "preserving only its useful functions" (Foucault, 1978, p. 108). Its useful function being for the purpose of reproduction: "the body that produces and consumes" (Foucault, 1978, p. 107) to generate more producers and consumers.

The gay movement's shift from calling for sexual and personal freedom to "a construction of people 'who have no choice' but are simply biologically or otherwise driven into a fixed sexual orientation" (Wagner, 1997, p. 158) de-radicalized the movement. From the late 1970s onward, the movement's goals included "acceptance of the belief that sexuality . . . should remain a private right exercised at home behind closed doors" (p. 158), reinforcing levels of self-control about sexuality. Wagner stated that the power of the capitalist would be undermined by intemperance, since the ideology of meritocracy rests on the superior morality and ingenuity of the upper classes, a point at which they split from the poor and working masses. Maintaining self-

discipline, particularly from nonessential sexuality, and therefore nonheterosexuality, is compulsory to uphold the spirit of capitalism that, according to Weber (2006), requires sole “devotion to the calling of making money” (p. 33).

This intrinsic need for a division of labor echoes Hennessy’s (2000) comment on the organization of labor. Since labor is therefore separated from the private into public life—market from household—one’s sense of self is constructed not only on their family/private life, but now defined by their labor’s production as well as their capability to consume. Consequently, identity is socially produced through the development of labor-dependent production required from the capitalist system, as well as the “individual from collective” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 95). The processes that have to do with the production of surplus value distinguishes groups of laborers from owners, and this trend of emphasizing difference is illustrated by identity-based groups who hold steadfast to identity categories in order to “turn insults into strengths . . . that should in all justice be turned back into insults” (Brennan, 2006, p. 88). Gamson (1991) agreed that “organizing around a resisted label . . . involves an initial acceptance of the label (and in identity-oriented movements actually celebrates it), can tend to reify the label” (p. 44).

Identity as a Means of Social Control

When people are categorized, often under the guise of their own consent, a level of self-domination, in addition to overt social control, is the result. Gamson (1991) stated that in the process of categorizing oneself, “the labels on which the group identity

is built are used, in a sense, against themselves” (p. 44). Social control is specifically discussed by Durkheim (1951) in *Suicide*. Because disorder is not conducive to the functioning of capitalism’s strict divisions of labor, order must be created and reproduced. Socialization, knowing one’s role in society, is key to productivity. Durkheim made clear that societies function best with the stability of social institutions, such as social roles that provide safety and security in times of crisis by maintaining predictability and consistency and controlling our actions. By identifying as LGBT, ally, or another label, we may appear to be giving consent to our identity, but we are ultimately controlled when identification becomes all encompassing and consuming—when identities define people, instead of people defining the identities. Human expression is also limited through the use of concrete identity labels serving to control desire. According to Rist (1992), “polemic” categorization, under the guise of social progress, actually “continues to imprison desire in the dark cells of ‘gay’ and ‘straight,’ rather than freeing our hearts and genitals to the fullest expression of human affection, which ought to be the unabashed ideal of any sexual liberation movement” (p. 424).

Ideological Contradiction

Wagner (1997) explained that seemingly liberal policies or institutions are actually “quite conservative” and “designed to control the people” (p. 161). Although a corporation, for instance, may provide same-sex partner benefits to its employees, their sexual choice is allowed, but only within defined limits. It is essential that the identities which have been socially constructed and institutionalized remain controlled by the

same capitalist divisions of labor, and hence, difference. Some scholars point out that the external social control invoked by identity is also illustrated as internal self-dominance. Gamson (1991) stated that the dominator “becomes increasingly abstracted and invisible, while the dominated, embodied and visible, becomes the focus of attention. In effect, people dominate themselves” (p. 43). Though this idea may at first seem to be a stretch of logic, it makes sense because the emphasis of identity-based movements always rest entirely on the *identity* itself. Granting full attention to the oppressed group seeking to reclaim power through presumably *self*-identification “leaves us defenseless against free-market fundamentalism” (Naples, 2004, p. 1112). This emphasis on self-identification has been growing at a time when the free market, encouraged by a neoliberal ideology, is creating an incredible gap between the rich and poor worldwide—when economic redistribution should be at the top of the agenda.

Brennan (2006) would agree, explaining that a politics of identity although “carped at by the Far Right or newspaper columnists, flourishes in the arts, journalism, and the academy, becoming in its own way hegemonic—as an ethical stand, at least, if not as a civic fact, forged through political will” (p. 33). Proclaimed activists have been so set on establishing their own identity through self-reflection that while poverty ravishes millions worldwide, they remain proud of their efforts to understand the suffering of others through an appreciative multicultural lens. Their ethical stand, in the midst of postmodernist thinking, is widespread and has impacted the political will (Brennan, 2006) by replacing extremist goals of “transformation of the economy and the abolition of class relations” into “public bragging” (p. 32).

COMPETING FORCES

In the geography of egalitarianism, identity politics results in competition for limited space (Escoffier, 1991). Rather than focusing on the true challenging of capitalist hegemony, priority is given to identity's interests with "the lack of any fundamental logic or center to these projects" (Stein, 1992, p. 35). Identity is "purchased at the price of hierarchy, normalization, and exclusion" due to groups advocating for "the deconstruction of a hetero/homo code that structures the 'social text' of daily life" (Gamson, 1995, p. 400). For instance, if one of the goals of the postmodern LGBT movements is to deconstruct a dichotomy of sexual identity, it would be contradictory to include self-named heterosexual allies whose sexuality could risk furthering the dichotomy. The emphasis on identity naming only supports the elite because "diversity is a rich people's problem" (Michaels, 2006, p. 108). It is the luxury of a few who have the time and elite cultural education to explore their identities. Returning briefly to Eagleton (2003), it was those with a "lack of chains" in the midst of middle class lifestyle who could pursue recognition. What hegemony constructs, then "is not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination" (Johnson, 2007, p. 29). The people are divided, and more easily able to be conquered when hegemony is rendered invisible and reproduced by the priority of identity labels. The socially oppressed are less of a threat because their numbers had been divided (Piven & Cloward, 1979).

Commodifying Social Identity

In the meantime, however, making identity-based groups well known puts them at risk to be co-opted. Gamson (1995) reported: “The last thing I want to do is institutionalize that difference by defining myself with a word and political philosophy that set me outside the mainstream” (p. 396). While description and grouping of identity become more well known in a visibility-as-politics approach, for instance as “researchers have documented increasingly positive attitudes toward lesbian and gay people” (Evans & Broido, 2005, p. 48), they are institutionalized into marketable products. In the fragmentation and poststructuralist’s “unremitting hostility toward totality” (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 95), “identity has been transformed into a commodity for those with the capital to consume it” (Stabile, 1997, p. 148). For the elite few with the luxury of time and capital, identity is emancipating and empowering that acts to “attract customers and commodify for the sake of ‘improvement’” (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 93). Hennessy (2000) pointed to the development of commercial space and progressive corporations that cater to homosexuals. A new market of products to be sold becomes available through the mainstreaming of LGBT identity. Corporations, such as Best Buy, financially sponsor Pride Parades with its name flying on large banners; institutions of higher education, including elite colleges, attract prospective students, and thus, profits, by advertising the value they place on diversity but paying no mind to the limitations poverty and illiteracy place on could-be students; and queer magazines and books are prolifically published, packed with advertisements for alcoholic beverages, restaurants, and leisure products. Desire is packaged and sold, value is stamped with a

pride rainbow, and consumed but with little to no signs of liberation from sexuality as a commodity.

Although it may be argued that desire can be satisfied through the consumption of products, and it may be comforting to know there are corporations such as Best Buy who offer domestic partner benefits to its employees, it is nonetheless naïve to think that LGBT persons alone are benefiting from this new, colorful, and potentially lucrative market. This is where identity-based movements truly fail to recognize the intricate relationship between desire and capitalism. Through advertisements and commodification, “consumption has been held out as a route to political and social enfranchisement” (Chasin, 2000, p. 101). Society is under the rule of investors and merchants that seek “to open new markets to absorb the products of an increasing over-production” (Brennan, 2006, p. 23). In the spirit of competition, “the continued growth of the market depended on the incorporation of more, and different markets” (Chasin, 2000, p. 106); namely, the commodification of gay and lesbian identity. By closing the distance between straight and gay identities, either identity is “basically a set of product choices” (Chasin, 2000, p. 46). Although identity movements have been bureaucratized and segmented by personal interests, assumed to be liberating and progressive, the potential power of bureaucracy envisioned by Weber (cited in Gerth & Mills, 1969) has not been captured by a class that is an agent of positive change, making the real beneficiaries from the institutionalization of identity capital. The important questions of “for whom, how much, on whose behalf, to what end, and is there any other way?”

(Brennan, 2006, p. 150) are not being asked, at the expense of liberation, but for the profit of capitalist hegemony.

Measurable Gains?: Material vs. Cultural Improvement

As Brennan (2006) put it: “running from power does not absolve one from power’s outcomes” (p. 151). Although social movements purport that they are advocating for positive change through the means of changing cultural norms, they are doing so at the expense of material, economic gains. Hennessy (2002) stated that new social movements have forced people to “measure their outlawed needs against the ways of making sense of them offered by the dominant culture” (p. 86). New Social Movements (NSM) are movements “defined by an orientation to identity and cultural politics rather than to state and class politics” with membership mostly from the new middle class (Weir, 1993, p. 73). Unfortunately, NSMs have typically maintained emphasis on cultural orientation and ambivalence regarding class, making a departure from Marxist class analysis, in the midst of globalization and the ever-widening gap between the wealthy and working poor. In the process of having to choose the identities provided by dominant culture and consumable market products, movements have prioritized cultural changes over actual material improvement, and while being “accepted” by mainstream culture is appealing, it is not the end-all solution.

First, acceptance in itself denotes a power differential in that mainstream culture has the power to choose to accept someone or something different and less powerful. Second, and most important, cultural acceptance into mainstream society does not

disrupt the hegemony created and maintained by capitalism. Realistically, “limited assimilation of gays into mainstream middle class culture does not disrupt postmodern patriarchy and its intersection with capitalism; indeed, it is in some ways quite integral to it” (Hennessey, 2000, p. 137). The absorption of a gay and lesbian difference in the United States is manipulated into a marketable “enfranchisement” of dominant culture (Chasin, 2000), but is in no way a sign of progress. This realism is illustrated in LGBT-focused magazines or college/university diversity statements because regardless of its appeal, “victories for diversity made no contribution whatsoever to economic equality” (Howard, 2006, p. 2). In the absence of emphasis on political and economic justice, the addition of self-identified heterosexual allies in LGBT movements simply becomes another selling point; another commodified identity that prioritizes improvement for the sake of convention.

Hennessey (2002) proposed the practice of “disidentification” that could replace identity politics with the “power and passion of the broad collective agency from which capital itself derives” (p. 86). While *cultural* materialism may imagine social change through achievements in cultural democracy and acceptance, they do so by renouncing “the causal link in Marxism’s systematic analysis between culture and economy” (Hennessey, 2002, p. 80). It is not compatible, or realistic, to envision positive cultural changes without recognizing the limitations of this model within a capitalist, economic framework. Ahmad (1997b) insisted that culture is not reducible to processes that Marxist political economy studies, but culture is embedded in those processes because “economics and culture go hand in hand” (Malik, 1997, p. 102). The lengthy discourses

on identity and culture draw attention away from capital and displace concerns from “power and policy to the ghetto or shopping mall behaviors” (di Leonardo, 1999, p. 64). Culture and temperament are narrated over politics, again ignoring Marx’s (1844) assertion that the rights of man are political rights. Such identity for deployment aims to “transform mainstream culture, its categories and values” (Bernstein, 1997, p. 538) by providing alternative organizational forms but fails to see the connectivity of culture to economics.

It is particularly ineffective to envision cultural progress within a framework of individualism, a trait inherent in and appreciated by capitalism. Seeking gains through an individual identity, complete with individual and usually unique self-interests, may grant improvement in the lives of a few, but what about thousands and millions of other persons? While an LGBT movement may take pride, for instance, in having stopped a same-sex marriage ban from entering legislation, what improvement has been made for the thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons denied employment based on sexual and gender orientation? For that matter, what about the many individuals who do legally marry but are still left without affordable and quality health care?

It is only through the analysis of capitalist economics that progressive change will occur. Michaels (2006) explained that at a time when economic inequality was increasing, so too was the question of identity, which did little to level that inequality. di Leonardo (1999) pointed out that in the past, “economic expansion laid the material basis for college-school youth rebellion—including civil rights, antiwar, and feminist

protest as well as demands for increased autonomy and sexual freedom” (p. 41).

Economic situations are intricately linked to cultural change and probability for achieving justice, or the lack thereof, for LGBT persons, as well as their allies. After all, despite the attraction to appear politically correct or morally righteous, being an ally to LGBT people does little to improve the material lives and survival of anyone. Labor in capitalism clearly shapes and serves as motivation for social movements: “put capitalism on the agenda as a starting point for theory and practice precisely because it is the prevailing means by which people produce to meet their needs” (Hennessy, 2002, p. 83).

CONCLUSION: CHALLENGING THE HEGEMONIC ORDER

What needs to be changed? The task is to “construct a theory of the whole that will enable us to ‘see’ more fully the dimensions and textures of social life, particularly structures of power and their points of internal contradictions” (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 99). Instead of attempting to change cultural attitudes that are essentially meaningless to materially improve people’s lives, hegemony needs to be challenged, not maintained by identity-based competition and divisions. A more economically balanced society will cultivate and harvest cultural changes when the restraints of identity-boxes become less emphasized. Forms of oppression such as race, class, gender, and sexuality interconnect to sustain a corporate ruling class. The “yield to temptation of making a hierarchy of oppression” (Martinez, 2002, p. 270) and new hegemonies between identity groups must be discarded in favor of unification and solidarity, as well as clear goals and political aims. Bernstein (1997) wrote of finding a commonality that challenges all social

movements because the mentality of differences does not accomplish policy reform, nor unify against the capitalist, hegemonic struggle. Durkheim (1997) wrote that “resistance must be collective” (p. 58), occurring through unifying revolution, not exclusionary, separationist identity-based groups.

Brennan (2006) argued that when one distinct group fights on behalf of some, but not all, they do so at the expense of others because “one’s principles are always unevenly applied, which is all the more reason to pick them carefully and argue them openly” (p. 151). Basically, individual self-interests ultimately take precedence over what could contribute to the common good. By attending to individual interests elevated by individual self-identity, some LGBT movements may consider the act of naming oppression and delineation of specific identity as progressive, but err in failing to consider whom they seek to emancipate, and the desired kind of emancipation. Including heterosexual allies into LGBT movements by distinctly separating identities is unproductive if persons are reduced to the very social identity constructions they wish to destroy. If there does exist an ideological agreement between including straight allies into LGBT movements, Derrida (1997) explained: “Before even thinking about what loving, love means, one must know that the only way to find out is by questioning first of all the act and the experience of loving rather than the state or situation of being loved” (p. 8). How can one align with a vast social movement without a clear explanation of its goals, its political approaches, or its motivations for change?

This question underscores the basic need for further study of the role and political approach of the incorporation of heterosexual allies into a social movement

with the presumed purpose of liberation. First, there is theoretical value in focusing specifically on LGBT organizing. Concentrating on how new hierarchies and hegemonies are formed within a so-called progressive movement through the types and motivations for those disputes is representative of the ways in which bureaucratic co-optation deradicalizes and divides movements. Critiquing how LGBT activism has embodied a bureaucratic approach to strengthen its membership support and legitimate its own existence offers specific insight to how movements are commodified within capitalism and result in little to no relief for social inequality. Second, the inclusion of heterosexual allies into LGBT organizing represents an ideological debate over how activism conceptualizes the incongruence of simultaneously emphasizing and reducing the distance between sameness and difference. Studying the ally as an ideological embodiment of such incongruence sheds light on how difference and sameness are understood and conveyed by movements based on social identities. Lastly, after recognizing inconsistencies and co-optations, there is need to tackle whether it is possible for local LGBT organizing in particular to reinvent itself to practice activism for the common good, addressing material and economic inequalities, while leaving behind individual interests tied down by identity politics.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The major research question of this thesis is why does lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender organizing and activism include heterosexual allies within the movement? It is essential to sociologically analyze how LGBT organizers conceptualize the movement's goals and motivations for activism, as well as how LGBT movements are organizationally structured. Several other significant research questions arise from these initial questions. For instance, what are the political ideologies employed by the movement's advocates? How are roles and identities included in the movement structurally determined? And how is the role of ally a social performance?

Research Questions

The review of literature emphasized three prominent themes that offer guidance for the direction of research. The first problem questions specifically why a social movement composed of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender persons would create a heterosexual ally identity and include such an identity in activism. LGBT persons and their behavior have been historically regarded as deviant. Consequently, some LGBT persons have experienced certain forms of oppression, of varying degrees, and have emphasized the need to be liberated from the heteronormative confines of capitalist society, as well as the construction of a heterosexual/homosexual binary.

If the liberation from these confines forms some level of motivation for activism, it would then appear potentially contradictory to grant heterosexual supporters of LGBT people a defined ally identity. This apparent incongruence is worthy of inquiry, exploration, and theoretical examination.

The basis for LGBT activism, however, is not monolithic. In an effort to answer the question of why LGBT organizing would include heterosexual allies, a secondary and two-fold problem then appears which interrogates what exactly LGBT activism involves: i.e., what are the goals, foundations, motivations, or reasons for organizing behind a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or ally identity? What are the meanings of these identities and how are they developed? Consequently, how are these identities translated into a social movement and with which political approaches? The second half of the question regarding the movement's ideological orientations that shape its goals is derived from a major theme in the literature. Unpacking how LGBT activism has embraced a bureaucratic approach to strengthen its membership and legitimate its own existence offers insight to how LGBT and other social movements are commodified within capitalism and do or do not necessarily challenge the bases of social inequality under capitalism.

The third major question emerges from the last; namely, is it possible for LGBT organizing to liberate its target population, or reach its desired goals, using its current political approach and bureaucratic means of expansion, rationality, and mindset within a capitalist framework? Whether or not it is possible, what is the ideological conceptualization of the heterosexual ally and does the ally have a place in the

movement? What is the problematic nature of the ally identity and who decides the criteria of “ally-ness?” In what ways is this identity performed and what is the sociological significance of that performance?

Data Collection: Qualitative Inquiry

The research method in this thesis was a qualitative one that “falls within the process of scientific research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 41). This approach is considered scientific in the systematic way that it proceeds, which includes starting with a problem, examining literature, posing questions, gathering and analyzing data, and reporting the research findings (Creswell, 2007; Jorgenson, 1989). According to Weber (1971), this rational means of inquiry “presupposes that the rules of logic and method are valid” (p. 9), resulting in self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts as the tools of scientific activity to achieve “truth while providing no absolute guarantees” (Jorgenson, 1989, p. 27).

According to the research techniques of Creswell (2007), qualitative inquiry makes it possible to gain access, rapport, and an insider perspective (Schwartz & Jacobs 1979, p. 37), through the use of a theoretical lens, to study the research questions in “a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Generally, this qualitative approach invokes complex descriptions and interpretations that satisfied gaps in the literature. Since the approach of participation in social science research “does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures” (Creswell, 2007, p. 41), it recognized that

social science is evolving and constantly changing. The natural setting included sites “where participants experience the issue or problem under study . . . this up-close information [is] gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context” as a major characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). The use of the natural setting was, consequently, the primary basis by which information was gathered into the ideological disputes and proclaimed goals of the movements. The voices of the participants in the settings of meetings and conference activities were expressed directly and uncensored by outsiders who may have otherwise influenced or intimidated participants.

Participant Observation

Taking from this qualitative approach, I engaged in participant observation during meetings and conference activities. A similar use of participant observation was exemplified in Gamson’s (1997) study on the role of collective identity construction in organizations. Gamson employed participant observation to analyze the institutionalization of organizations. Choosing to attend the planning meetings of New York’s Gay Film Festival, Gamson was able to discover how “movement cultures are consolidated and disseminated” in the context of space where activists engage in discussion and “debate within the community” (pp. 528-529). By attending these planning meetings as an active participant, but also as a researcher, Gamson (1997) discovered how organizations adapt to their environments, including the increase of

corporate interest, the need to expand their “protagonist identity field” (p. 529) and the organization’s changing political motivations.

This study likewise employed participant observation to explore how LGBT organizing is shaped by bureaucratic expansion, uses political approaches, and conceptualizes the place of social identities, including the construction of a straight ally. Hartman and Hedblom (1979) described participant observation as “a means of organizing behaviors into categories” and requires a method in which “the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study . . . observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people over some length of time” (p. 225). This technique allowed more insight into the “etiology of behavior in the very stuff of the human experience” (Hartman & Hedblom, 1979, p. 4; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 46) more than other methods.

For the objectives of this specific study, participant observation allowed the opportunities to observe what Hartman and Hedblom (1979) explained as the very “stuff” of the human experience. It additionally permitted the concerns of insiders within LGBT organizing to be documented, reflecting the conviction that “knowledge resulting from research will be valuable in some way to members of the setting” (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 71). In agreement with Gamson’s choice (1997) to study planning meetings, this research used the natural settings of LGBT local, statewide, regional and nationwide conferences and meetings. My participation in these settings varied from passive listener to active participant, depending upon the appropriateness of the situation, for instance, in the case of a keynote presentation or a workshop discussion. When

appropriate, I asked questions related to the content of the discussion and interacted with other participants who typically recognized my role as being a heterosexual ally, although I was frequently presumed lesbian or bisexual. When my position was understood by other participants as an ally, I gained access to discussions devoted to the challenges and objectives of ally-ness. This position also granted insider status to problematize heterosexual involvement since it was generally acceptable for an ally to critique their place in LGBT activism. On the other hand, when my position was presumed to be that of a lesbian or bisexual woman, I was insider to the frustrations and perceptions of ally expressed by LGBT communities. These multiple positions “helped me understand everyone a bit better” (Agustín, 2007, p. 141) since being presumed heterosexual ally or lesbian/bisexual welcomed me into variable situations, according to the conditions of the moment. “Because I behaved in most ways as a normal member of the organization, participating fully in its activities, it was hard for other . . . members to think of me as a researcher” (Cole, 1990, p. 163; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 48), creating a comfortable, open space to ask questions, take notes, and become unquestionably involved. The following settings, as described below, are those that were specifically attended.

Specific Settings of Participant Observation

State university level meetings. Participant observation was conducted from October 2006 to March 2008 at a state university in the Midwest United States. I attended random student organization meetings as well as the university’s department

sponsored LGBT gatherings to note the discourse and proclaimed organization efforts. Written notes were recorded when discussion was pertinent to the research objectives. These meetings were selected because they offered microlevel, local insight into the goals and organizing of students, faculty, and staff members who purported their activities and events as activist oriented and awareness raising. I actively participated at various times in a variety of meetings and was generally trusted and unquestioned by fellow participants. “Researcher” status was typically unknown by other participants, and careful note taking and inquiries were never questioned.

Conference attendance. To increase insight into LGBT organizing approaches and goals, I attended LGBT conferences on the statewide, regional, and national levels between November 2006 and February 2008. One statewide conference at a state in the Midwest was attended in October 2007 to observe differing campus approaches of “advocating for change on our campuses” (Slogan of 2007 statewide campus conference). Two regional Midwest conferences, each with nearly 1,800 participants, were attended—one in February 2007 and the other in February 2008—for the purpose of discerning the widespread goals of LGBT campus activism within the Midwest region. One national conference was attended in February 2008 to note the activist objectives of large, national grassroots organizations seeking to “create change” for LGBT equality (Adaptation of conference title to maintain anonymity). The national conference had more than 2,500 participants. Conference attendance offered opportunity to observe activities highlighting the movement’s goals, points of concern, bureaucratic

organization, and overall patterns of member contention and agreement. The variance in each conference's level of activism, organizing, membership size, and budgets offered the research a diverse spectrum of the short- and long-term goals, motivations, and methods for LGBT organizing. I attended every event offered at each conference, within reason and ability, including workshops and keynote speakers. At each meeting, careful, detailed, written notes were taken and the status of researcher was generally unknown because most participants assumed active participation. Careful notes interwove the "continuance . . . of observations and inference" (Hartman & Hedblom, 1979, p. 231; Jorgenson, 1989, p. 23) on my behalf. Cole (1990) explained this mingling of observation and conjecture as the ability to "understand the kind of questions that needed answering" (p. 162) while simultaneously maintaining a "flexible, open-ended process for identifying and defining a problem or problems for study" (Jorgenson, 1989, p. 18). Simply put, my note taking involved an attuned ear to the problems under study while remaining open to speculate on the introduction of new or related questions pertinent to the research project. Agustín (2007) clarified that "participant observers engage in situations that they do not define, delimit or control . . . Impressions are recorded as field notes, often after the experience itself is over as interpretation" (p. 140). Although I listened carefully to discussions that would fulfill the research questions, my observations did not limit the potential for additional topics or questions.

Focus of Observations

Since each setting had unique purposes, I developed a framework to organize

notes. In addition to note taking of written and spoken words, particular attention was given to the facial expressions as verbal and nonverbal cues. Notes were categorized in accordance with Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of the "presentation of self." Using this framework, how movement advocates and members structured roles, identities, goals, and purposes of activism and organizing was given close attention. Observations were categorized as "verbal signification," or verbally expressed, and "nonverbal signification," or nonverbally expressed. Nonverbal communication was observed since I can "infer a good deal from 'body language,'" especially from facial expressions as the face "is a major source of 'emotional comments'" (Schwartz & Jacob, 1979, p. 77).

Goffman's "front stage." After sorting verbal and nonverbal observations, notes were organized by two principle categories. The "front" was "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion...intentionally or unwittingly employed" (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). Particular attention was given to how individuals presented themselves before others with intentions to "incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society" (Goffman 1959, p. 35). Specifically, these officially accredited values related to the so-called formal, public stances and ideals of LGBT organizing and activism. I observed how individuals within the research setting performed these values by attempting to relate "to *them* [the audience] in a more ideal way than is always the case" (Goffman, 1959, p. 48).

The “front” was thus the observed performance of the individual contributing to a collective representation of the organization seeking “to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotypes expectations to which it gives rise . . . the front becomes a ‘collective representation’” (Goffman, 1959, p. 27). Weber (1947) discussed the performance of social action that “takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course” (p. 88), signifying that certain expressions of behavior are negotiated by the setting in which the individual acts. Observations referring to the performance of the “front” are therefore called “The ‘official’ (front stage) stance” of the specified research setting.

The “back stage.” Since the “front” is the collective representation of institutionalized abstract stereotyped expectations that is often “more ideal . . . than is always the case” (Goffman, 1959, p. 48), it was necessary to take note of observations that did not represent such institutionalized behaviors. Goffman (1959) described these performances as the “back stage” in which “the suppressed facts make an appearance” and reveal the “front” as a performance that is “knowingly contradicted as a matter of course . . . it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed” (p. 112). Specifically, an image that “others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself” (Goffman, 1967, p. 5) is displayed for the sake of maintaining an appearance that is in line with the expectations of social settings. Particular attention was given to both verbal and nonverbal significations that were at odds to the formal, public values of the

organization and suggested more honest and realistic indicators of possible contradictions and inconsistencies of LGBT organizing at meetings and conferences. This “back stage” is therefore referred to as “The ‘back stage’ (truthful) stance” of the specified social actors observed in the research setting.

Bureaucratization: Framework

In addition to observations focused on the movement’s perceived and purported goals and identity roles, I also noted how activism and organizing involved an institutional and bureaucratic need to strengthen membership and self-legitimize. Observations related to the bureaucratization of the movement were adapted from Best’s (2008) conception of “activists as claimsmakers” (p. 91) in which the actions of activists result in ownership of particular social issues. In the case of social problems, ownership “is established when particular claims or frames become generally recognized and acknowledged as the best way to understand a particular issue” (Best, 2008, p. 85). Organizations such as Human Rights Campaign (HRC) thus become seen as an authority for particular issues, such as same-sex marriage. Nonetheless, issues can have “multiple owners,” for instance, same-sex marriage authorities regarding LGBT issues include not only the HRC but the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF).

The conditions required for owning a social problem require a bureaucratic approach including the development of a way of looking at the world such that others will adopt a similar perspective. Best (2008) referred to this concept as the “framing” of an issue. In other words, activists must nurture an audience that may potentially adopt

social problems or concerns as their own. One reason social movements use framing is to recruit new members, which is a directly bureaucratic approach. Similarly, activists and organizations must mobilize resources, including people (new members), skills, and money. Not only must social organizations work for others' adoption of certain problems, they must also gain the dynamism in membership to organize many people for the purpose of demonstrations, lobbying of policymakers, and fundraising (Best, 2008; McVeigh, Welch, & Bjarnason, 2003). Fundraising and monetary donations are key factors in the further advancement of a movement, especially amidst the competition to capture the audience's attention. Resource mobilization additionally reflects a movement's ability to promote its claims through bigger budgets to hire skilled activists, and more members to garner greater support. Thus, I noted discourse concerning focus on monetary donations, particularly those from large corporations, as well as political approaches to gain publicity and hold an audience's attention through dramatic, disturbing, or easily grasped claims (Best, 1999, 2008; McVeigh et al., 2003). Notes were also documented concerning arguments, proposals, and slogans that rallied the attention, compassion, or interest of current as well as potential members.

The third condition to achieving ownership of issues is the ability of social movements and activists to recognize opportunities when claims are likely to succeed. In light of the murder of Matthew Shepard, for instance, a gay college student at the University of Wyoming killed in October 1998, LGBT organizations had the occasion to advocate for hate-crime policies. Best (2008) articulated that since movements "seek to change existing social arrangements" (p. 79), they must consider devising a persuasive

frame and doing so at the appropriate time and place. This includes the capacity to expand the domain of issues of concern. “Long-term ownership requires flexibility. Narrowly focused single-issue movements are at a long-term disadvantage . . . it helps to develop a broader set of interrelated concerns” (Best, 2008, p. 87), making it essential to notice when and how new issues, such as the relationship between immigration and LGBT rights or fat-phobia or racism in the LGBT community, were brought into view during LGBT conferences, meetings, and dialogue. Notes of the continual addition of new issues are important to Weber’s (2003) conception that a “fully developed bureaucratic apparatus” must expand membership to ensure its legitimacy. Observations related to the movement’s long-term self-legitimization were, therefore, mindful of the persistent collaboration of LGBT organizations with other social change organizations to secure recognition.

Piven and Cloward’s (1979) delineation between behaviors of “organizing” compared to “organization” was pertinent to the methods of data collection. Best (2008) provided the basis for developing ownership of proclaimed social problems. Piven and Cloward (1979) presented explanation of the ways in which formal organizations are “preoccupied with trying to build and sustain” (p. xxii) to ensure recognition, whereas *organizers* seize opportunities of “oppositional politics” (p. xi). The mold offered by Piven and Cloward (1979) on the “flaw inherent in the mass-based permanent organization model” (p. xi) was, therefore, groundwork for taking note of how LGBT organizing epitomized “drawing people away from the streets and into the meeting rooms” (p. xii). Consequently, notes were taken of instances that pulled LGBT

organization members into alignment with formal structures of political process and established norms of social relations, thus evoking a de-radicalization of liberation.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, the qualitative data gathered from conference and meeting attendance are organized and discussed in adapted frameworks from Best's (2008) "activists as claimsmakers" and Goffman's (1959) "presentation of self." Individual and related findings are described and presented by major themes, as well as interpreted for their significance to the research problems. The vast collection of notes, quotations, and observations of the data in this chapter is presented to address the methodology research questions from Chapter III. To review, the major research problems from Chapter III included:

1. What are the political ideologies and goals of LGBT organizing and activism, and how have movements used a bureaucratic approach to achieve these goals?
2. Why do LGBT movements include heterosexual allies, and how does the inclusion of straight allies reflect an ideological incongruence?
3. Is it possible to achieve liberation under the movement's current mindset and capitalist framework? Does the inclusion of heterosexual allies contribute to liberation, assuming the capitalist framework?

My role as participant observer was positioned as an involved member of LGBT organizing and activism. In this position I was able to ask questions, offer my own ideas, take notes, and fully interact with other members. I had close, activist-based relationships with other participants, especially those from the state university in the Midwest. I had gained respect from members of the university's two LGBT student organizations as a reliable and resourceful member. Additionally, I was positioned as a staff member in the state university's LGBT student resource center that provided me with a level of prestige and professionalism that was recognized by the university's students, faculty, and staff, as well as other professionals and students whom I met at statewide, regional, and national conferences. This position of reliable and relatable student activist and professional staff member of an LGBT resource center granted me insider status to problematize heterosexual ally involvement as well as insight to the bureaucratic processes of organizing.

LGBT conferences on the statewide, regional, and national levels were attended between February 2007 and February 2008. The first conference was statewide in the Midwest and was attended in October 2007 to observe differing campus approaches of "advocating for change on our campuses" (Slogan of the 2007 statewide campus conference). Two regional Midwest conferences, each with nearly 1,800 participants, were attended—one in February 2007 and the other in February 2008—that discussed the widespread goals of LGBT campus organizing on university and college campuses in the Midwest. Finally, a national conference with more than 2,500 participants was attended in February 2008 that noted activist objectives of large, national "grassroots"

organizations seeking to “create change” for LGBT equality (adaptation of conference title to maintain anonymity).

Observations and note taking required specific and concrete methods, as were explained in Chapter III. Particular attention was given to the ways in which a topic was introduced and how it was further manifested in discussion, including whether there was disagreement among participants about the topic and how the topic was presented and received by others. Many participants shared their own experiences and conceptions of “activism” on local, regional, and national levels, thus providing indication of the political ideologies associated with their organizing goals. For the purpose of this project, I specifically listened to and carefully noted conversation and discourse pertaining to allies. Consideration was additionally given to how organizations and members of such organizations were linked with others, including other activist groups, governmental departments, foundations, corporations, and businesses as well as how multiple memberships contributed to and shaped activist efforts and the structures of organizations.

LEGITIMIZATION AND CLAIMSMAKING IN THE MOVEMENT

Applying Best’s (2008) account of activists as claimsmakers to the discussion themes in meetings and conference workshops and keynote speakers revealed that LGBT organizing involves coordinated and purposeful activism. There are three components that provide the ownership of particular social problems to an organization. One such factor is that LGBT activists and organizers must ensure ownership and

validity of issues, as well as an ample audience to rally around and further validate those issues. The conditions required for owning a social problem demand a bureaucratic approach including the development of a way of looking at the world such that others will adopt a similar perspective. Best (2008) referred to this concept as the framing of an issue. In other words, activists must nurture an audience that may potentially adopt social problems or concerns as their own. Likewise, a significant component of purposeful activism at conferences and meetings was particular social issues being framed in a specific manner to gain the attention of audiences. Upon explanation of each problem, participants took time to address the ways in which this problem emotionally, physically, and/or mentally affects lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender persons. The problem was also described in a manner that evoked concern and attention on behalf of the audience, as well as a mode in which the audience felt empowered or able to challenge the problem in their own lives. The major points and specifics of problem framing are further explained following an account of resource mobilization.

Resource Mobilization

Activists must gather certain resources to validate the social problems they have outlined (Best, 2008), as well as to legitimize their role and purpose as an activist organization. Acquiring ample resources involved recruiting and maintaining membership, securing funding from businesses as well as charity foundations and government grants, collaborating with other organizations and centers to maximize budgets, and attracting skilled participants to navigate the press and media, as well as the

general public. In the activities I attended, I noted that LGBT organizers made purposeful efforts to expand the membership of their movements, student organizations, and activist groups. I documented limitless accounts of activists arranging monetary donations, sponsorships from local businesses as well as national corporations, and collaborating with nonLGBT organizations, such as multicultural centers, women's centers and feminist groups, health departments, and religious affiliates. Every conference booklet included several or more pages of "gratitude" for corporate sponsors and local businesses who had donated funds, supplies, food, publication costs, and t-shirts to the conference event and who "made this conference possible." Corporate sponsorship never went unnoticed by conference attendees who commented on how "awesome that Wells Fargo donated money" or that "Best Buy is really gay friendly" while carrying around conference tote bags printed with Showtime's trademark.

One of the first steps of local event planning conceptualized by one of the student organizations was to contact locally-owned businesses, as well as regional and nationwide corporations, for event donations. Requests were phrased in formal letters, mailed on behalf of the organizations, by emphasizing the value of diversity to "enrich students' lives." Donations from businesses would demonstrate, the letters stated, "your support of students who seek to make the world a better place" and would additionally "make your business better known and advertised in the campus community." These well-constructed phrases not only request donations, but do so by giving moral importance to the relevance of "enriching students' lives" and "valuing diversity." In other words, businesses were left with little choice but to provide donations and

monetary contributions to LGBT events less risk losing business from the student population. Businesses also, of course, benefited from the formal and informal advertising that the student population provided, such as pages of “We Thank Our Generous Corporate Supporters” in conference handbooks, “I would love to work for Target because they’re so LGBT welcoming” praises from participants, and “Event made possible by the generous contributions of American Airlines” on event flyers; not to mention the free condoms provided by Mad BJ, Inc. and lunches from Chipotle.

Corporate and business sponsorship, as well as budgetary collaboration with non-LGBT organizations, allowed for big name speakers and activists to address audiences at the national and Midwest state university, regional, and statewide conferences. The pooling of funds between organizations, as one regional workshop participant commented, “expands speaker budgets” to further educate campuses and communities. The collaboration of events, however, also expanded the reach of audience populations. Upon the inclusion of workshops at an LGBT conference for “Activists in a Multicultural Society,” the target audience reached those concerned about LGBT issues *as well as* those concerned with racism and xenophobia, thus expanding the scope of membership and skills.

Collaboration with other social problem organizations was a goal for which many participants strived. A national conference workshop conceived of collaboration by expanding membership and concern for LGBT issues through “infiltration,” particularly in regards to religious institutions. The goal of one presenter was to befriend church institutions by going “to the mother of the church,” the pastor’s wife, because, as

a participant in another workshop noted, churches are “an influential group to have on the side of LGBT folks.” The means by which one presenter established expansion of concern and membership for LGBT concerns was by “staying under the radar” to “work from the top” of the institution’s hierarchy “down.” It was often pointed out that the best way to gain these connections was with “more honey than vinegar,” proving that “sexual orientation isn’t chosen; it’s immutable,” and through “respect” because “everyone has the right to be happy” and needs to be “educated” since “anti-gay industry” is everywhere. Again, the target population of events related to LGBT issues expands beyond the scope of sexual and/or gender minorities, extending to participants of religious organizations, immigrant rights groups, as well as disability rights organizations for events such as “ableism in the LGBT community.”

Upon reaching out to the greatest spectrum of populations, organizing incorporated members with specific skills and experiences related to activism. “Professional” activists were those most financially capable of attending the national conference. This 5-day national conference, with an early registration fee of \$250 and whose location required extensive travel and expensive hotel costs, catered to the needs of professional LGBT activists who earned their income and made careers of LGBT education, awareness, resources, health care, and other forms of activism. It is clear from the expensive registration fee and associated costs that this national conference was not intended for everyday people, especially those without the economic resources to travel, take time away from work and/or dependent family members, or upfront registration, hotel, and food costs. While the conference thus excluded participation on behalf of low-

income persons, it also highlighted the ways in which the increased budgets and establishments of organizations such as nonprofits, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, campus centers, and LGBT religious organizations provided activists with the means of making professional careers out of activism. Membership not only expanded within the movement, but extended inclusion to skilled, educated, and experienced professional persons.

The significance of these observations points to a three-fold bureaucratization of LGBT activism. On the one hand, the problems asserted by activists were given more attention by greater membership, which attracted more skilled members and resulted in validation for bigger budgets. These bigger budgets were made possible by increased membership and skilled, experienced activists were better able to more appropriately target and attract businesses, grants, sponsors, and corporations who provided the increased budgets. On the other hand, these bigger budgets, made possible by the validation of more members to call attention to the social problems, further increased opportunities for membership and thus attracted skilled and experienced activists. In other words, the claims made by activists were promoted by three-fold interrelated causes and effects: larger budgets, increased membership, and more skilled, oftentimes 'professional' activists.

Framing

Attention to the ways that issues were framed resulted in three principle and key elements. Each of these three frames will be explained with examples that illuminate the

significance of specific instances. The first key frame was that LGBT equality was possible by reforming current regulations that oppress and inhibit the full expression of LGBT people. These regulations included ones existing as federal, state, and other civil laws as well as regulations made by private enterprises. The second key frame was that homophobia and heterosexism exist within a biased culture that further reproduces homophobia and heterosexism. This biased culture was placed into several, though related and often interchangeable, arguments, including that it was patriarchal, or male dominated, and that it was racist, or over privileging of white people at the expense of people of color. The third and last key frame was that the social overvaluing of heteronormativity, namely that heterosexual coupling and marriage between a man and woman are ideal, encourages and condones the invisibility, erasure, and continued inequality of LGBT people.

Given the topic of the United States military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which prohibits LGBT persons from service, a Midwest regional conference keynote speaker framed the topic in a way that would appeal and be important to those within the audience regardless of whether they had any participation in military duty. The speaker contributed his reason for joining the military was to fight "for liberties of this country," including the liberties and freedoms enjoyed by the attentive audience. He described, with detail, his personal struggles with being a closeted gay man within an institution that discriminated against him being his "true self." These trying mental and emotional effects of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy were elaborated upon by including stories of the speaker's friends and acquaintances who had also suffered similar discrimination

and oppression. This example illuminates the first key frame that discriminatory regulations, such as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” prevent LGBT equality.

These terms of “oppression,” “discrimination,” “heteronormativity,” and “freedom” were only a few of those frequently and often repeatedly used by participants and speakers at workshops, keynote addresses, and even casual meetings. The use of these key words that evoked an emotional and proclaimed intellectual response on behalf of the audience in conjunction with real-life experiences resulted in abundant applause, signaling the audience’s agreement and encouragement. However, the terms were also used ambiguously. For instance, a representative of a Christian church and speaker at a national LGBT conference declared that: “For too long, white, straight, Western, educated men have been making the world’s decisions. But their bid is up;” a declaration that received wild applause and a standing ovation of behalf of the audience. Next, he declared that “We must end patriarchy,” but without defining, describing, or clarifying “patriarchy,” leaving the term foggy and uncertain. Nonetheless, the applause indicated that the audience agreed with the source of their social discrimination being the fault of “patriarchy” and “straight, white men.”

They did not, however, question the lack of clarity in his use of the term, exemplifying the second key frame that it is biased, *patriarchal* culture that invokes LGBT inequality. An absence of questioning and clarification additionally suggests that inequality is attributed to abstract, intangible, and immaterial cultural phenomenon. In this speech, as well as that of the ex-military soldier’s, the causes of personal struggles related to being part of a sexual and/or gender minority is recognized by the audience

through emotional struggles and key words that appear to signal the source of discrimination and challenges and is framed in a specific and overarching, although highly unclear, structure that bears responsibility for inequality.

Ambiguous terms on the local level. These terms were ambiguous for more than their obscure and unclear usage. The words were used in a specific manner to name the source of LGBT inequality and to do so within a particular framework. This framework followed the ideology of frames previously described in this chapter. The social problem of LGBT inequality was described, using these obscure terms, and done so at the expense of a material and economically based critique. Instead of recognizing the possibilities for unification based on real, material interests, these ambiguous terms represent goals towards what Fraser (2000) called “claims for the recognition of difference.” A recognition of these differences, attributed to the oppressive systems of “patriarchy,” “heterosexism,” and “racism,” fail to acknowledge the existence of frames that would discuss redistribution of material goods (Fraser, 2000) or the relationship of “oppression to the wider system of exploitation and oppression [under which] capitalism operates” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 47).

Due to their narrow framework that critiqued systems of oppression but failed to acknowledge the overarching impacts of inequality inherent to capitalism, the use of these ambiguous terms rallied members, and potential members, together for a common cause. On the Midwest state university campus, the concepts of “racism,” “patriarchy,” and “white privilege” were rarely explained during conversations between activist

student organizations, the LGBT resource center, faculty members, and other university multicultural centers. One specific and important example emerged from recent acts of proclaimed hate-biased crimes on campus that had been occurring within the last several months. Hosts of groups of multicultural student organizations, social justice faculty, and the university's multicultural and women's centers, including the LGBT resource center, were drawn together.

These crimes had a profound negative impact on some members of the campus community and were appropriately deserving of actions to alleviate those negative impacts. However, a thorough analysis of how to connect these symbolic crimes with worldwide material inequalities was absent. The discourse failed to question, for example: does activism that focuses on the oppression that middle class students perceive themselves facing mobilize or distract energy from involvement in the concrete forms of oppression experienced by working class populations, whose oppression is not only symbolic but also materially experienced? And, while the crimes were not directly homophobic or heterosexist, LGBT student activists were nonetheless outraged and enamored by terms used to describe the crimes: racist, hegemonic, patriarchal. Although no one clarified how the crimes reflected racism, hegemony, or patriarchy, they were terms that had been frequently used by keynote speakers at conferences as well as workshop presenters. The attention of the LGBT student activists was then captured after the campus media mimicked the use of key terms, thus assisting in the collaboration and expansion of a concerned cohort who proceeded to voice their resistance to the hate-biased crimes.

The fashion in which the LGBT student activists, on behalf of their student organizations and the university's LGBT resource center, rallied together without assertively questioning how the crimes were related to homophobia, heterosexism, or even racism and patriarchy suggested how the university's multicultural centers were able to further legitimate the need for their own presence on campus. When multitudes of students, student organizations, and faculty members rallied behind them, naming the crimes as hateful, patriarchal, and racist, the "necessity" for the organizations and centers were justified. They were able, through the expansion of concerned campus participants, to validate their presence on a "hateful" campus, although the majority of the concerned campus participants were materially unaware of why the acts were "patriarchal."

The application of problem and topic framing within LGBT activism did not only serve to encourage concern and attention on behalf of audiences. Framing also involved a degree of individual empowerment that attempted to display triumph over the third key frame, which placed inequality on the overvaluing of heteronormativity, which erased, made invisible, and silenced LGBT people. In other words, empowerment towards making change was limited to the individual scope and within the confines of merely challenging heteronormativity, rather than acknowledging alternatives to an inherently unequal economic system that could be challenged through collective action.

Instead, all speakers, participants, and meetings incorporated, at one point or more in the session, a time for phrases and discussion of personal empowerment that narrowly focused on *individual* action, such as: "We're all one community;" "Gay rights

are civil rights,” or “You can’t choose who you love.” One conference workshop included a group discussion upon viewing an historical documentary of queer activism. The audience was generally moved by “How far things have come since the 1950s . . . but how far we still have to go.” Another workshop on multiculturalism in the LGBT community elaborated upon the need to “Speak up. When you are silent, you are complicit” and that struggles against oppression are “everyone’s issues.” A regional conference’s keynote address added that change is possible if “We imagine a different and better world” because “collective action can bring radical change.” “Activism,” a Midwest state university student organization member stated, “becomes part of who you are” when “you interrupt [oppression] as much as you can.” These statements of empowerment were integral to the third key frame that declared an overvaluing of heteronormativity erased LGBT people. Thus, to overcome the overvaluing of heterosexual coupling and heterosexual behaviors, workshop and conference participants were encouraged to “be out and proud;” a statement that would make LGBT people and lives visible to society after being silenced by heterosexual emphases.

Components of framing. Framing thus involved two key components. First, a person’s inability to legally marry someone of the same sex due to state and federal marriage bans were described as personal injustices under the key frame of oppressive regulations and rules to evoke an emotional urge to change that injustice. Heterosexuals in the audience were given scenarios to ask themselves: “How would I feel if someone I loved was fired from their job just for being gay?” These scenarios do not apply only to

a heterosexual/LGBT binary. People in the audience who were already “on board” with LGBT issues/problems were asked to “build bridges” with other communities including people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, and other “disenfranchised populations” to challenge the second key frame that oppressive “patriarchal,” “racist” culture is responsible for LGBT inequality. A very frequent occurrence in conference workshops were “positionality” statements in which participants declared a so-called recognition of their privileges: “I am a white, middle-class man,” to phrase problems so others would adopt them and thus surpass oppressive culture and overemphasis on heterosexuality.

This act of conceptualizing issues so others may take them as their own (i.e., “Gay rights are civil rights,” “We’re all one community”) led to the second component to framing: empowerment. Once the audience was told that “immigrants and LGBT people have all been scapegoated for economic problems in the United States” and therefore share a form of victimization by social oppression, the attentive audience was then sanctioned to change this oppression by blaming “the systems” of patriarchy, heterosexism, and racism. The audience, already concerned about LGBT issues, was then encouraged to expand consideration for other populations, such as people of color, while simultaneously advanced to believe in “the power of an individual to make positive change” because “diversity enriches our lives.”

Conceptualizing problems and solutions. Nevertheless, empowering others to change these social problems was done within the confines of the three key frames: (a)

regulations and rules are the source of LGBT inequality, (b) biased culture nurtures oppressive attitudes due to ambiguously used terms of patriarchy or racism, and (c) the overvaluing of heterosexuality erases and makes LGBT people invisible. These three key frames were the foundation for homophobia and heterosexism and, consequently, these three avenues were *the* way to challenge and end homophobia and heterosexism. In other words, unlike the vision of the organization Beyond Same Sex Marriage: A New Strategic Vision for All Our Family and Relationships (Beyondmarriage.org, 2006) that offers alternative perspectives to unjust regulations, the conferences, workshops, and meetings that I attended promised relief from LGBT inequality by merely reforming the current systems of oppressions. Revolutionizing, overturning, or abolishing the existing source of oppression was not discussed.

The existing sources of oppression, following the tradition of postmodernism, “arises out of the almost folk idea that claiming one’s unique cultural heritage can provide a secure foundation both for understanding power and constructing a political project” (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 63). This framework of understanding LGBT inequality was aimed towards one’s uniqueness and, therefore, the power of the individual living within the capitalist economy. Through heavy emphasis of the unique individual, often outright positioned as white, male, heterosexual, gender variant, lesbian, and so forth, however, there was little option to understand oppression as a materially based phenomenon. Alternative frames, such as those Marxist based or the recognition that inequality is inherent to capitalism, were rarely addressed. Where conference workshop discussions conceived of same-sex marriage bans as reinforcing LGBT inequality, for

instance, the organization Beyond Same-Sex Marriage acknowledged that marriage “should not be legally and economically privileged above all others” (Beyondmarriage.org, 2006). The lack of alternative frames addressing the economic inequalities that affect all persons were sacrificed for those that emphasized “one’s uniqueness.” Or, as Cho (2006) explained “the politics of ‘difference’ is emphasized with the assumption that the material base is no longer fashionable to reckon with” (p. 127).

Opportunity Structures

These three-fold causes and effects would not result in widespread attention of and concern for social problems without activists appropriately recognizing when their claims would most succeed. I thus noted the opportunities that activists and organizers at conferences and meetings seized to promote their claims.

On the general and national level, political elections provided an ample opportunity to activists to call attention to certain social problems, particularly in the midst of the 2008 Presidential campaigns when rhetoric emphasized patriotism, nationalism, and the power of voting. Although one keynote speaker stated that “it is all of us that will make a changed world, not just the person in the White House,” participants and presenters alike asserted the power of a gay constituency by showing “gay strength of voting.” Political campaigns provided the chance for issues of health care coverage for transgender persons, legislation for domestic partner benefits, hate crime legislation, as well as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) to

become known in the general public with the hope that an election year will offer advancement of LGBT activist goals. Conference workshops and keynote addresses emphasized that the year 2008 would be a turning point for LGBT equality with the “passing of a transgender-inclusive ENDA,” the “repeal of same-sex marriage bans,” and “hate crime legislation” to protect students such as Lawrence King.

The murders of LGBT people such as trans-woman Gwen Araujo, gay college student Matthew Shepard, and the recent shooting of junior high student Lawrence King also provided opportunity structures for the goals of LGBT organizing to be recognized by potential audiences. The martyring of the deceased has been the basis for establishment of multiple foundations, organizations, and centers across the country, as well as on university campuses, for legitimizing the need for LGBT equality and education. Names of the deceased were mentioned in multiple workshops and meetings to serve as reminders of the need to “educate the majority on the minority,” to “speak up” and “write letters to the editor” when there are acts of hate on university campuses, and to always remember the impact “our people” such as “Audre Lorde, Bayard Rustin, and Sylvia Rivera” have made for “the progress of the movement.” For example, Judy Shepard, a surviving family member of one of the martyred deceased, Matthew Shepard, was showcased on the campus of the Midwest state college, receiving abundant attention and recognition for the importance of “teaching tolerance” for “other [LGBT]” people.

These observations were significant for activists’ devising of when and where to mobilize the promotion of their claims. Political elections, the aftermath of tragic and high profile murders, even the establishment and nationwide recognition of dates such as

GLBT History Month, National Coming Out Day, and World AIDS Day, and the attention on other social movements such as the dovetailing of LGBT organizing on feminist movements and the Black Power Movement, provided opportunities for LGBT activists to bring their issues to the forefront of media attention and the general public. It is during these occasions that claims might be most heard because they received greater media endorsement, university-wide publicizing, and financial support. For instance, when the president of the Midwestern state university introduced and applauded a national LGBT spokesperson, it was primarily the presence of this respected figure with the backing of a university's financial and marketing resources that the speaking event reached a wide audience. This brought the message beyond an already concerned LGBT population and towards a more general and public audience.

Ownership

LGBT organizers and activists, as described above, by purposefully taking steps to legitimize the need for organizing and expansion of the movement, have become authorities on the ways in which to conceptualize the problem of LGBT inequality, point to the sources of the problem, and resolve the problem within a very particular framework. For instance, the issue of the lack of state and federal marriage recognition for same-sex couples was discussed as the major problem. The source of the problem was attributed to “heteronormativity” and that “we live in a homophobic society,” making this framing of LGBT inequality *the* way to think of, discuss, and overcome the so-called problem. This frame of LGBT inequality was the basis for tools, i.e.,

arguments, statistics, political platform, given to activists and heterosexual sympathizers to combat same-sex marriage bans since “Gay rights are civil rights” under the presumption that civil rights will be the remedy for LGBT inequality. The use of the three key frames previously discussed—(a) regulations and rules are sources of LGBT inequality, (b) biased culture nurtures oppressive attitudes, and (c) the overvaluing of heterosexuality erases and makes LGBT people invisible—were *the* way of understanding, discussing, and attempting to solve LGBT inequality because problems had been framed in such a way that audiences of media and widespread society gave attention to the problems.

Best (2008) stated that “ownership relates to framing, resource mobilization, and political opportunities” because “the owners’ frames become influential in shaping how others approach the problem and its solution” (p. 86), even if there are alternatives to the owners perspectives. Nonetheless, the conception of marriage by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) that same-sex marriage would alleviate LGBT inequality within the United States, was the way in which LGBT activists and even widespread society conceived the problem. Likewise, at the Midwest state university the problem of hate-biased crimes on campus as racist, patriarchal, and hegemonic was the only way to conceive of the problem because it had been claimed by multicultural centers and student organizations on the campus.

In reference to hate crimes “as a successful social movement outcome,” McVeigh et al. (2003) explained that political actors “offer a diagnosis of the problem and make a convincing case that the policy they are advocating will service as an

effective remedy” (p. 843). The process of “image making, where the images have to do fundamentally with attributing cause, blame, and responsibility” (McVeigh et al., 2003, p. 843) is a solid demonstration of the framing done by social movements to “persuade others that their posed policy represents the optimal solution” (p. 844). Since the hate-biased crimes on campus were successfully framed by university administration, the LGBT center was then presented with the opportunity structure of having the mother of an LGBT martyr speak to the campus community. The hate crimes on campus, as a “measure of a successful social movement outcome rather than as a valid measure of a particular type of crime” (McVeigh et al., 2003, p. 847), deemed the concerns of social movements correct, validating the existence of hate crimes and, thus, the need for the university’s LGBT center. When the hate-biased crimes occurred and were coupled by “typifying examples of especially brutal assaults or murders” (Best, 1999, p. 58), such as Matthew Shepard’s, the expression “against hate crimes made a powerful claim [that] gays and lesbians were subject to frequent criminal attacks and the criminal justice system often failed to give those attacks the serious attention they deserved” (Best, 1999, p. 58). The actions of social movements that aimed to draw attention to hate crime legislation and the violent oppression against LGBT people were validated.

This recognition, that the LGBT center was necessary to combat any future displays of hate-biased crimes, granted the center and subsequent LGBT organizing and activism full ownership of issues through their acceptance by university administration as well as the campus community. This ownership also served to link the LGBT center with other multicultural centers and organizations on campus. Since “Hate crime is an

umbrella term, invented to cover crimes against various minorities, and thereby establish a common cause among a diverse set of activists” (Best, 1999, p. 57), groups across the campus joined together. Such an expansion in membership, the mobilization of resources, especially in the form of collaborative budgets, and similar framing even further validated the need for the LGBT center as well as other multicultural organization devoted to “ending hate.”

The LGBT center’s recognized ownership of LGBT inequality consequently spread to statewide and regional conferences when the incidences of the campus’ hate crimes were shared with fellow conference participants. In a regional workshop, discussion was raised regarding how homophobia and heterosexism were challenged on the campuses of participants. A member of the LGBT center recalled: “Recently on our campus, our rainbow flag was stolen from the flagpole during National Coming Out Week, so we held a march to reclaim the flag.” Fellow workshop participants were shocked at the extent of this hateful act, but pleased to know that the campus had rallied together “in unity” at the subsequent march to reclaim the flag. When fellow participants described particular challenges on their campus, they looked to the LGBT center member for advice, reassurance, and insight since they had “successfully challenged homophobic hate.” The member, as well as the Midwest state university as a whole, was consequently recognized by other campus and state representatives as a legitimate owner to resolve acts of homophobia.

Because the problems became well known and familiar, framed within a confined vision and resolution that blamed abstract but oppressive systems, owners such

as the university's LGBT resource center "find it easier to mobilize resources" and "are probably better placed to assess political opportunities" (Best, 1999, p. 86). When Judy Shepard, mother of the deceased and martyred Matthew Shepard, visited the Midwest state university campus, the LGBT center captured the political opportunity by advertising the event in light of the recent hate-biased crimes on campus. The center was then able to gain a greater audience who, saturated by discussions of patriarchy and racism, were more impressionable to the idea of advocating for LGBT equality—the LGBT equality, of course, that was possible only through the altering of currently oppressive systems.

CONTRADICTIONS OF HETEROSEXUAL ALLY INCLUSION

The second major research problem of this project questioned why LGBT movements included heterosexual allies, and how the inclusion of straight allies reflected an ideological incongruence amidst the proclaimed goal of gender and sexual liberation. To answer this question, I listened carefully to any discourse that mentioned allies. I additionally made it a priority to attend any activities, including workshops and special trainings, for straight allies. In the discourse, there were multiple points of dissension, and often dislike, for heterosexual persons, couples, and lifestyles. One discussion theme involved the reproduction of an "us vs. them" attitude, reflecting the third key frame of the movement that the overvaluing of heterosexuality was a major source of LGBT inequality and oppression.

Comments were additionally suggestive of the bureaucratic approach of extending membership to heterosexuals for increased visibility and promotion in the greater public. A national conference workshop presenter and attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) noted, “People who know someone who is gay are more likely to support LGBT equality, including marriage rights. We need voices of straight people told to expand that support.” Another participant affirmed “We aren’t in the position to turn away any talent or contributions to the movement.” These statements, including one that “We need to find places for allies” so “we can all join together,” suggested that the inclusion of heterosexuals could act as a bridge to encourage attention to LGBT issues from the larger, majority population. It was also an acknowledgement that the greatest annexing of membership would improve resource mobilization as well as skills and talents to maximize the productivity and efficacy of an organization.

The specific points of dissension as well as the illustration of bureaucratic processes will be outlined. In addition to particular examples, these points of dissension also describe the bureaucratic approaches of LGBT organizing and activism to secure ownership and, thus, legitimization. It points out the inclusion of heterosexuals, referred to as allies, as a step towards growing membership and, therefore, promotion to attention on LGBT issues. The inclusion of heterosexuals into a movement with goals to liberate the sexually oppressed is consequently a means by which activists can increase budgets, membership, and validation by expanding audiences. Despite the benefits of further legitimizing the movement, however, there exist discrepancies among the members as whether expansion to “sympathetic heterosexuals” is welcomed.

In my dialogue with several LGBT students who took on an active campus role at the Midwest state university in “challenging and ending homophobia and heterosexism,” very few were able to answer the question of “What is an ally?” When I asked three queer students this question, a lesbian woman responded: “Allies are amazing! That’s what they are!” I reiterated the question, encouraging them to answer, with specificity, what is an ally, and what makes someone an ally. Although the students retold descriptions of the ally they had heard elsewhere, including that “it is difficult to be an ally,” that “allies are friends,” etc., they were ultimately unable to materialize a solid definition of the term or role that allies had in LGBT movements. Then, a gay man stated: “Actually, I don’t really see why allies need a special name. If they really care about us, they should just be okay with being called gay.”

This type of dialogue that began with enthusiastic expressions of the “amazing ally” but, after more discussion, ended with “I don’t see why allies need a special name,” was a common theme throughout local university meetings and at conference workshops and keynote speakers. For instance, during the university’s LGBT resource center’s meeting on “visions for the campus” that consisted of LGBT student organization co-chairs and other “leaders” invited by the LGBT center’s director, discussion led to ally workshops. In the midst of brainstorming educational workshops that would “enlighten and make allies of the campus community,” I asked the question: “What does an ally do in order to be recognized as an ally?” Again, fellow students interjected that “allies are amazing friends who support us.”

“How,” I questioned, “would an ally support LGBT people?” Confused, the students, whom I had known for nearly 2 years, said they did not understand what I was asking, prompting me to outright ask: “Sometimes I don’t agree that marriage is the answer for LGBT equality. I can say that around all of you because we all know one another, but what would happen if I said that in a workshop with participants I didn’t know?” A lesbian woman responded: “You’d be stoned.” Another gay student chuckled, “I don’t agree that marriage is the answer either, but I’d never say that because even I would be stoned. And I’m gay!” The interjections of this meeting indicated that it was not necessarily be acceptable to disagree with widespread conceptions of LGBT equality. Whether the disagreement was offered by an ally or an LGBT person, there was unspoken understanding that objections would not be tolerated. A bisexual student explained: “Nobody wants to be the one to disagree, but if you disagree with something that the movement wants, you’d be called a bad queer.”

Being a “bad queer” was a ridiculous concept, the meeting’s participants agreed, but would nonetheless risk the movement’s reputation and “might confuse heterosexuals and allies.” In other words, participants suggested that if the movement were to encompass an extreme variety of opinions and stances on issues of LGBT inequality, the movement would risk losing potential supporters, including corporate sponsors, potential allies to the cause, and media attention. The director added, “We may have different goals, but the most widespread one is given the most attention so we can gain civil rights.” Simply put, conflicting ideas and resolutions to LGBT inequality was admittedly

sacrificed for, as a 19-year-old and outspoken lesbian student said, “goals that are actually possible,” that is, not too radical.

Again, this theme of participants beginning dialogues with welcomed agreement of widespread solutions or concepts such as including heterosexuals in the movement, but sometimes making contradictory comments, was pervasive throughout meetings and workshops. Consequently, I used Goffman’s (1959) conception of the “presentation of self” to categorize comments and behaviors that, at first, seemed to go along with the widespread goals of the movement, but upon further examination presented a more honest and objective perspective. Specific examples of these varying viewpoints are explained within Goffman’s framework.

Goffman’s “Front Stage”

Goffman (1959) illustrated the ways in which a formal stance on a particular issue is expressed both verbally and nonverbally. I noted observations where, on the formal stage, members of LGBT organizing expressed openness to welcoming and extending membership to willing heterosexuals. Multiple nonverbal representations signaled reception to the inclusion of “straight allies,” including the hundreds of “ally” and “straight but not narrow” buttons taken from the Midwestern state university’s LGBT center and worn on backpacks, jackets, and book bags. Event flyers consciously detailed *Allies Welcome* to indicate the event’s target population was not confined to LGBT students, faculty, and staff. The letter “A” was added to LGBT-acronym events and student organization meetings.

At all conferences and available at the university's LGBT center were multiple how-to manuals on being a straight ally to LGBT people, including formal publications produced by national organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), Straight for Equality, and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) entitled *Straight Guide to GLBT Americans* or *Guide to Being a Straight Ally*. Publications were additionally constructed and distributed at the local university level as compilations of information provided by LGBT students for allied heterosexual students such as *Four Levels of Becoming an Ally* and *Ally Identity Development*. Trainings on how to provide a "Safe Zone" or "Safe Space" were held across campuses nationwide, and conferences served as meeting places for training providers to enhance their ally-training skills. Completion of such trainings held on campuses resulted in distribution of *Safe Zone/Safe Space* placards that were seen at the university's department offices, faculty offices, and in student residence halls, all signaling that heterosexual persons were qualified for inclusion of LGBT issues. Two conference workshop presenters wore t-shirts with the phrase *Straight is Great. Gay is Fabulous* and received compliments from a number of the workshop's participants.

Welcome to straight allies was furthermore indicated through verbal signification. Casual conversations at the Midwest state university's LGBT center included a remark made by a staff member that the letter "A" (Ally) was "Probably the most important letter of them all!" A member of one of the university's LGBT student organization's added that "Allies have just as difficult a time coming out as we [LGBT people] do," suggesting a recognition of respect for the difficulties associated with

relating to LGBT persons. Another mentioned “Even as an ally, there’s a coming out process . . . it’s hard.” Participants had seemingly naturalized the enthusiastic inclusion of allies because they did not question the concept. Rather, they simply celebrated the movement’s insistence that allies offered “friendship and support” to its members.

Likewise, participants at workshops assembled at regional conferences declared that “Allies are the backbone of the gay community” due to their alignment with LGBT organizing goals and because, as a participant at a state conference commented, “Allies are a resource and support for LGBT people.” Fellow participants echoed these sentiments, empowering heterosexuals at an ally workshop that “A single individual has the power to change things” and to “Use your heterosexual privilege to be an ally.”

At the end of a weekend-long conference, one gay student stated in his evaluation of the regional conference: “I did not appreciate the ally bashing!” or demeaning comments made towards heterosexual people, implying welcoming of straight allies to LGBT communities. Simultaneously, however, his evaluation revealed the fragility of the concept of ally since he had written the statement in an evaluation, rather than interrupting “ally bashing” comments inaction. Even more than remarks indicative of accepting the idea of heterosexual inclusion were verbal significations that heterosexual allies were, at times, better suited to fight for LGBT equality in the midst of intracommunity disputes and divisions. A professional drag queen performer and presenter at a regional conference stated, “I’ve suffered more prejudice from the GLBT community than from the straight community” due to the “gender policing in LGBT communities,” an attitude reflected by many workshop participants who detailed “Queer

people police each other” and that “T-voices [transgender] are still under recognized” in LGBT activism.

Goffman’s “Back Stage”

There was, however, dissension among the verbal and nonverbal expressions regarding the inclusion of heterosexual allies into LGBT organizing. A regional conference workshop devoted to a discussion of “ally activist” apathy signaled a response by self-identified allies to articulate the frustrations and difficulties of being an “unappreciated” heterosexual in LGBT organizing. Meanwhile, “non-ally” participants disagreed with eye rolling and irritated glances at one another over the stated complaints. Participants wore buttons with the phrase “Non-Breeder,” suggestive of distaste for heterosexual coupling. Despite these nonverbal expressions of disagreement, however, I never witnessed outright objection to the inclusion of allies, once again signaling the naturalization of going along with the widespread goals of the movement or risk being a bad queer.

Two conference registration forms required attendees to select identifications that listed “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender queer, queer, two-spirit, straight,” or “prefer not to disclose.” Despite offering a variety of identifications, attendees were only able to choose one category and did not list a category related to an ally or allied heterosexual, signifying a rejection of ally as an identity welcomed in LGBT activism and organizing. When a university-sponsored ally training, separate from the introductory Safe Zone trainings, was conducted at the Midwest state university, merely

three participants attended, contrary to the hundreds of ally buttons easily worn on backpacks. I noted the lack of participation to point out the absence of support and advocacy for educating heterosexual allies who were previously proclaimed valuable assets to LGBT activism.

Disagreement with the inclusion of heterosexuals had components of verbal dissension as well along a spectrum of passive to aggressive opposition. Aggressive resistance at one workshop involved a participant exclaiming “Saying you’re an ‘ally’ is like yelling, ‘I have privilege!’” beckoning laughter and applause from other participants. In light of the frustrations expressed by self-named allies towards being heterosexual in LGBT organizing was the response that “Straights say they don’t feel comfortable [in LGBT organizations]? What about all the hetero spaces?!” indicating aggravation about the hollow complaints and assertion of privilege in the identification of ally.

Other verbal expressions were extremely frank with disapproval such as one made by a faculty member at the Midwest state university towards student-activists: “Anyone attending a queer conference is brave . . . except for our honorary heterosexual. She doesn’t need to be brave because she’s privileged;” a comment made directly towards a presumed heterosexual in the group and condoned by other audience members through their silent consent. Discrete laughter ensued from off-hand comments about “stupid heteros” during one workshop while a presumed straight woman spoke and another participant rolled their eyes at her comment, whispering: “At least I’m not a breeder!” Persons in LGBT communities frequently used epithets such as “fag hag” and

“fruit fly,” jokes about straight people, particularly women, who spend time and have friendships with LGBT persons. A discussion within one conference workshop regarding connections between forms of oppression and the need to address even the oppression faced by heterosexual couples invoked a Midwest state university student to comment: “We should just stick to gay rights. We can’t be trying to change everything! We’re supposed to help all these other groups, but what do they ever do for us?!” His comment implied a lack of interest or welcome to any persons or groups that did not identify as gay-related.

The assertive verbalizations of the unwanted inclusion of heterosexual allies also included more passive commentary. A state university student expressed her frustration after a woman approached the LGBT center and said, “I’m not a lesbian, but can I get an ‘ally’ button?” The frustrated student rolled her eyes after the woman left, commenting “Why do allies have to act like it’s an insult if someone thinks they’re gay?!” making clear that even if heterosexual allies were welcome, there exists a gap in communication and understanding over what actions an ally should perform. At conference workshops designed to enhance activist skills, the presenter recommended that inclusion be extended to heterosexuals, but for the sake of fulfilling LGBT activist goals: “Make sure straights are involved [in organizing] to show others that the movement is broadly based.” A keynote speaker, however, sent a clear message that heterosexual allies were not necessary to activism: “We [LGBT people] have the responsibility to be out and proud in all locations. It’s all up to us. No one is going to just give us rights.” This statement again clarified the need to be “out” in order to compensate for the erasure of

LGBT people caused by the three key frames purported by principle activists. Again, empowerment existed primarily to further legitimate the need for having organizations, which reminded audiences that inequality persisted due to *current* oppressive systems that must be *altered*.

Specifically, empowerment was encouraged within a confined space: that cultural inequality that denied LGBT people their ‘uniqueness’ would be overcome through reforming oppressive systems, rather than rallying to revolutionize the widespread material inequalities inherent to capitalism. Philion (1998) proposed “a language of class” that “speaks to and resists both purely economic and noneconomic forms of oppression under the logic of capital...to resist the logic of capital” (p. 94). The frames of discourse at meetings, conferences, and workshops, however, was strictly opposed to such a “language of class” that would bridge groups of people experiencing both economic and noneconomic marginalization. This alternative framework could offer positive social change that worked beyond differing identity and towards the similarity of interests that all groups living in capitalism share.

A commonly heard question among both young and older students was “Are you a friend, or are you family?” in reference to whether the individual is a “friend,” heterosexual, or “family,” lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The question was asked to a new member of the state university’s student organization who was startled by the question, did not know how to answer, and never returned to the organization’s meeting again, leaving the remaining members to presume “she was probably hetero.” During the designing of an event flyer sponsored by a different student organization, a woman

sighed, “Guess we have to include the ‘A’ on our [LGBT event] flyers, cuz that seems to be the thing to do these days . . . ” hinting annoyance at having to include yet another letter to the acronym.

Among the disagreements over whether to include heterosexual allies or not into LGBT organizing, there was ultimately a direct message that LGBT communities, activists, and organizations do not maintain monolithic goals. With or without the addition of heterosexuals, there was abundant incongruence regarding how to conceptualize and advocate activism, particularly in the statement: “We should just stick to gay rights” while another member maintained “We need all the help we can get.” The ideological discrepancy was not just limited to welcoming allies, because the discrepancies were also inherently a part of discussions about queer people “policing” one another, “there is no *one* community,” or “If we’re supposed to be a community, why do we keep dividing ourselves? It seems like there’s no LGBT community unless we’re at a conference.”

Liberation Under Capitalism

The last major research question of this project asked whether liberation is possible under the movement’s current mindset and capitalist framework. I chose the term “liberation” because of its frequent use in LGBT activist and organizing discourse. While organization mission statements included phrases such as “complete equality” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 1973) or “fundamental fairness and equality for all” (Human Rights Campaign, 2008), everyday discourse envisioned sexual and gender

liberation where LGBT people could be themselves. Therefore, my own use of the term “liberation” refers to the overarching goal of LGBT activism to achieve ultimate freedom to be “themselves.”

Given the use of the term, how would the inclusion of heterosexual allies contribute to liberation, assuming the continued existence of a capitalist framework? To help answer this question, Hennessy (2000) acknowledged a de-radicalization of sexual liberation organizations since groups like Red Butterfly because they fail to recognize the overarching social conditions that evoked gay oppression. Workshops and meetings that I attended resulted in supporting evidence of Hennessy’s assertion in several channels. More than anything was the absence of any analysis that discussed how capital accumulation and labor exploitation result in the forms of oppression so frequently used through ambiguous terms, such as heterosexism, sexism, racism, and ableism. Empowerment consisted of cast-off phrases such as “speak out for what’s right,” “fight for equality no matter what,” and “imagine a better world,” but failed to offer the tangible means to meet material needs.

The key language of workshops and keynote addresses involved gentle encouragement to “respect all people,” while the content of the workshops and keynote addresses were conservative, reflecting little revolutionary substance. Announcements by a keynote speaker that “the most radical thing we can do is be ourselves” indicated the ways in which arguments and changes advocated by the majority of LGBT activists were framed in a limited manner. They were framed, in other words, around mere individual self-expression. While the Gay Socialist Action Project determined “coming

out” as “an inadequate strategy for social change in itself” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 45), proposals made by organizers at the events attended were restricted to *changing the current system vs. changing systems*.

For instance, a participant in a regional workshop complained of the homophobia practiced in her local area: “We live with lots of rednecks!” Laughter ensued, but there was no mention of the classist stereotyping inherent to her comment. A keynote speaker maintained that “everyone has the right to be happy” without any thoughtful analysis of how “happiness” is shaped and understood by class position. Discussion frequently involved the privileges associated with whiteness and heterosexuality, but was absent from material understandings of race, the division of labor, and uneven distributions of wealth. Yet even more class issues were ignored, for instance, when a well-known keynote speaker stated, “Activist work is good selfish work,” and another said, “We can’t create a hierarchy of oppressions because it creates tension over who has it worst” without consideration for those who have no option to engage in the “selfish work” of activism.

Entire workshops and student organization meetings were devoted to “joining forces to fight against university administration” without identification of the class privilege intricately required to engage in higher education. Consequently, activist goals were reduced to increasing administrative support for LGBT programming on campus, rather than, for example, a reduction of tuition costs. Likewise, strategies devised at a national conference on how to secure domestic partner benefits in the workplace were confined to the need for partners to access health insurance through one another’s

employment, rather than realizing that health care for all, as well as employment in general, is a more universal need. Even a national workshop on “Connections Between Immigrants and LGBT Rights” failed to identify how economic policies and social service privatization due to advanced states of capitalism link immigrant and LGBT rights. Instead, the presentation insisted that the two were related “because we [LGBT people] exist in all these immigrant communities” and both have been “used as scapegoats for social problems.” One participant in this workshop was directly told she was “too radical” for advocating open borders and redistribution of wealth as her ultimate vision for United States immigration policy.

One workshop entitled “Trans Women in Men’s Prisons” brainstormed a list of systems that allowed “this atrocity” to happen in the following manner: “racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, xenophobia, and capitalism.” Rather than linking the privatization of prison complexes with the impoverished backgrounds of inmates, acknowledging capitalism as a founding source of the atrocities, they lumped capitalism in with a lengthy list of oppression terms without thoughtful analysis or clarification on how those systems of oppression were based in the advancement of privatization and ownership in advancing capitalism. The solution, as proposed by the workshop’s presenters, was to “end the prison industrial complex” without any tangible discussion or theoretical frameworks with which the end to the “prison industrial complex” would be possible.

The statements and substance of the workshops, meeting agendas, and inspirational plenary addresses was consistent with little to no radical move towards

liberation. Instead, the conception of liberation was in the mindset of the current capitalist system, in disagreement with the vision of Red Butterfly. LGBT inequalities are not challenged by an inclusion of heterosexual allies in the movement. A movement that advocates only for reforms in the inherently oppressive system of global capitalism and uneven distributions of wealth, as well as divisions of labor both within and between nations, is not likely to accomplish full liberation. The way the movement proposes to achieve liberation is in contrast to actual material liberation. In more concrete terms, research findings confirmed that with or without heterosexual ‘allies,’ a movement confined to analyzing how a system *should be*, versus reckoning with *what it is*, is unlikely to achieve any level of “liberation.”

Chapter V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This project addressed the phenomenon of how social movements, namely the LGBT movement, have used a bureaucratic approach to organize and expand membership, budgets, and resources. The project also problematized the specific political ideologies that the movement has embraced within a capitalist system, answering the question of whether liberation is possible under the capitalist system, and whether heterosexual allies contribute to the possibility of liberation given this framework. To fulfill these research questions, multiple sites were attended and data collected from September 2006 through March 2008. Research sites varied from the local, micro level of a Midwest state university's student organization and LGBT center meetings in addition to attendance at several statewide, regional, and one national LGBT conference. Information was gathered using participant observation, which gained insider status and access to discussions devoted to the challenges and objectives of ally-ness.

Major Findings

Findings confirmed that complex dissension exists among LGBT organizers regarding whether heterosexuals should be included in activism. Applying Goffman's "presentation of self" (1959), I listened carefully to discourse that referenced allies as

well as taking note of ally-related nonverbal significations such as t-shirts or posters. Goffman's framework provided organization to "front stage" discussions and displays that signified support of inclusion for heterosexual allies. This front stage affirmed public, organization-wide insistence that heterosexual allies were welcomed and valued as members of LGBT activism. All research activities included displays of participant cooperation with the purported position of welcoming and extending membership to allies, both verbally and nonverbally. Indications that participants cooperated with the formal and official stance of ally-welcoming included participant comments such as: "allies are awesome" and "A [Ally] is probably the most important letter of all!" Nonverbal significations of cooperation with the formal, welcoming stance were also present at every activity, including buttons stating "Straight but Not Narrow" and event flyers advertising "Allies welcome." Members of LGBT activism clearly made efforts to appear welcoming to extending membership to heterosexuals.

Goffman's (1959) "back stage," however, suggested that ally-welcoming was merely an appearance. The back stage represents more truthful, unfiltered stances on ally inclusion. Verbal and nonverbal significations ranged from forcibly opposed to heterosexual inclusion to suggestive dissension. A representative example of opposition included statements such as "Guess we have to include the 'A'," referring to involved allies as "honorary heterosexuals" and the epithet "fag hag." Nonverbal dissension spanned from buttons reading "Non-breeder" and conference workshop time devoted to "ally bashing." Such instances illustrated that, while the formal position of LGBT

organizations welcomed heterosexual membership, there was underlying disagreement among LGBT members.

These unfiltered patterns of heterosexual ally exclusion were relevant for two reasons. First, they pointed to the existence of a conflicted, divided social movement. LGBT activism is by no means monolithic, but the underlying dissent of organizing members with official organization stances represented bureaucracies attempting to extend membership and, consequently, budgets and resources. Second, formal organizations sought to expand and legitimize their existence by extending membership to heterosexuals, leading even the nonconforming members who question heterosexual inclusion to use verbal and nonverbal significations of support. Nonconforming members did not openly or directly speak against ally inclusion. However, the frequency of off-hand and informal objections, epitomized by the statement that “You’d be stoned!” if anyone disagreed, pointed out member willingness to go along with the proposals of formal organizations less risk being perceived as a threat to the movement’s success.

Formal organizations were additionally interwoven with others, further illustrating the bureaucratization of social movements. Organizations purposefully framed social problems and their solutions in a specific manner to increase membership by maximizing audiences. They also frequently collaborated on event planning to exploit budgets and resources, using one another’s previous programming success to dovetail their own potential for success. An example of this dovetailing was explicitly illustrated at the Midwest state university when the campus environment, already

preoccupied with instances of hate-motivated crimes, merged funding, media attention, and administrative endorsements with the LGBT center. The bureaucratic interweaving of organizations to make social problems more viable was also demonstrated when formal organizations, including one that sponsored a national LGBT conference, took on new social problems. Recently, for instance, immigration issues have become a new focus of concern for LGBT activists who held multiple workshops and caucuses on the topic in order to expand membership and attention to LGBT inequality under the guise of forming alliances with other marginalized groups of people.

Such alliances were costumed because they failed to offer more than one frame of solutions for the social problems under examination. Resolutions for immigration problems, like resolutions to LGBT inequality, were confined to goals of reforming oppressive systems rather than overthrowing them. The inherent inequalities and oppressive structures of capitalism were never acknowledged, and material inequalities rarely addressed or discussed at workshops, meetings, or conference keynotes. Instead of critiquing and challenging capitalism, the basis for inequalities, alliances were formed only to expand audience participation in efforts that would further legitimize the need for the existence of social organizations in the minds of their patrons.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this research have major implications that contribute to the necessity for continual self-evaluation and critique of social movement organizations and activism. Where LGBT organizers seek to end inequality and propose fairness by

critiquing state and federal legislation, corporate policies, and cultural biases, an absence of *self*-critique impedes the obtainment of liberation. This project problematized the political and ideological strategies that mainstream LGBT organizers frequently embrace without question or analysis. One such strategy, examined explicitly in this research, was the addition of heterosexual allies to LGBT social movements. Although such an addition may, at first, appear merely inclusive of anyone interested in LGBT equality, a more thorough examination revealed the employment of careful political expansion on behalf of formal organizations that, like any bureaucracy, must continually validate their existence with constant increases in membership, budgets, and resources.

It was these findings that shed light on the question of whether liberation is possible under capitalism, given the current political mindset of most LGBT activist organizations. It also clarified whether heterosexual allies were a valuable asset towards reaching the goal of liberation. These questions were fulfilled through a theoretical analysis of the means by which LGBT activist organizations were attempting to achieve liberation. Namely, how most organizations used one another, as well as corporate sponsorship, willing legislators, and media opportunities, to draw attention to the issues they purported as major social problems. These organizations additionally framed such social problems in a manner to maximize widespread audience attention, adding membership and, consequently, financial resources and talent to the organization that would even further self-legitimate.

Perhaps the most important implication of this study was the lack of a thoughtful, material analysis of social problems used to reach optimal and realistic goals. It was

clear from the findings, outlined with detail in Chapter IV, that liberation was not viable given LGBT activism's current mindset. This ideological mindset focused so greatly on its own self-legitimization that it failed to offer tangible critiques of the system of capitalism—a material source of inequalities in the lives of not only LGBT people, but people around the world. The narrow ideological mindset additionally failed to offer a critique of its own contributions to the unequal system of capitalism. This was noticeable when nonprofit social organizations accepted donations and sponsorship from multinational corporations.

This lack of material analysis of capitalist inequalities, as well as the movement's failure to offer thoughtful self-critique, contribute to the unlikelihood that LGBT equality is plausible under capitalism, with or without the inclusion of heterosexual allies. Where activist organizations propose a critical consciousness, they have shown in this research a frequent lack of self-critique. Without a social movement's continual examination of its own devices, it is improbable that the movement will achieve ultimate fulfillment of its goals. Where the social organizations in this study purposefully seek to form alliances with other social groups, they fail to recognize the system of inequality that binds all people together—capitalism. A material examination that reaches beyond reforming policies and procedures is likely to offer a fully collaborative and revolutionary solution to all the oppressed people with whom many organizations seek to align, including LGBT people, immigrants, people of color, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, and religious groups.

In other words, a movement that searches only to end the oppression and suffering of its own people fails to acknowledge the material basis of inequality. Capitalism's constant search for market expansion leaves groups of people pitted against one another. Thus, a social movement designed only to achieve its own ends is likely to fail without a real assessment of the *common good*, which refers specifically to what will serve as beneficial to all persons, regardless of how social relations have identified them, and aims to directly address processes of the capitalist economy that serve as the basis for inequality. The common good begins with examination of what all groups of people have in common; namely, the inequalities born from capitalism's necessary drive for continual accumulation.

Although it is essential for social movements to be critical of their own tactics, it is nonetheless challenging to conceive of an ideal alternative to the bureaucratization of LGBT social change organizations. While most organizations do not form with intentions to solely reproduce themselves, the capitalist system demands that organizations continue to grow in order to receive the funding and resources needed to become, and remain, a presence in a competitive society. Piven and Cloward (1979) recall the "tragedy" of the unemployment workers' movement when stating: "Instead of exploiting the possibilities of the time by pushing turbulence to its outer limits, the leaders...set about to build organization and to press for legislation, and in doing so, they virtually echoed the credo of officialdom itself" (p. 91).

If not organization building, then what tactics might LGBT activists use to achieve greater equality? Piven and Cloward (1979) suggest that when members and

activists are divided, “they are less of a threat” (p. 85) to resist oppression and demand equality. Such a suggestion indicates that *unified* mobilizing may be an answer, but still does not provide an alternative to organization building and maintaining. Perhaps members can supply self-critique of their own actual level of organization and movement making, encouraging an evaluation of how LGBT issues of inequality are constructed within a context of uneven capitalist development. A movement that encourages “freedom” to “be ourselves” could be the optimal place to express original ideas and critiques, even if it is critical of its very foundation. The data collected in this research, however, indicates significant hesitation of members to make such critiques, rendering such a solution as member resistance complicated and unlikely.

Given the difficulties and complexities of alternatives to formal organization, this project does not claim to have ‘the answer.’ Instead, it offered analysis of the ways in which well-intentioned social movements are co-opted in an environment shaped and constrained by capitalist competition and, thereby, drawn into a bureaucratic apparatus. Alternative tactics may be discovered through continued self-analysis, careful theoretical consideration, and appreciation of historical means by which increased equality has, and has not, been achieved. It should be noted that no successful social movement in the history of capitalism has succeeded without a serious commitment to historical analysis of capitalism and self-critique. This project is one step in the direction towards creating permanent and materially viable change for LGBT inequality, and encourages subsequent study and theory to challenge the expanding capitalist markets responsible for such inequality.

Expanding the Study

Like any study, this project opens doors for additional research. Provided a substantial amount of financial resources and time, this project would benefit greatly from several focus groups with members of LGBT social organizations, as well as activists involved in other social movements. Focus groups with three to four participants at various locations would provide the opportunity for LGBT individuals to discuss how the role of ally is understood. The focus groups would additionally serve the opportunity to raise a particular topic or question and observe emerging patterns of exclusion, common or conflicting agendas, and issues under examination.

In-depth interviews with members of LGBT activism would additionally be beneficial to expand upon the specific ways in which participants are in (dis)agreement with tactics provided by the formal organizations to which they belong. A study that stretched over a greater period of time and included an even greater variety of conference attendance would more deeply fulfill questions over how social organizing has used bureaucratic approaches. It would also contribute to the study by offering an extensive observation of unifying, dividing issues, exclusion of certain social identities, and how the heterosexual ally does or does not contribute to the discussions.

Additional questions, in conjunction with the research methods listed above, would emerge during data collection. Quantitative components would certainly enrich this study. One particular area of interest, which time did not allow for in this study, would include quantitative evaluation of organization budgets. These budgets could be examined on a long-term basis as the organization assumes greater visibility,

membership, and collaboration with other organizations. These budgets could additionally be assessed in combination with the emergence of new social problems that have warranted media attention, and would consequently provide in-depth insight to the relationships between framing and budget increases.

Final Thoughts

You are special; you are the same . . . You need to form a self-reliant community; you want to be incorporated into the mainstream. You need to separate, you need to integrate . . . You want massive social change, but you don't want to tamper with the class system. You want gay liberation but you don't want to look at the causes of gay oppression. (Chasin, 2000, p. 50)

Reflecting upon the processes and findings involved in this project, I was startled by the degree to which activists and conference participants failed to contribute insight and solutions that differed from those purported by mainstream LGBT social organizations. As a participant observer seeking to contribute without overstepping my boundaries as an objective researcher, I was unable to interject the essential alternative frameworks of capitalist critique, Marxist perspectives, and material analyses. With or without my own interjections, however, few participants proposed any alternative agendas.

Although few participants made alternative proposals, however, many of the participants with whom I personally knew did, in fact, have progressive and revolutionary ideas, as well as critiques, to offer. The students at the Midwest state university with whom I became close friends and colleagues were progressive thinkers, critical of both their own behaviors and the propositions offered by more mainstream

organizations. These students were able to constructively critique even the faculty and staff with whom they were obliged to agree. Unfortunately, the students who shared their visions of real social change with me were also coerced into withholding such critiques and visions for risk of jeopardizing the so-called continued progress they were told was being made. The bureaucracy of the movements, needing to self-legitimize, has stifled opportunities for necessary critique and self-reflection. While the students may have shared their own truths with me, as their friend/colleague, they did not voice their truths in public or activist-related settings. If one disagreed, a student told me, “You’d be stoned!” It is clearly unfortunate that the movement to which these activists belong has not provided an environment in which they can “be themselves;” an absolute irony, indeed, considering the mottos of these very movements include the same discourse to “be yourself,” and provide “safe spaces.” Nonetheless, these voices of truth, even with the risk of being “stoned,” must be heard if ‘liberation’ of any variety is possible.

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