"'You've Got a Friend in Me?': The Politics of Allyship and Privilege Negotiation at the Intersection of LGBTQ and Feminist Activism"

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# INTRODUCTION

*You've got a friend in me*
*You've got a friend in me*
*When the road looks rough ahead*
*And you're miles and miles*
*From your nice warm bed*
*You just remember what your old pal said*
*Boy, you've got a friend in me*
*Yeah, you've got a friend in me*
*You've got a friend in me*
*You've got a friend in me*

*You've got troubles, and I've got 'em too*
*There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you*
*We stick together and can see it through*
*'Cause you've got a friend in me*
*You've got a friend in me*

*Some other folks might be*
*A little bit smarter than I am*
*Bigger and stronger too, maybe*
*But none of them will ever love you*
*The way I do, it's me and you, boy*
*And as the years go by*
*Our friendship will never die*
*You're gonna see it's our destiny*
*You've got a friend in me…*[1]

Families of all shapes and sizes gathered to watch a film in a small park along a local river the ran alongside Metro City. Some had already settled on the red picnic blankets and pillows, which Metro Pride scattered across the green. Others were still perusing the long line of booths along the river. Some were grabbing the last of the small bags of artisanal popcorn that are being given away by a local cruise line before stopping at the Merchandise tent where I was working to pick up a complimentary plastic cup of water. A few stopped to buy one of the many rainbow-blazoned Pride t-shirts we were selling or to get information from us about Pride events later in the week. Many of these families were already laden down with freebies they had gotten from other booths. Some were wearing the rainbow fanny packs and tinted shades that State Farm was giving away in exchange for emails and photos taken with their Pride logo. Many were carrying pink tote bags from T-Mobile with "Mobilize for Equality" written in white letters below a rainbow-colored Wi-Fi symbol, often stuffed to brim with miscellaneous items from other

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[1] The song, "You've Got a Friend in Me" was composed by Randy Newman for the 1995 film *Toy Story*, which was directed by John Lasseter.

booths, including V8 juice and Goldfish crackers (which promised "Smiles For All Families" and "Veggies for All"), small bottles of bubbles with Axa's logo on the side, samples of chocolate-flavored coconut water from Zico, pink T-Mobile noisemakers, and promotional literature.

Intermixed with the families and curious onlookers were sponsors trying to share their merchandise—from people in red State Farm polos to Walmart representatives whose shirts proudly declare #WMTPride. There corporate sponsors shared the space with volunteers from community groups (e.g., the local Metropolitan Community Church chapter, leaders of nearby Pride festivals, and local activist groups). Finally, unbeknownst to most of the event attendees, undercover members of the Metro Police Department were out in plainclothes, invited to protect Metro City Pride attendees from a mass shooting like the one orchestrated at the *Pulse* nightclub in Orlando—a tragedy that had shaken the community to its core earlier in the week and created a great deal of anxiety amongst Pride organizers. These groups laughed and mingled as the sun slowly disappeared from the sky.

As I worked Metro City Pride events in the summer in 2016, I found myself pondering several questions that had animated my dissertation since its inception: Where at these events did I 'have a friend'? What does it mean to be an ally to LGBTQ people? Who here at this event 'counted' as an ally? Were participating companies, like Walmart, our allies, or were they merely exploiting a good PR opportunity? Could the police be our 'friends' when their presence alienated poor queer people of color in the community who were disproportionately vulnerability to state control and violence? — a question other festivals in Toronto, London, and Minneapolis have struggled with in recent years (e.g., Lopez 2017; Stryker 2018; Turner 2019). Who 'gets' to decide who the 'real' allies are? And, finally, how does this decision-making process vary across movements? Answering these questions about the meaning and dynamics of allyship are crucial for explaining the success and failure of social movements.

In this dissertation, I will explore how activists across movements create a sense of togetherness through boundary-work, either through bridging ties with powerful outsiders (Pugh 2011) or drawing symbolic boundaries against those comparatively advantaged others (Lamont 1992; 2000). Specifically, I will show how these boundary-drawing processes vary across social

movements, showing how identity-based LGBTQ activism draws strong boundaries against straight allies (despite the challenges created by the invisibility of sexual identity and blurred boundaries in LGBTQ social life), while an increasingly post-identity feminism movement builds new pathways for men into activism (despite the high visibility of their gender identity). In the following sections, I will show how such a comparative theory of allyship complicates existing models of ally politics within social movements. Once I've outlined this theoretical contribution, I will briefly describe my methods for examining this theory before concluding with a brief outline of the dissertation itself.

## Allyship in Social Movements

Though who counts as an ally and what constitutes good allyship are hotly debated questions, most social movement theorists follow David Myer's lead in defining allies as "movement adherents who are not direct beneficiaries of the movements they support and do not have expectations of such benefits" (2008:168). While the term is widely used, social movement research has only recently begun to engage meaningfully with allyship as a concept. Early social movement theorists (e.g., Smelser 1962) were largely uninterested in 'allies' because they saw social movements primarily as emotional and irrational responses to structural and economic strain. Since these theorists saw activists as irrational people who were making emotional decisions based on their extreme economic deprivation, they did not consider the possibility that these actors may seek to build bridges with sympathetic outsiders who do not share their experiences with oppression but still empathize with their struggles.

The proliferation of the resource mobilization approach (e.g., McCarthy and Zald [1977] 1987; Zald and McCarthy [1980] 1987) in social movement theory, however, created new

opportunities for thinking about the role that allies and privilege might play in social movements. These theorists saw activists not as responding to strain, but rather as rational actors struggling to mobilize resources for social change. Such resources included, not just financial support, but movement participants as well. Under this theoretical model, powerful outside supporters were extremely valued because they could connect marginalized actors to elites capable of impacting policy decisions.

Research on allies was further amplified by the cultural turn in social movement theory, which emphasized the importance of 'framing' claims in a way that both prompted collective solidarity around shared grievances and that was intelligible to those in power (Snow et al. 1986; Snow & Benford 1992). These scholars thus recognized that movements, countermovements, and elites often experiment with competing cultural frameworks to both attract in-group participants and appeal to outsiders who were not the primary stakeholders of the movement (Creed, Langstraat, & Scully; Scully and Creed 2005; Stein 1998). However, although these new strands of social movement theory raised new questions about the movement non-beneficiaries we have come to classify as 'allies,' they remained largely remained peripheral to these traditions, understood primarily as the targets of movement messaging rather than a group being actively recruited to join activism. As such, they were treated not as potential collaborators, but rather as an external audience for social movement claims.

It wasn't until movement scholars began grappling with identity-based movements (e.g., Bernstein 2005; Melucchi 1985), such as the civil rights movement, LGBTQ activism, and feminism, that allyship and privilege became more central to social movement theory. The cultivation of allies has been more salient to movements that mobilize collectively around a shared, socially devalued identity (Moon 2012; Polletta & Jasper 2001) than economically

focused ones for two central reasons: 1) mobilizing around a stigmatized identity implies that there are 'others' who don't share that identity and who are comparatively privileged as a result; 2) the privileged position of these 'others' means they can be appealed to and convinced to 'ally' with the cause so that it can succeed. Although many did not use the language of allyship, this recognition led many theorists to incorporate non-beneficiaries more meaningfully into their models of activism; Doug McAdam (1999), for example, integrated sympathetic supporters, such as politicians in positions to enact change, into his conceptualization of the 'political opportunity structure,' which he (and others) saw as a convergence of social, political, and economic forces that either facilitated social movement success or stalled it (e.g., Grasso & Guigni 2016; MacIndoe & Beaton 2018; Spicer, McGregor, & Alcantara 2017). Once it was acknowledged that identity was often a central component of social justice activism, it became possible to theorize more deeply about tensions between those who possess marginalized identities and those who do not.

However, recent shifts in the social movement literature have pivoted away from questions of allyship and privilege. This research seems to be moving in one of two directions: 1) towards intrapsychic questions—following Arlie Hochschild's lead in exploring how emotions and 'feeling rules' (1979) structure social movement emergence and member dedication (Ahmed 2013; Gould 2009; Jaspers 1997; Summers-Effler 2010); and 2) towards a rapprochement between organizational sociologists and social movement scholars (e.g., Davis et al. 2005) that seeks to understand how resources, organizational structures, and cultural frames diffuse across organizations depending on the dynamics of the institutional field they are embedded in (i.e., the complicated matrix of interconnected organizations, social movements, adversaries, and political bodies that shape what rhetoric and resources activists have access to) (e.g., Armstrong 2005;

Armstrong & Bernstein 2008; Clemons 2005; Currier 2010; Soule and King 2008). Although these explorations and collaborations have been generative, they are respectively too micro and too macro to engage deeply with concepts like allyship and privilege that play out between activists at the interactional level. While emotions certainly play a key role in how privilege is experienced and navigated by allies (Russo 2014) and the broader sociopolitical context clearly shapes the dynamics of allyship, focusing exclusively on these levels can prevent as from asking important questions about how activists negotiate privilege on the ground and how they actively negotiate who is inside the movement.

Much of the most promising work on interactions between allies and the community members they are trying to support is occurring, not at the level of social movement theory, but within discussions of social movements occurring inside other sociological subfields. For example, critical race theorists and students of the anti-racist movement have pursued promising work that illuminates how 'colorblind racism' (Bonilla-Silva 2006)—the misguided belief that racial equity involves not seeing race at all—prevents many whites from acquiring the level of awareness required for allyship. These studies have shown how narratives of 'white victimhood' and 'white guilt' (as well as a distrust of minority voices) can erode the social justice efforts of white allies (Hughey 2012; Steele 2006) and how such allies can overcome these barriers (Case 2012; O'Brien 2001) to make positive impacts on the movement (Boyd 2015; Brown 2002). This scholarship has produced generative knowledge about the myriad ways that supporters' privilege can derail social justice work and how movements try to sidestep these obstacles.

The literature on allyship within LGBTQ activism and feminism has also raised important questions about these ally cultivation processes. For example, there is a nascent, and often less critical, literature within the sexualities subfield examining the benefits of straight

allies for social justice work, including increased numbers that provide much needed support for a numerically small movement (Cortese 2006; Miceli 2013; Myers 2008). These studies have demonstrated that the presence of allies and the safe spaces they help create with their presence have a positive impact on LGBTQ people's self-esteem, sense of empowerment, and overall wellness (Mayberry 2013; Toomey et al. 2011). This literature has often focused on the life experiences that draw straight people to LGBTQ activism (Swank & Fahs 2012; Wahlström, Petersen, and Wennerhag 2018), such as being exposed to LGBTQ people in childhood (Stotzer 2009), the possession of LGBTQ and gay-friendly social networks (DiStephano 2000; Fingerhut 2011; Goldstein and Davis 2010; Ryan et al. 2013), explicit exposure to the negative consequences of homophobia (Valenti and Cambell 2009), and affinities for broad ideologies supportive of equality (Russell 2011). Cumulatively, these studies have prioritized identifying the causes and benefits of straight ally presence.

Feminist scholars have also commented on the merits on bringing men into feminism. There is a robust literature examining how feminism enriches men's lives by encouraging them to reject limiting gender roles and noting how their inclusion builds a broader base for the movement (e.g., Digby 1998; Frantzen 1993; Schacht and Ewing 2004). However, these scholars have comparatively focused more on the possible downsides of men's involvement, noting how the presence of men decenters women's concerns and creates opportunities for male domination in spaces meant to be buffered from it (e.g., Heath 1987; Kolb 2014; Macomber 2018). As such, the feminist literature has been significantly more critical than LGBTQ research on the ally question.

Because these literatures are often not in conversation with one another, the kinds of questions researchers can ask about allyship and how it unfolds within activism have been

limited. So far, existing research on allies has largely treated them as a static resource that any movement can mobilize as a utilitarian means to an end. Some scholars have encouraged us to think of allyship not as an essential state of being, but rather as a 'fluid' process of becoming, wherein allies are constantly tailoring their actions to better serve the marginalized communities they want to support (Reynolds 2010) and negotiating the uncertainly of how to be a 'good' ally through 'identity choreography' (Grzanka, Adler, & Blazer 2015). However, the mechanisms through which this ally incorporation is undertaken and how it varies across social movements remain unexamined. Specifically, social movement theory has undertheorized the process through which marginalized activists constitute the borders of social movements by drawing 'symbolic boundaries' (Lamont 2000; Lamont and Molnar 2002; Tilly 2004) around allies.

Identity-based social movements vary on two dimensions that could impact the politics of allyship within: 1) the degree an identity is visible; 2) the degree to which it is treated as essential and intrinsic to an individual's being. While the former impacts activists' ability to distinguish between marginalized people and the allies who support them, the latter has implications for the firmness of the boundaries of a movement (i.e., whether a so-called 'ally' could potentially have a personal investment in that movement or whether they remain perpetually outside). To better understand these allyship processes, it is necessary to consider how movements positioned at different points along these axes negotiate the presence of allies.

## Towards a Comparative Model of Allyship

Feminism and LGBTQ activism are ideal movements for examining these processes of ally incorporation. Although the movements are interconnected (Butler 1997; Marinucci 2016) and are both typically classified as identity movements by social movement theorists, I argue that their distinct histories and experiences position them at distinct points on these visibility and

essentialism axes (Chart 1.1). Despite the invisibility of LGBTQ identity, queer activism has

increasingly crystallized around a rigidly essentialist identity politics that centers LGBTQ

people. Feminism, on the other hand, has moved towards a post-identity politics that seeks to

decenter women and expand the base of the movement to include a more diverse constituency of

stakeholders, even though gender is often a highly visible identity. My comparative theory of

ally politics, which I empirically examined using ethnographic and interview-based methods,

helps us to understand the implications of these differences for allyship in each movement.

However, before further elucidating these methods, I will briefly outline the history of identity in

these two movements and why they raise interesting questions about allyship.

Identity

Visible ←——————→ Invisible

Post-Identity

Chart 1.1: Mapping Movements
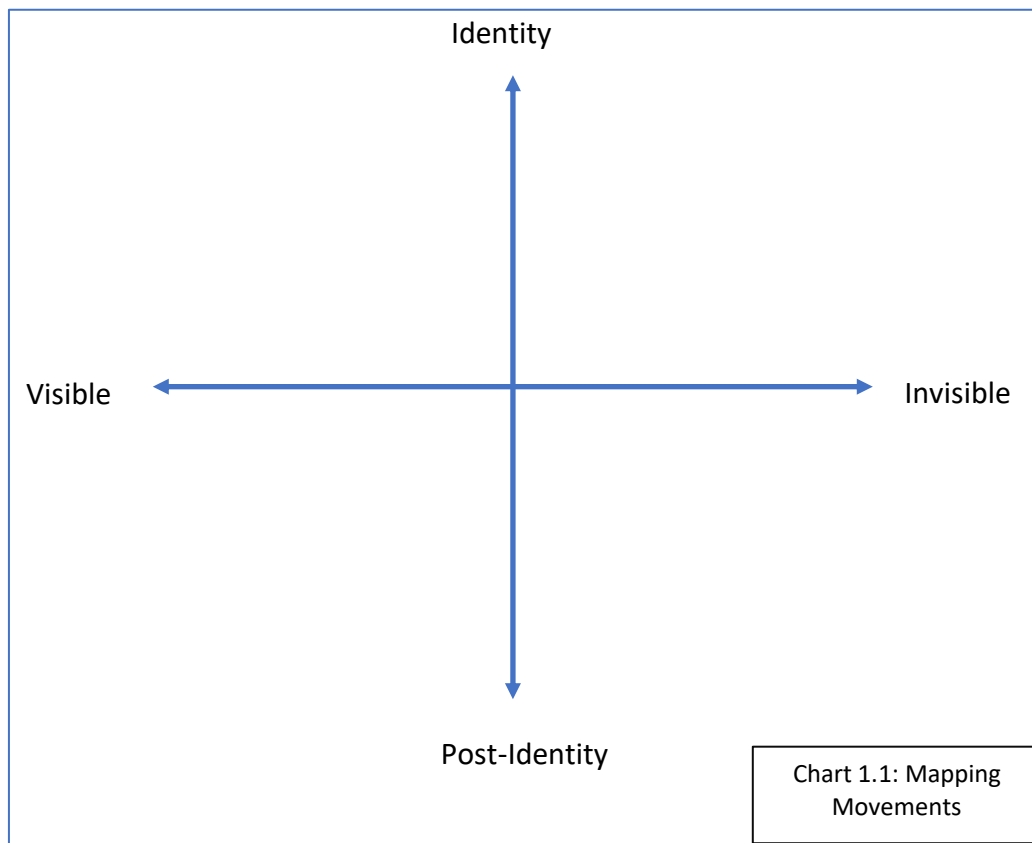
*LGBTQ Activism, Allies, and Identity-Based Politics*

The LGBTQ rights movement, like many other social movements, has often struggled over whether to mobilize around essentialist or constructionist models of identity politics, debating whether to emulate the civil rights movement and adopt an ethnic-style model of identity that sees LGBTQ people as possessing a shared culture oriented around an essential gay identity (Gamson 1995; Escoffier 1985; Seidman 1997) or adopting a more fluid understanding of sexuality that seeks the queer potential in everyone and rejects the notion that there is a shared 'gay' experience (Sedgwick 1990; Warner 1993). Although current models of LGBTQ identity are deeply essentialist, scholars have noted that earlier stages of LGBTQ activism were conflicted over the merits of this thinking about sexual identity this way. This, in turn, impacted how they engaged with straight people in their midst.

The early homophile movement in the 1950s, for example, incorporated an amalgamation of essentialist and constructionist rhetoric into its activism. On the one hand, homophile activists sought to blur the sharp line homophobic rhetoric drew between 'good' heterosexuals and 'deviant' homosexuals by adopting a respectability politics that insisted gay men and lesbians were 'just like' straight people; on the other hands, these assertions of sameness coexisted uncomfortably with mobilization strategies that saw same-sex-attracted people as having a distinct community and culture (Esterberg 1994). Wherever homophile activists stood on the question of the intrinsic quality of sexual identity, this stage of the movement was very eager to cultivate ties with heterosexuals in the academy, psychiatric field, and religious organizations because they believed their support would legitimate the moral worthiness of 'homosexuals' (D'Emilio 1983). This proto-essentialism coupled with the profoundly marginal position of gay

men and lesbians in American society incentivized connections with those we currently see as straight allies, but they remained largely outside the movement.

The post-Stonewall, gay liberation stage of the movement in the early 1970s shifted the identity politics of the movement in new, transformative directions. This stage of the movement sought to build ties with collaborators in the New Left, such as the Black Panther Party and communist activists, who joined with gay activists in broader campaigns against oppression (Valocchi 1999; 2001). In this moment, sexual identity became decentralized within LGBTQ activism in favor of broader, multi-issue campaigns for social change. However, this moment was short-lived. In the gay reform stage in the late 1970s and early 1980s, these radical expressions of cross-movement solidarity were replaced by single issue identity-based politics that prioritized narratives of coming out as 'gay' or 'lesbian'; these tactics emphasized an interior difference from the straight majority, eschewing more 'structurally transformative' (Hays 1994) goals in favor of using the rhetoric of 'gay pride' to build a visible community as a basis to collective petition for identity-based civil rights (Armstrong 2002; Gamson 1995). These strategies were useful when fighting anti-gay measures like Proposition 6, which would have banned 'homosexuals' from teaching in California (Shilts 1978). This stage of the movement was influential in cultivating essentialist models of identity politics that linger today.

However, it is important to note that the increasingly essentialist way that the mainstream LGBTQ organizations understood gay identity during the 1970s was neither uncontested nor inevitable. A competing discourse about LGBTQ identity existed amongst lesbian feminists, who felt alienated from the (supposedly unified) gay community because of the sexism they experienced within the movement (Armstrong 2002; D'Emilio 1983). These women did not feel much of a connection to gay men, whom they saw as complicit in patriarchal oppression (e.g.,

Rich 1980: 649-650), but rather sought community with other women irrespective of sexuality. Although these women tended to essentialize gender as a means of creating woman-centered communities, this desire to build bridges with other women rather than gay men contributed to a very constructionist model of sexual identity—by positioning lesbian identification as the ultimate manifestation of feminist praxis, lesbian feminists framed community identification as a political statement rather than an essential nature (D'Emilio 2003; Stein 1997a; Stein 1997b). Lesbianism was thus the logical endpoint of true feminist activism, not the result of an intrinsic biological orientation.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the AIDS epidemic ravaged the gay male population (Anonymous 1990 [2009]; Shilts 1987), giving birth to a more queer and fluid LGBTQ identity politics. The emergence of queer theory (e.g., Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990), alongside an increasingly radicalized politics, encouraged activists to deconstruct gay identity and problematize the binary we construct between heterosexuality and homosexuality (Gamson 1995). Had this queer politics remained strong, essentialized identity politics may have been displaced by a fluid mobilization that sought to challenge broader systems of heteronormativity rather than lobby for identity-based civil rights reforms. Instead, the community's mobilization around the AIDS epidemic gave the queer community unprecedented access to government institutions (Armstrong 2002; Gould 2009) and heightened visibility (Walters 2001) and facilitated alliances with other communities struggling with the disease (Ghaziani 2008), which brought the LGBTQ community closer to the mainstream and helped establish LGBTQ organizations as clear interest groups in American politics.

As a result, the movement became more mainstream (Endean 2006; Vaid 1995) as activists mobilized around collective models of LGBTQ identity, appealing directly to straight

audiences for rights and representation (Bernstein 1997; 2002). These strategies seemed to have some degree of success. Through the 1990s and 2000's the most explicit barriers to LGBTQ integration were largely demolished, including the overturning of all state-level anti-sodomy statutes and the staggered acquisition of marriage equality (Bell & Binnie 2000; Bernstein & Taylor 2013). As the movement has gained such concessions, there is evidence that many straight people are increasingly willing to build social and political community with LGBTQ people. This is especially true of young women who have typically expressed less homo-negativity (Montgomery & Stewart 2012). However, it is perhaps extending to young men as well (Bridges & Pascoe 2014; McCormack 2012), leading them to embrace softer forms of masculinity that are less invested in homophobic boundary-drawing against gay men.

In the wake of this mainstreaming of the movement, some theorists speculate we are moving towards a 'post-gay' (2014) or 'post-mo' (Nash 2013) period where LGBTQ people can live 'beyond the closet' (Seidman 2002). Forming more meaningful social relationships with straight communities has become a greater priority—making gay enclaves more of a symbol or 'institutional anchor' (Ghaziani 2014) than a real center of queer sociality. Therefore, LGBTQ people understand their relationship with the straight community less as a confrontational 'us versus them' scenario and more within a collaborative 'us and them' framework (Ghaziani 2011). The sympathetic visibility the movement got in the 1990s (Walters 2001) and the rising public approval ratings of the LGBTQ community (Baunach 2012) have encouraged straight people to invest in queer neighborhoods (Collins 2004; Kanai 2014; Mattson 2015; Rushbrook 2002) and attend LGBTQ bars and other social venues (Eves 2004; Holt & Griffin 2003; Skeggs 1999). It is thus less stigmatizing now to identify as an ally, and straight people are increasingly bridging social ties between LGBTQ community members and themselves.

Although these factors seem to blur boundaries between straight and gay people, they coexist alongside the widespread embrace of a 'born this way' model of identity politics that keep straight people at arm's length because it presumes sexual orientation and gender identity is fixed and non-malleable (Garrison 2018; Walters 2014; Waites 2005)—an ideology that has inspired (and been inspired by) a cottage industry of scientists seeking to identify the genetic causes of same-sex desire (e.g., LeVay 2010; Lippa 2003). This essentialist turn in LGBTQ politics has important implications for how straight people can engage with the movement, as well as how the movement engages with straight people. Since the 'born this way' rhetoric is a 'minoritizing' (Sedgwick 1990) discourse that defuses the fear of gay contagion, it is a very successful frame that has encouraged straight people to express tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ people (Horn & Heinze 2011). However, the essentialist underpinning of this rhetoric means that these straight people are not truly a part of the queer community, even though they are more willing to associate with LGBTQ people— since LGBTQ activism is an identity based movement, it is not really theirs to claim, meaning that straight allies seem (by definition) removed from it.

This essentialist politics is not unanimous in the community, of course. Queer theorists, for example, have critiqued the limitations of this 'born this way' mentality, arguing that the modest civil rights reforms it encourages are far removed from the queer utopias that are possible when all people embrace sexual liberation (Jones 2013; Muñoz 2009; Warner 1999). Furthermore, critics have noted that centering sexual identity can lead to the secondary marginalization of multiply oppressed LGBTQ community members, asking them to center one marginalized identity at the expense of others (Cohen 1999; Purdie-Vaughn & Epiach 2008). For example, there has been interesting empirical work on how the poor, non-cisgender people, and

queers of color are erased and undeserved by the elitist, homonormative claims-making strategies of the mainstream LGBTQ rights movement (Carbado 2013; Duggan 2002). Critics of the marriage-focused quality of the movement have also noted that moderate civil rights reforms like marriage benefits typically benefit cisgender gay men and lesbians the most (e.g., Conrad 2004). Finally, scholars have noted how the 'homonationalism' of the Western neoliberal state—which weds LGBTQ liberation to nationalism and state pride (Puar 2007)—'others' queer Muslims, justifies imperialistic interference in nations with anti-gay track records, and facilitates the 'pinkwashing' of human rights abuses in more LGBTQ-positive regimes (El-Tayeb 2012; Haritaworn 2007; Rahman 2010). However, despite these critiques, essentialized identity politics remain strong in the movement, as is evidenced by the severe backlash queer theorists face when they dare to suggest the fluidity of sexual identity (Ward 2016). Scholarly critiques thus are in tension with LGBTQ politics on the ground.

### *Intersectionality, Deconstruction, and Post-Identity Feminism*

Such essentialized politics are significantly more controversial and embattled in feminism. Though feminism has historically been a firmly identity-based movement, it has moved increasingly towards post-identity models of mobilization. In its first and second waves, its goals were largely oriented around gaining wins for women as a class (Offen 1988: 128). The first wave of the feminist movement, for example, was centered around acquiring basic civil rights for women, including the right to own property and vote in elections (e.g., Du Bois 1999). This centering of women continued in the second wave of feminism (e.g., Evans 2008), as 1960s feminists were inspired by books like *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan1963 [1997]) to challenge the widespread notion that women belong in the domestic sphere by 1) securing legal protections that ensure women cannot be discriminated against in education or the workplace, 2) fighting for

women's right to control their bodily autonomy through access to contraception and abortion, 3) pushing women to enter traditionally male arenas like politics, and 4) attempting (albeit unsuccessfully) to make discrimination against women unconstitutional by passing the Equal Rights Amendment.

In the years following the height of the second wave, feminist intellectuals began to question the wisdom of taking womanhood for granted (Stone 2004). They became increasingly critical of so-called 'difference feminists' like Carol Gilligan (1982) and Simone de Beauvoir (1953) who made the case that women should have access to power because their natural predisposition towards nurturance and mothering meant they could help bring about more peaceful societies wherein children and citizens are more thoughtfully supported. Such essentialist narratives were increasingly understood as empirically dubious and politically problematic by postmodern feminists (Evans 1995; Grant 2013; Mann & Huffman 2005). Rather than treating gender as something a person is, feminist scholars began to characterize it as a "performative accomplishment" (West and Zimmerman 1987)—something that is 'done' by actors and that they can be held 'accountable' for if they violate social norms. Buying into essentialist narratives about men's inevitably violent natures or women's innately caring ones was understood as reifying a gender binary designed to maintain patriarchal domination and ensure 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler 1990; Rich 1980); these changes were increasingly treated as shaped by social conditioning (Benjamin 1988; Chodorow 1978). Understanding gender as a social construction hence laid the groundwork for a more de-essentialized form of feminism.

This transition was amplified by critiques of second wave feminism's well-demarcated history of excluding trans women. Many cisgender feminist women in this wave, especially in

radical and lesbian feminist circles, often rejected trans women's right to occupy women-only spaces, arguing that they were 'really' men because they were born with male privilege and thus could not hope to understand the struggles of women who were born female (Daly 1978 [1990]); some cis feminists went even further, attacking trans women for surgically 'colonizing' the female body (Raymond 1979). Though these trans-negative perspectives still exist (e.g. Jeffreys 2014), they have been much maligned in recent years, with women who adopt them being labeled trans-exclusionary radical feminists or TERFs (e.g., Nanney 2017; Williams 2016). As such trans-exclusive feminism has begun to fall out of favor, new transfeminisms have made a case that no attempt to undermine patriarchy is complete without addressing transmisogyny and cissexism as well (Davies 2004; Koyuma 2003; Munro 2013). As millennial feminists have become less focused on (cis) women's empowerment and more invested in securing more gendered possibilities for all people (Meadow 2018; Risman 2018), biological sex within the feminist movement has been further decentered.

This deconstructionist turn rejected binary and essentialist models of gender that relied on universalized notions of womanhood for coherence (Hunter 1996; Fuss 1989; Riley 1988). These developments fed, and were supported by critiques of unitary models of womanhood that universalized the experiences of white women, erased the voices and experiences of women of color, and reinforced racial inequality within feminism (Grillo1995; Hill Collins 1986; Lotz 2003; Spelman 1988). These important discussions about the experiences of women of color and what they can bring to feminism crystallized into the theory we now refer to do as 'intersectionality.' Originally coined by legal theorist Kimberle Crenshaw (1989;1991), the term intersectionality refers to the importance of recognizing the mutually reinforcing nature of systems of inequality and seeing gender and sexism as part of a web of intersecting identities and

'interlocking oppressions' that compose a 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins 1986; 2001). Under such a model, single-issue gender politics are thoroughly problematized.

This intersectional turn was reinforced by the negative experiences of women of color within feminism; although women of color were instrumental in all waves of feminism (Brienes 2007; Wagner 2019), they found themselves pushed to the margins of the movement throughout—from weathering the racist rhetoric of (white) first wave feminist icons and being pressured by those second wave icons to sublimate their desire for racial justice (Davis 1981; hooks 1981; Hurtado 1989) to their contemporary struggle to dethrone the cultural centralization of exclusionary models of 'white feminism' that don't reflect their lives (Carby 1982; hooks 1984; Mane 2012). In response to this exclusion, Black feminists and other feminists of color began to construct their own theories and write histories of their activism (e.g., Roth 2004). These Black feminists argued that women of color were uniquely positioned to analyze systems of racism and sexism because they were in 'double jeopardy,' trapped between multiple oppressive systems (Beal 2008; King 1988). This Black feminist tradition produced rich theory that centered rather than excluded the viewpoints of women of color, inspiring influential compilations and powerful polemics from scholar-activists (e.g., Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982; Lorde 1978; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981) about women of color's lived experiences.

These intersectionality theories, together with additive models of double/multiple jeopardy (e.g., King 1988; Bowleg et al. 2003), have produced compelling theoretical and empirical work explaining how interlocking inequalities are experienced, covering everything from sexual harassment in the workforce (Berdahl and Moore 2006) to wage and workplace inequality (Greenman and Xie 2003) to struggles with immigration (Buitelaar 2006) to domestic violence (Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Nixon and Humphreys 2010; Sokoloff and Dupont 2005).

These theories have also shaped our understanding of the relationship between social movements and policymakers, focusing on how groups can be inclusive of multiple identity groups without having their radicalness diluted when they interface with the state  (Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013; Siltanen, Klodawsky, and Andrew 2015) and how policies can be created that address the needs of oppressed groups without silencing their most marginal members (Lombardo and Verloo 2009; Lombardo and Rolandsen 2012; Verloo 2006). There has also been interesting theoretical and empirical work about the 'interference' (Verloo 2013) that occurs when the needs of one oppressed group conflict with those of another and how that can thwart coalitions between social justice groups (Cole 2008). Intersectional feminism further decentered identity within the movement.

Cumulatively, this shift towards postmodern deconstructionist and intersectional identity politics have enabled new ways of thinking about feminism (Alcoff 1988; Goss & Heaney 2020; Scott 1988) that are less enmeshed in the 'privileged/oppressed' binary (Kannen 2008) and more focused on how gender inequality intersects with other systems of inequality (Kelly & Gauchat 2016). This trend could have interesting implications for the position of men in feminism. If men's oppressive behavior is not hard-wired, then there is no reason they could not cultivate less 'toxic' forms of masculinity that would improve the lives of women and men (e.g., Iwamoto et al. 2018). This realization has led scholars and activists to emphasize how 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995)—the impossibly contradictory standards men must live up to be perceived as 'real' men—is created and maintained, as well as what can be done to unmake it (e.g., Katz 2006). This new focus has ignited important conversations in feminist scholarship and activism regarding the hidden costs of masculinity to men (e.g., Allen Ridgeway, & Swan 2015; Fleming et al 2015; Lander & Ravn 2016; Oliffe et al 2011), such as their predisposition for

risky behavior, vulnerably to physical violence, difficulties receiving support for sexual violence, and alienation from their emotions.

I argue that this deconstructionist impulse problematized the exclusion of men in feminism and gave them a pathway into the movement that did not previously exist. Although earlier waves of feminist activism were supported by high profile intellectuals and male activists in other movements who saw the liberation of women as commensurable with their respective missions to better the human condition and/or achieve justice for oppressed communities (Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992), such as humanist John Stuart Mill (1869 [1973), abolitionist Frederick Douglas (2003), and communists like Frederich Engels (1848 [1973), these men offered largely auxiliary support for the movement. The second wave of the movement drew men even further in, as some began to wonder if feminism's challenge of gender norms might present opportunities for men to adopt less destructive models of masculinity (Whelehan 1995)—an impulse that led some to emulate the consciousness-raising groups of second wave women, meeting with other men to speak about how they have been hurt by masculine gender norms under patriarchy (Messner, Peretz, and Greenberg 2015). As the waves progressed, men moved closer to the movement.

However, men were still largely treated as outsiders in these waves (Kahane 1998; Showalter 1983 [1987]), and this masculine involvement was peripheral to the woman-oriented activism occurring in the rest of the movement. The presence of these men was also very contentious and distrusted. This distrust was fed by the visibility of second wave men who left feminism and sought their liberation from restrictive gender norms in either the apolitical mythopoetic men's movement (Ashe 2004; Connell 2013; Kimmel 1997; Messner 1993) or more oppositional men's rights activism (Messner 1998; Pleasants 2011)—and it is further

exacerbated by the reluctance of many men to engage with feminism period (Edley and Wetherall 2001; Riley 2001). The specters of these 'bad men' seemed to overshadow the actions of the 'good men' involved.

More recently, however, feminists of various genders have pushed back against this assumption, arguing that men have something important to add to feminism (Boone and Cadden 1990; Digby 1998). For example, their capability of meeting young men where they are and bringing feminism into traditionally male dominated spaces has been framed as an asset to feminism (Johnson et al. 1996; May 1998; Stanovsky 1997; Sterba 1998). These scholars and activists argue that excluding men from feminism on the grounds of their gender is essentialist (Herbert 2007), based on the wrongful presumption that men do not have a gender or meaningful experiences with patriarchy (Boone 1990; Frantzen 1993; Hopkins 1998), and perhaps even sexist (Lemons 1996; Schacht and Ewing 2004).

This increasingly male-positive feminism helped male-embodied feminists feel like they have a stake in the movement (Boone & Cadden 1990; hooks 2000; Shail 2004; Tarrant 2009). As men's stake in the movement has expanded, women have become de-centered within feminist campaigns and policies that are increasingly degendered (e.g., PettyJohn et al. 2018; Kretschmer & Barber 2016; Flood 2011; Jewkes, Flood, & Lang 2015). This degendering has potential negative consequences. For example, much has been written about the potential pitfalls of men-run feminist organizations and efforts (e.g., Nicholas & Agius 2018) and the difficulties of holding men accountable for missteps when their sheer rarity in feminist activism produces a 'pedestal effect' (Macomber 2018; Messner, Peretz, and Greenberg 2015; Peretz 2018). Yet even these studies still largely treat men as external 'allies' whose contributions are evaluated by

women gatekeepers—a false equivocation that ignores feminism's increasingly post-identity mobilization and men's ability to use the feminist label to claim space therein.

### *Some Hypotheses About Identity Politics and Allyship*

This comparative overview of the distinctive histories of LGBTQ activism and feminism suggests that these two movements exist at distinct points on the axes of visible-invisible and identity-post identity politics (See Chart 1.2). LGBTQ activism is a largely invisible identity that typically only becomes 'seen' when individuals challenge heteronormativity and communicate it by 'coming out' as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or some other queer label (Klein et al. 2015; Manning 2015). This invisibility coexists with an essentialist identity politics that demands that identity be disclosed so that the boundaries between insiders and outsiders can be drawn. But what does this mean for ally politics? How can LGBTQ activists draw boundaries against outsiders when they are not clearly visible? What challenges does this create for LGBTQ mobilization?

There are contradictions embedded within feminism as well. In this movement, gender is constantly being 'undone' (Butler 2007; Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009)—treated as a socially constructed, performative accomplishment (West and Zimmerman 1987) that constrains both women and men and presses the former to embrace an 'emphasized femininity' (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Schippers 2007) where they passively submit to men as sexual objects (Currier 2013; Korobov 2011). Within this system, the latter are pushed to live up to norms of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995) that give them power, but also restrict their emotional expression and produce other bad outcomes (Alexander & Wood 2000; Ramirez-Ferrero 2005). However, because gender is constantly being 'redone,' even by sexual and gender minorities

(Connell 2010; Darwin 2018; Kelley & Hauck 2015), and because it is one of the first things we tend to notice about social others (Contreras, Banaji, & Mitchell 2013), gender is also highly visible compared to sexual identity. How can post-identity politics thrive when gender is so visible? How does men's visibility impact their ability to be seen as feminist insiders?



Chart 1.2: Mapping Movements
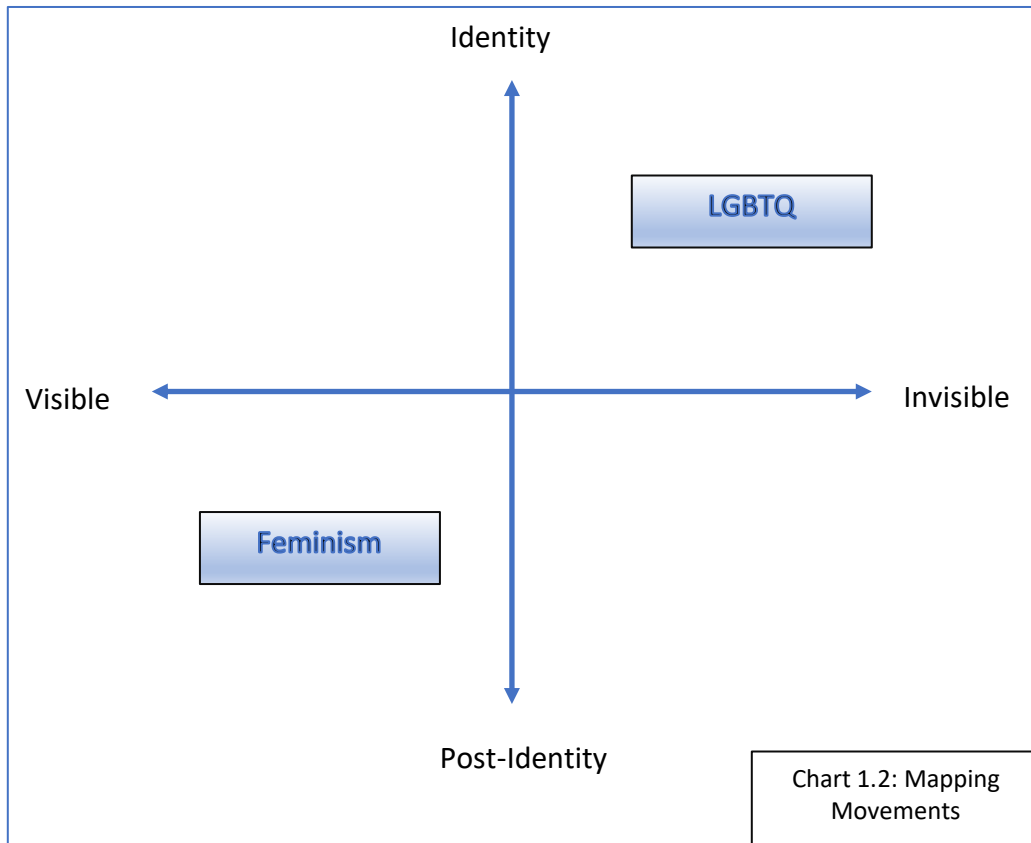
This suggests that movements will provide their activists with different cultural tool-kits (Swidler 1986) for dealing with allies depending on their position along this visible-invisible axis. By comparing how identity-based movements like LGBTQ activism and post-identity movements like feminism negotiate allies, we can capture a clearer picture of how social movements agitate for change—the distinct challenges they face as balance the normative ideologies of their given movements with the practicalities of mobilization on the ground.

Through such analysis, we can gain a clearer understanding of how social movements are constituted and the efficacy of drawing rigid and fluid boundaries against the beneficiaries of social movements and the broader institutional context they are embedded within.

*Methods*

To examine how allyship and privilege are managed in social justice spaces, I ethnographically observed 11 activist organizations (i.e., five feminist and six LGBTQ-oriented groups), which I list in Table 1. I conducted the first leg of this research from February 2015 to January 2016, in a small Southeastern city, which I call University Town (UT). I attended the meetings and events of two local feminist groups—a campus-based group of college-age feminists, which I call University Feminism (UFem), and a community-based group of middle-aged feminist women who work on securing abortion access for low-income women, which I refer to as Women for Community Change (WComm). The campus group met two times a week during the school year, while the community group met 2-3 times a month. I also observed the gatherings of three local LGBTQ groups—two on the University campus (i.e., the campus LGBTQ Services Center and a service-oriented fraternity for queer people and their allies) and UT Community Pride, which puts on the annual Pride festival. I typically spent one to two hours a week with the two campus groups over the course of an academic year, but only observed the UT Pride group biweekly for several months leading up to the festival.

In February 2016, I began the second leg of my research and relocated to a large urban enclave in the Northeast, which I refer to as Metro City, where I sat in on the meetings of three feminist groups and three LGBTQ oriented ones before departing in August. Here I could observe more specialized organizations, including ones specifically designed to cultivate allies

and help them manage their privilege. I observed two feminist groups dedicated to integrating men into feminism—a monthly discussion group, Masculinity Talks, which was dedicated to discussing how men can understand their gender and be better feminists in their daily lives and a more short-lived group trying to bring men into feminism called Male Profeminists United; I also attended two meetings of a drastically different organization, Feminist Circle, that explicitly excluded men. I also sat in briefly on an LGBTQ-oriented ally group called Together With LGBTQ Friends, which was a monthly support group that bridged ties between straight people and the queer community. Additionally, I observed the weekly meetings and events of an organization seeking to serve multiple marginalized groups—a group called Radical AIDS Activism, which has historically served the LGBTQ community. Finally, I observed a large organization, City Pride, which was responsible for organizing one of the Metro City's annual Pride festivals—an undertaking that necessitated extensive intra-movement and inter-movement coalition building.

| Table 1: Field Sites | LGBTQ | Feminist |
|---|---|---|
| **University Town (UT)**<br>• **Small Southeastern College Town**<br>❖ **1 year** | • LGBTQ Services Center<br>• Fraternity<br>• Community Pride | • Women for Community Change<br>• University Feminism |
| **Metro City (MC)**<br>• **Large metropolitan area in the Northeast**<br>❖ **6 months** | • Together with LGBTQ Friends<br>• Radical AIDS Activism<br>• Metro City Pride | • Masculinity Talks<br>• Male Profeminists United<br>• Feminist Circle |

I supplemented this with 106 in-depth qualitative interviews with activists and allies—51 in University Town and 55 in Metro City. These interviews ran between 2 and 2.5 hours in

length, though a few were longer or shorter. They focused on respondents' experiences with allies (or as allies) in social movements, but also covered broader questions about how organizations managed internal conflicts over identity and inter-organizational coalitions. Prior to these interviews, respondents were given a brief demographic survey designed to capture their social identities. All but six of my respondents had some degree of involvement in (or affinity with) both movements, though most were more intensely involved with one. Overall, my respondents possessed notable social advantages—all but 27 of my respondents were white and all but 11 had at least a four-year college degree (or had every expectation of obtaining one soon). That said, the intersectional nature of inequality ensured that most of them were disadvantaged on some dimension (most commonly gender or sexual identity), making it possible to see how each respondent both negotiated the privilege of others and managed their own privileges.

To analyze how privilege operates in the organizations I studied, I followed Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's suggestions for writing ethnographic field notes (2011), taking detailed notes on the meetings or events I attended and writing them up into a coherent narrative. I then analyzed these field notes and transcriptions of my interviews, intermittently writing theoretical memos about allyship and privilege. The goal was to allow my theory of privilege negotiation to emerge from the data in the tradition of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998) rather than pre-emptively imposing my own interpretations on the data. More details on the dynamics of my field sites, the demographics of my interviews, and the process of my data, as well as full copies of my pre-interview demographic survey and semi-structured interview schedule analysis can be found in Appendix A and B.

### *A Brief Outline of the Dissertation*

This dissertation is separated into two parts. Part I illustrates the politics of allyship within identity-based LGBTQ activism. In Chapter 1, "Here But Not Queer," I show how activists draw a firm boundary against straight and cisgender allies, even as they deeply desire them as collaborators. I begin by demonstrating the centrality of essentialism to LGBTQ activists in my sites, showing how this led straight people and cisgender folks to be understood as outsiders whose *ally credentials* could be vetted by LGBTQ insiders. In Chapter 2, "Invisibility, Identity Fragmentation, and the Complication of LGBTQ Allyship," I explore the limitations of this ally/LGBTQ-insider/outsider dichotomy, illustrating how the invisibility of sexual identity could bestow *transversal privilege* on straight allies (i.e., letting them distance and immerse themselves in LGBTQ spaces through strategies like *ally disclosure*, *rainbow passing*, or *performative queerness*), highlighting how attempts at *ally vetting* could lead to the erasure of bisexual and transgender community members, and examining how ally rhetoric collapsed when the activist group's mission transcended single-issue LGBTQ politics.

In Part II, I explore feminism as a post-identity movement, exploring how many young feminists rejected *woman-centered feminism* in favor of a *gender-blind* or *male-focused feminism*. In Chapter 3, "Intersectionality Talk and Post-Identity Feminism," I show how 'woman-centered feminism' generates intersectionality conflicts that undermine activism and examine how young gender-blind and male-focused feminists use *intersectionality talk* to advocate for more inclusive movement spaces—a strategy that often led to a de-gendered vetting of *feminist credentials*. In Chapter 4, "Can (and Should) Everybody Be a Feminist?," I unpack the limits and constraints of this post-identity politics, highlighting how advancing a *gender-blind feminism* that is bolstered by prolific intersectionality talk was not a panacea for building

inclusive movements nor a costless way to bring men into feminism, but rather led to a ***power-blind feminism*** where male domination and ***intersectionality failures*** still persist. Together these chapters illustrate that relying on identity-based and post-identity models of mobilizations comes with distinct tradeoffs for social movements, having implications for their movement stability and success. I end with some reflections on the future of identity and ally politics within LGBTQ activism and feminism, as well as thoughts on the limitations of the study and pathways for future research in the field.

### *Conclusion*

This project illustrates the importance of taking allyship seriously as an object of study. Not only does it add much needed nuance to the social movement literature in general and scholarly conversations about the politics of allyship in LGBTQ activism and feminism more specifically, it has tangible benefits for activists on the ground. The Internet blogosphere is full of helpful hints on how to be a good ally who 'checks their privilege' (Charles 2015; Truong 2015; Utt 2013; Utt 2014) when working with marginalized groups, such women (e.g., Clifton 2015; Murphy 2013; Smith 2014b), LGBTQ individuals (e.g., Mogilevsky 2015; Tannehill 2014), or people of color (e.g., Walker 2015; Watanabe 2015). There are also numerous online tips for dealing with 'problematic' allies (e.g., Al-Sibai 2015), and critiques of shallow or uncritical allyship (e.g., Bolger 2014; McKenzie 2013; McKenzie 2015; Smith 2014a). The sheer proliferation of this term suggests it is speaking to powerful concerns for contemporary activists. By deconstructing the concept of allyship and exploring how it varies over time, across movements, and within different kinds of organizations, my research will enable scholars and

activists to better grasp the work the ally/insider binary is doing and the implications these ally

politics have for the ultimate success of mobilization.

## PART I: NAVIGATING STRAIGHT ALLYSHIP WITHIN LGBTQ ACTIVISM

The winter chill blew through Charity's room as attendees of the LGBTQ Services Center's biweekly Community Brunch on the Quad intermittently ducked inside, following Charity's written instructions to "Please Come Inside for Brunch—It's Cold!'" A small group of University Town undergraduates huddled around table with pastries and coffee, including Charity, Marcel, Serena, and Courtney—four interns at the LGBTQ Services Center. Courtney, the only straight ally in the room, asked the LGBTQ-identified interns for advice, saying, "I have a terrible question. I'm writing a research paper…and I was wondering, is 'cisgender' one word?" Marcel replied, "Yes" with Charity adding, "You can also just say cis." Courtney continued, "Do you call them a cis man or woman—or is it male and female?" Serena said, "It should be man or woman. You're talking about gender." Charity disagreed, saying, "Someone could identify as male or female." After some discussion, Courtney clarified, "I'm using Butler in the paper. I'm writing about what contemporary feminism means to people. I enjoy the class, but hate that everyone there thinks about things as so binary…I just always want to say that there is more than just 'man and woman' and that what we come to think of as male and female is complicated. I keep trying to say things like 'person who identifies as a male.'" As Courtney, a straight ally, turned to LGBTQ community members for insider knowledge about a community she was not a part of, she placed herself in the role of student, creating a hierarchy that cast her LGBTQ friends as the 'authorities' on transgender politics.

Later in the afternoon, however, the complexities of queer experience and the complications of allyship within the LGBTQ community became more apparent. Long after Marcel, Courtney, and Serena had left for class, the host Charity let her guard down with her friend, Kylie, exposing how tentative her position as a LGBTQ insider truly was. Despite joking earlier with Serena that she "experienced no discrimination" as a white cis woman and that "no one was surprised" when she 'came out,' Charity told Kylie that she struggled a fair amount with her identity and was continuing to work through it. She confessed, "In second year, I began to feel an attraction to a friend, and I was afraid if I came out, she would know. In many ways that made me act more straight and that wasn't good." She shrugged, "Who cares that I can't tell my best friend, and my family doesn't know I'm gay—I'll be an intern for the LGBTQ Center! I'll come out to everyone at Uni." Kylie said, "I thought—because you were kind of ambiguous—that you might not be. I was like 'How nice that people who aren't LGBTQ care about the community!'" Charity admits, "I wasn't ready. And I feel like saying I'm lesbian or a gay woman isn't really understating the complexities of my identity. I'm also kind of asexual because I don't like people.…I was like 'Stop bullshitting around, Charity, do it!' I was really mean to myself. It wasn't really good self-care...I want people to know I struggled...What if someone who is struggling…thinks "Why is this so hard for me?"…but I hate that I literally wasted a year of my life thinking about it…I don't regret it…I mean, I would have rather been doing other things…" Still, she brightened, masking that ambivalence with bravado—"Again, who was surprised? Lezbehonest!" Both girls laughed and moved on to more cheerful topics.

Despite the seemingly non-political setting in which they occurred, these brief

conversations over coffee and pastries illuminate several important dimensions of the politics of

allyship in identity-based movements like LGBTQ activism. As a woman who weathered heteronormativity and spent years in the 'closet' before 'coming out' as queer and becoming deeply involved with the LGBTQ community, Charity was in many ways a quintessential LGBTQ insider. It is thus perhaps unsurprising that that straight-identified Courtney would treat her as an authority on LGBTQ issues and turn to her for information on community rhetoric. Courtney's deference to Charity, despite their similar positions as LGBTQ Services interns, reflected the limits of ally involvement in identity-based movements. No matter how much time Courtney devoted to the Center or how many classes she took on LGBTQ issues, she had not lived life as a queer person. As long as the movement mobilized around essentialized understandings of sexual identity, she could not attain true insider status; she could be a dedicated supporter, but it was not *her* movement.

However, these snapshots of queer life also highlighted contradictions and complications in the allyship politics of the contemporary LGBTQ rights movement. Charity's life experiences and 'coming out' story expose the limitations of the insider/ally binary. First, although she had been oppressed as a queer woman, Charity experienced herself as privileged in other ways. As a white, cisgender woman, she felt she was an ally to others as often as they were allied to her. Second, the frequently invisible quality of her sexuality meant she herself had often been read as an ally by others and received all the privileges and disadvantages that came along with that reading. Finally, the conglomeration of multiple identities that make up the LGBTQ umbrella ensured that Charity herself could not claim a complete insider status; when Courtney asked cisgender community members like Charity for advice on how to best talk about trans people, she was effectively soliciting help from a more proximal ally (i.e., an ally within the community) rather than someone who could speak to the trans experience.

These anecdotes thus expose a central tension in LGBTQ activism, showing how the pressure to establish a rigid ally/insider boundary conflicts with the complex realities of mobilization on the ground. Chapter 1 examines how an emphasis on essentialist identity politics that treat sexual identity as innate and unmalleable have bolstered the construct of the 'ally,' fueling a LGBTQ/straight binary that centers queerness and keeps heterosexuals on the margins of the movement—whether their presence is ultimately critiqued or celebrated. Chapter 2 then addresses the limitations of this binary understanding of allyship, showing how the fragmentation of queer identity politics under the ever-expanding umbrella of LGBTQ+ activism and multiple-identity mobilization can make it difficult to determine who has 'privilege' in social activism.

# CHAPTER 1: HERE BUT NOT QUEER

Essentialist politics that treat sexual identity as fixed and unmalleable construct a firm boundary between straight and cisgender allies and the LGBTQ community: I argue that this rigid boundary centers LGBTQ activists within the movement. Though individual LGBTQ people may set different *ally thresholds* for potential supporters (i.e., ideal levels of participation) and engage in *vetting battles* over contentious allies, their authority to vet the ally credentials of straight supporters by evaluating the quality and desirability of that support is often unquestioned. As such, I show how LGBTQ activists engage in *ally-educating* and *ally-bridging initiatives*, teaching straight outsiders how to be better supporters and coexist with the LGBTQ community. I begin by outlining the deep impact essentialist rhetoric has on LGBTQ activists and allies before discussing the dynamics of these vetting processes.

## *'Born This Way' Politics and Essentializing Sexual Identity*

LGBTQ and straight respondents in my field sites were often heavily invested in narratives that treated sexual identity as an inviolable, immutable aspect of a person. This essentialist understanding of identity treated LGBTQ people as 'always already' (Foucault 1978) queer—even before the moment they 'came out.' For LGBTQ people in this study, this often meant framing their life histories as part of a natural trajectory towards their current, fully actualized queer identity. For example, Jim, a Community Pride board member, when asked about his coming out story, replied, "That's an interesting question…I think there's two answers to that story. Because there's the like 'understanding story,' and then there's the retrospective, 'looking back story.' And I think the understanding story happened in college…But knowing what I know now, I knew in like kindergarten… [I] just never had the language…to understand

that I was different until leaving and then looking back. I was in love with this boy… it's funny that the boy that I was obsessed with in elementary school actually is also gay. I think we picked each other out." With this narrative Jim queered his entire life narrative, extending it beyond his college 'coming out' to his early childhood so that no part of his life could ever be read as 'straight'—even his childhood affections become predictive of his future gay identity.

These kinds of coming out narratives were common in my interviews and ethnographic observations, and when their accuracy and simplicity were questioned, resistance was often swift. For example, at a Uni LGBTQ Services Center event, an audience member asked the all-LGBTQ panel, "How can we be allies? What would you say to people who think it's a choice?" A young lesbian, Aurelia, firmly responded, "Anyone who thinks this is a choice is insane! Why would I choose to pay this much money and risk this much discrimination?...I feel like 'choice' is representative of a rejection of science. Not just this, but climate science and vaccines. Like people will read one Facebook post on vaccines thanks to Jenny McCarthy, and that's enough for them. All the science points to us being born this way! Every psychological and medical organization has signed off." Other respondents also embraced essentialism; for example, Martha, a young lesbian on the panel, said "I could say I was straight and live my life as though I was straight. But if I liked girls still would I really be straight? I don't know."

In a context where LGBTQ sexuality was understood as thoroughly fixed and biological—and where denying this 'truth' was as seen as equivalent to rejecting climate change—boundaries between LGBTQ insiders and straight outsiders became almost impossible to transverse. Becoming a straight ally to an LGBTQ movement thus involved embracing the essential and uncontestable quality of LGBTQ identity and recognizing one's place as an outsider-supporter of the LGBTQ community. This implicit prerequisite was often made explicit

in *ally educating* and *ally bridging initiatives*—the former involving top-down dissemination of information from insiders to allies, and the latter covering more collaborative efforts that attempted to bring new allies into the movement.

For example, essentialism was deeply embedded within *ally educating initiatives* like the Safe Space Trainings put on by Martin, the head of the UT LGBTQ Services Center. These programs were designed to provide information about LGBTQ identities and experiences to those who wanted to learn more about the community. In these trainings, after introducing audience members to key terms that they should be familiar with, Martin had a section on 'Coming Out.' Every training, he (or an intern like Marcel), asked, "What does it mean to come out?" This was a question that clearly had a correct answer that the well-socialized 'ally' should be prepared to produce. In one training, when Marcel asked this question, an attendee replied, "It means you are comfortable enough in your own sexuality that you can tell other people." Marcel tried to get the audience to push this further, asking, "Does anyone want to broaden that definition?" Marcel was more satisfied when woman in the audience replied, "It's about sharing your natural self with other people." When an attendee at another training similarly answered, "So they can share their true self," Martin exclaimed, "Spot On!" in response. Generating these kinds of essentialist answers from straight attendees seemed to be one of the central goals of this part of training.

The importance of recognizing the fixed and natural quality of LGBTQ identity for straight allyship also informed how veteran straight allies reached out to more nascent allies in *ally bridging* organizations, such as Together with LGBTQ Friends (TLF), which was a support group where LGBTQ and ally 'old-timers' guided 'newcomers' struggling with how to best help LGBTQ folks in their lives. A primary goal for this group was to get these 'newcomers' to

unconditionally support and better understand the lives of their LGBTQ loved ones. Essentialist

narratives were a common tool for cultivating this acceptance. For example, Marcella, a straight

woman facilitator of the LGB-focused subgroup of the organization, encouraged both LGBTQ

members and ally 'old-timers' to tell the group "when you knew" you or your loved one was

gay:

> Emmanuel responded, "I always knew I was different, even though my Mom had to tell me she knew I was gay. It was bad then. It's more acceptable now… [but] I knew since about 7th grade." Delores, a Black woman with an adult lesbian daughter, insisted, "I knew my daughter was at 13, but I gave the child time to figure that out. I always let her know also that she was part of a safe space." Jason, a white gay male facilitator agreed, saying, "I knew there was something different about me by the time I was in my early teens…I didn't want to be…but by 20 I had to accept that I was gay. There was nothing I could do about it, so I came out." Last was a white gay man named Ray, who said, "To answer your question previously, I've probably known since I was 8 or 9…I never told the kids at school, but I knew something was different…[it] wasn't until I was 20 when I realized I wasn't going to Hell… that I could live just as rich and full a life. Since then, I've spent a lot of time being a gay advocate...I'm constantly amazed. I went to my high school reunion gather around me, and I can tell they are envious. They want to live the life I do… I have [straight] friends who are embracing that straight life and doing things, but they wouldn't be able to handle being gay."

Any beginner ally entering this space hence would hear a hegemonic narrative of 'coming out'

that is exceedingly common amongst more class advantaged segments of the LGBTQ

community (e.g., Meyer 2017a; 2017b)— a common triumphant story of self-acceptance in the

face of adversity wherein LGBTQ people discover and embrace their true sexual orientation

before going on to live fulfilling and even enviable lives. Straight people, like Ray's friends,

might yearn to claim such a story for their own as an escape from their mundane lives, but it was

one that they could never truly embody because of the essentialized way identity was understood

in this space.

The normative quality of this narrative was even more apparent in TLF's trans-focused

support group. Consider the group's reaction to Lillian, a middle-aged white woman who was

clearly in the very early stages of dealing with her adult child's transition, frequently fumbling with pronouns and using their past name to refer to them. At one point in the meeting, she took out a small photo of a five-year-old with bright blue eyes and blonde curly hair, sending it around the group and saying, "He was a remarkable child. He just lit up whatever room he was in. He's grown up now and…a couple months ago I received a call from him—them. And he said that he had made the decision that—they—wanted to transition into a woman. I had no idea. There was no warning…He—they—called me and asked me to have lunch…and I was met by this woman. And they were wearing eyeliner and foundation, a red dress and black stockings with like a red Prada bag. And it went fine…But Miles has ADHD, and I wonder if that has something to do with it. If maybe it's just a phase." Len, a long-time member, interjected, "Believe me. It's not a phase." Barb, another veteran member, agreed, "It's definitely not a phase. I asked my daughter that a lot, and she just got to the point where she yelled at me, 'Mom! It's not a phase!'" Lillian assures us, "Oh, I didn't say that to [*meaningful pause*] 'them'…I'm here to learn." While the group seemed willing to tolerate misgendering and misnaming in an **ally-bridging** space like TLF where cisgender allies came to learn how to be better supporters, the notion that a trans identity might not be 'valid' was beyond the pale of acceptable discourse and was immediately challenged in a way other ally missteps seldom were.

These essentialist narratives created spaces that centered queerness and pushed straight allies out from under the LGBTQ umbrella. The centrality of queerness within these LGBTQ social justice spaces was often so extensive that the very straightness of self-proclaimed allies who occupied them were playfully (and sometimes seriously) questioned. This sort of humor was particularly common at Pride events. For example, there was a sketch by a Latina lesbian comic at the Metro City Pride Rally that jokingly questioned the sexuality of its attendees:

Tina started by cheering "Happy LGBTQ [*pause*] I, D, W? I don't know, you keep adding wordings, letters, and changing shit around." The crowd chortled lightly. She continued, "Basically E-V-E-R-Y-B-O-D-Y…and Allies!" There were loud hoots from the crowd at this. She called out, "Straight girls—where are the straight girls? Straight people? The allies?" More cheers rang out, and several people raised their hands. She pointed at someone skeptically in the crowd, "Queen, please…as-fucking-if!" Laughter echoed through the crowd. She said again, "Where are the straights?!? A cluster of long haired, white women in front of me waved pink, silver-streamer accessorized shakers from T-Mobile and cheer, "Whoo!" She flirted, "I'll see you after the show. I'm a straight girl magnet. [*Points*] Do you have kids? Even better." She asked "Where are the heteroflexibles…Show yourselves!!! You know how the heteroflexibles are. You're gonna fuck us, and then go back to men. What?!? Hetero-fucking-flex-ibles" She added, "But I love those great people that are like [*affecting a Valley girl accent and flipping her non-existent hair tresses*] "I'll sleep with a girl like twice." She continued in her normal voice, "No, it doesn't make you gay if you sleep with a girl twice…but we're going on three years here, babe. I would say you're part of the family. I would say you're a little spectrum-y."

This comedy sketch played at queering the boundary between LGBTQ and straight people before ultimately re-affirming it. The comic began by drawing a firm line between the proliferating identities under the LGBTQ umbrella and straight-identified attendees. She then hints that this line might be possible to transverse—that people self-identifying as allies might, at times in their lives, experiment with queer sexuality—but she ultimately walked back this potentially radical point by definitively establishing herself as the lesbian arbiter of who really 'counts' as 'family' and who was going 'back to men' at the end of the day.

The perception that many LGBTQ folks use the label 'ally' as a stepping stone towards adopting a queer identity themselves made this sort of playful arbitration of insiders and outsiders a somewhat common occurrence in LGBTQ spaces. For example, Martin, the director of LGBTQ Services at Uni, encouraged me at one point to sit with him at orientation, saying, "I have allies come to the table...I also have 'allies' [*finger quotes*]. You know, people who are obviously gay but not out—even though we shouldn't make those calls. But they come up and [*affects lisp*] 'Do you accept allies?' 'Yes, we do, you beautiful future queen!' [*nudging my arm*

*playfully*] We can only say that in community." The firm boundary between queer and straight couple with the minimal visibility of sexual identity meant that sheer proximity to LGBTQ-oriented events and services could call one's heterosexuality into question.

When allies tried to claim an insider status within LGBTQ activism without relinquishing their straight identity, reactions could be severe. These adverse reactions came across most strongly in my interviews with LGBTQ activists when I asked them to read and respond to an article (Hsieh 2015) that critiqued a QSA group for being too harsh on a straight ally who asked, "In gay dating, who is the girl?" The article claimed we needed to be better about including straight allies in activism because the 'A' in LGBTQIA+ stands for 'ally'—a point which was contentious even amongst respondents sympathetic to his argument. Though many embraced the author's former statement about being kind to allies as they learn, respondents like Avery, a non-binary officer in the Uni LGBTQ Fraternity, were upset about how his latter pronouncement erased asexuals while co-opting queer identity and space:

> The concept of scaring away our straight allies pisses me off a little bit because… that's acting like the allies are hefting an equal amount of the work we're doing, which isn't always necessarily true…If you're insisting you need to be a part of the alphabet soup, it's like you're trying to claim space that isn't yours…It's almost like derailing…I don't think it's [a] community failure to call him out …You're coddling a straight dude who has asked a stupid question at a queer meeting that is primarily about queer dating…The roundabout logic people will use to defend straight dudes, is very like…'Okay. I actually do not have any point of reference where I can understand remotely where you're coming from, but 'kay.'

For Avery, to imply an ally was inside the movement was to de-center and ignore the marginalization of queer people. To do so as an ally would, for Avery, be an act of domination worthy of censure.

These events, interactions, and interview responses cumulatively affirm the ultimate outsider status of allies in the organizations I observed. Self-identified allies could only be inside

these movement spaces when they were understood as someone who had not yet 'discovered' their true queerness. Otherwise, they were classified as ancillary supporters of the community. As outside supporters, their intentions and actions were subject to vetting by the movement's true stakeholders—LGBTQ people—through both the sanctioning and celebration of ally actions.

### *Ally Credentialism & the Politics of 'Vetting' Straight Allies*

The prominence of essentialist identity politics shaped how LGBTQ activists engage with straight allies in these social justice spaces. When LGBTQ people were centered and insider status was determined by identity, the ally was pushed into the role of external supporter within the movement. As a supporter, an ally was often limited in how they could appropriately interact with LGBTQ causes, and LGBTQ people were typically the final arbiters of those guidelines. Though LGBTQ community members often disagreed in practice about the best way for straight allies to engage with the community (i.e., over the extent of their involvement, the appropriateness of their leadership, and their right to claim an ally identity for themselves), they were primarily the ones who were drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders and policing ally behavior on the ground.

This line between insider and outsider was often starkest when events were specifically targeted towards empowering LGBTQ folks. For example, one day Serena, the President of the otherwise ally-inclusive Uni LGBTQ Fraternity, announced that they were planning a panel for the Day of Silence "since our voices were silenced in high school." Cat, a bisexual member, immediately asked, "Is this LGBTQ-specific or can allies come?" Serena responded, "My thought is that anyone can come and show their support, but it should be a place for LGBTQ

people to speak." Cat clearly thought this suggestion sensible, saying, "That's what I thought."

The appropriateness of straight presence in LGBTQ-oriented spaces thus could not be taken for granted, and instead was contingent on attaining approval from LGBTQ gatekeepers.

Even when the presence of allies in LGBTQ spaces was desired or viewed as unobjectionable, they were constantly being 'vetted' by insiders through a process I call *ally credentialism*. This meant the good intentions of allies were not always taken for granted, but rather allies were evaluated on a case-by-case basis by LGBTQ insiders who weighed the sincerity of allies' intent with the quality of their support. Ally experiences with these vetting processes were not identical; some allies faced heavier vetting than others. For example, though allies with high social status and elevated visibility within organizations frequently brought tangible benefits to LGBTQ communities and their events, these allies also faced the highest degree of scrutiny and the harshest condemnation when they made mistakes. Three subtypes of this kind of ally were particularly likely to have their credentials checked: *celebrity allies*, *corporate supporters*, and *out-of-sync allies*.

*Celebrity Allies and Battles Over Credentials*

Perhaps the most visible and high status of these allies was the *celebrity ally*, a category including actors, politicians, and musical performers willing to publically lend their support to the movement. The presence of such allies was sometimes a moment of validation for LGBTQ people. The willingness of well-known politicians to walk in the Metro City Pride March and popular artists to perform at events throughout the week were often brought up as LGBTQ people's favorite parts of Pride. For example, these celebrity allies were on the minds of community members when they came together a couple weeks after Pride in the MC Pride

Retrospective to bond over the week's best moments. At this meeting, Shiane, a member of the women's dance leadership team, noted one of her favorite parts of the week was seeing their straight-identified celebrity headliner connect with the audience. "I went to get our headliner in my golf cart, and she was wearing this jacket that said, 'Pussy Power.' It was like the most hilarious thing…She was giving it everything! Like 'Yes…Work it! The girls loved the show…This was the first time we had someone who was big…I feel energized. All the ladies…getting things they don't get at all the other events for sure," Shiane said. She thus saw this celebrity headliner as authentic in her support and appreciated how she offered a degree of legitimacy to queer women, who were often underserved by Pride events.

However, when celebrities' credentials did not pass the vetting process, they swiftly found themselves the objects of disdain. Straight celebrities at Pride events and other LGBTQ community gathering were often accused of being inauthentic and exploitative—of using LGBTQ events to engage in 'performative progressiveness' (Brodyn & Ghaziani 2018) as a means of promoting their own brand. These tensions came to a head, for example, when MC Pride members evaluated how Tim Johnson, a local government official, behaved during the March:

> Blaise shook his head, noting "Sam [the co-chair] was so over him." Kipper scoffed, "Everyone was…He wanted to march when he wanted to march." Blaise continued, "She was like 'Should we stop?...No…we already are going'" Finn shrugged, "Well, he's always been an asshole." Kipper sharply mocked, "Maybe that's why he's divorced…Sorry! Was that mean?" Finn continued more seriously, "It goes way back…I'll never forget when he was running for [office years ago] and [he told constituents not to vote for] 'the homo' [he was running against]."

Johnson's questionable history on LGBTQ sensitivity coupled with his contemporary contrariness made MC Pride members reluctant to see him as an ally. The sense was that these sort of 'allies' were not true supporters. Instead, they were trying cash in on increasingly

liberalized attitudes towards LGBTQ sexuality (Baunach 2014), using their attendance to bolster

their own image rather than help the community. As LGBTQ enclaves and festivals have

increasingly been subsidized by the state (Kanai 2014; Rushbrook 2002), such conflicts over the

opportunism of political celebrities will likely increase.

This kind of self-promotion was particularly objectionable when it disrupted actions and

ceremonies meant to commemorate the victims of anti-LGBTQ violence or speak to queer

trauma. For example, the presence of straight celebrity allies was highly contentious at actions

and ceremonies meant to honor the loss of life at the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, where

49 queer individuals, mostly people of color, lost their lives in the deadliest mass shooting to

date (Ellis et al. 2016). At a Radical AIDS Activism (RAA) meeting, Conroy, one of the general

members, complained about the actions of allies at a Pulse-related protest march, saying, "A

bunch of straight men got up and talked. It took everything I had not to boo them. If there is one

time for straight men not to speak…" Following this meeting, a contingent of RAA members

walked to a vigil for the survivors held outside a prominent Metro City gay bar where these

tensions exploded in real time:

> As the sun sank lower in the sky, the vigil moderator said to a growing and increasingly
> restless audience, "Our last speaker has been a great supporter of our community. To give
> you an idea, he was instrumental in establishing a gender equity coalition that has stood
> for the rights of all individuals whatever their gender identities to use the restrooms they
> are comfortable with. He made that a city-wide policy. He has taken great strides to
> advance progressive politics not only in this city, but in this state…Please welcome,
> Mayor Jordan Scioto!" As Scioto started to speak, he was met with heckles, including a
> woman shouting, "Since when have you been radical, Jordan?!?" The crowd continued to
> grow restless after he ceded the stage to his wife. By the time the police commissioner
> rose to speak, the disgruntled murmuring of the crowd had rendered the speakers almost
> unintelligible. At one point, a white male with a megaphone loudly chanted, "Say their
> names!" Others in the crowd echoed this chant, which grew louder and louder before it
> was replaced by an angrier wave of chanting with the words "No more shit!" rippling
> through the crowd. The heckling only died down when the names of the fallen were read,
> and the hecklers were shushed by other participants, the atmosphere settling into a more
> somber, mournful tone.

Though the organizers at this vigil attempted to highlight the Mayor and Police Commissioner's 'ally credentials,' they were ultimately rejected by a crowd that was still reeling from the tragedy of the Pulse shooting and uninterested in hearing from those deemed outsiders.

Politicians and state officials were not the only allies vetted and found wanting at this specific vigil—the presence of a popular straight-identified singer, Tom Hannon, was also highly contentious. Rod, a Latinx member of MC Pride, mentioned him explicitly as a bad ally in his interview because of his "gay baiting." Rod mocked the singer's allusions to sexual fluidity, saying about Hannon, "But you haven't really come out as gay. It feels like you're just using it so you can make some money…you shouldn't be praised just because…you're an ally…You're just there…you're just there to help like everybody else." The presence of a contentious figure like Hannon led gay men like Roland, another MC Pride member, to accuse the singer of "co-opting and muddying the point." River, a white gay male volunteer at a nearby Metro City Pride Center was particularly firm in his condemnation:

> "Why?" Is my question. Why did he have a voice in that? …You need to know when to step back as an ally, and give the podium to someone else. Someone who is, like, part of the community, and the situation, you know?... I just don't understand why. An ally was very out-of-place there… [I want to see] people who are queer. People who are like queer people of color…because there has not been a lot of emphasis put on the fact that [it was] their Latina/Latino night at the club, so like…A lot of the people who died [were] LGBTQ people of color…that community was even being more affected than the general LGBTQ community. So put those people up there…Put trans identities up there. Put literally anyone in the community, except the ally. I don't care if it's someone off the street who is just, like, gay.

For these men, the presence of a self-serving straight ally at an event designed to commemorate the deaths of multiply marginalized members of the community was offensive, taking up space that should have been allotted to people closer to the tragedy.

This negative take was common, but not universal. Other gay men in my Metro City field sites were more sympathetic. Enrique, a Black gay man who helped run one of the Pride dance parties admitted that he "question[ed] all the time [Hannon's] pure intentions" and wondered whether the singer was "exploiting the gay thing because he knows…when it comes to purchasing and consuming, gay men are some of the…biggest spenders."  At the same time, he said, "I feel sometimes…we over-question people…at times we don't know the true sincerity of someone's genuineness to really care about the cause and the situation. And sometimes we can just misconstrue it. Hannon could…really, really care about our causes and our self." Clint, another MC Pride member, was even firmer in his defense of Tom Hannon's right to be present at the vigil:

> I'm a big supporter of…straight allies doing something a little more…I find it…so odd that people immediately jump on the whole, "Oh, they're just doing it for money." Or "Oh, they're just doing it for the attention or the popularity, or whatever"…When they let Tom Hannon get on the stage, and some people booed him for being there—And then they threw all these postings on social media of like, "Why is he here? What is he doing? He doesn't understand the plight of the community, and he shouldn't be allowed to speak at such an event that's a tribute to tragedy and all the stuff." And it was like, "Are you kidding?"…They threw up the terms gay-baiting and stuff because he takes a shirt off at gay clubs. And yet here we are inviting him to more clubs because he took a shirt off at the other club. And here we are searching online for him with his shirt off because he went to a club…You can't have your cake and eat it too, and that's what this is [to me].

These debates over Tom Hannon's ally credentials and where it was appropriate for him to cultivate them reflected both the community's hope for ally attention and the swiftness with which that relationship could sour if an ally was understood as 'stepping out of line,' giving way to **vetting battles** wherein a celebrity ally's critics become pitted against their defenders. Though the exact **threshold of allyship** (i.e., the boundaries activists set between too much ally intervention and not enough) might shift and community members might disagree on whether a particular ally has stepped over it, these activists at least, did not seem to contest that it should be

LGBTQ insiders rather than straight allies drawing that line, which further bolstered the LGBTQ/straight-insider/outsider binary.

*Corporate Vetting and the Branding of Allyship*

Another common **vetting battle** involved the appropriateness of corporate allyship. Corporate branding of Pride was utterly inescapable in Metro City, logos plastered over every inch of both free and ticketed events. These logos produced a jarring effect at times, particularly at political events like the Rally. For example, the opening rally's sober tributes to the victims of the Pulse shooting, speeches about the importance of helping LGBTQ asylum seekers, and pleas to end police brutality against people of color co-existed uneasily with T-Mobile's glittery noisemakers and pink tote bags embossed with the pun-filled slogan, "CELEBRATE THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF PRIDE…MOBILIZE FOR EQUALITY." Furthermore, each event was staffed with volunteers who wore shirts with a hierarchical ranking of brands that financially subsidized Pride such as Hilton, T-Mobile, V8, Goldfish, and Walmart. Though volunteers were encouraged to personalize their Pride shirts by cutting the sleeves and baring their midriffs, they were regularly warned by organizers, "Just don't cut off the sponsors!"

These sponsors paid a hefty sum to participate in Pride. The presenting sponsor donated over $150,000[2] for the right to be centered in Pride branding, platinum sponsors paid over $60,000, and smaller sponsors donated more 'modest' sums in the ballpark of $10,000. It also cost these sponsors and other corporations a significant amount of money to purchase floats for the march (i.e., $3,000-8,000 depending on the float size). Their tables, which were so

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[2] Like the city demographics discussed in the Appendix…actual figures were approximated and intentionally non-specific to protect confidentiality.

ubiquitous at the festival and smaller events, were costly as well; a single booth could cost a small business over $1,000 at early-bird pricing, and that is without add-on features like a tent with tables and chairs (an extra $200) or a power/Wifi package (an extra $400). Such costs could be particularly punishing for non-profits and activist groups who wanted representation. Metro City Pride was aware of this challenge, setting lower fees for these groups. Unlike small business, who had to pay at least $500 to march, non-profits with operating costs below $1 million could march for free. However, if these groups wanted a vehicle or float, the cost could run between $400-800. Furthermore, booking an early-bird space at the Festival cost them around $500 (not including add-ons). This still high price tag meant there was a substantial cost for being visibly represented in Pride—one that many organizations likely were unable or unwilling to pay.

Pride could be costly to attend as well due to this corporatization. Though events like movie night, the rally, and the festival were free, the group had recently begun experimenting with VIP packages, including gift-bags and special privileges, such as premium seating along the March route, food and couch seating at the Movie Night, access to risers that gave a better view of the Rally stage, and access to a special tent with food from sponsors and shade for Festival-goers. These VIP packages, which started at around $40, created visible boundaries at free events between those with expendable income and those without. This hierarchy was even starker if one wanted to participate in the ticketed events that Metro City Pride put on. A single entry to an event like the celebrity-headlined End of Pride Dance could cost around $50—and it was significantly costlier if you wanted to purchase drink tickets for the event or special access to VIP areas with better views of dancers and performers. For example, a group could pay $1,000 for access to one of the cabanas at the dances—roped off elevated platforms with couches,

snacks, and beverages that gave purchasers a refuge from the crowded dance floors and a perfect view of the dancers. Prices were even more staggering at events like the Pride Disco, where there was an astounding gap between the almost $50 entry fee and the $400 VIP admission and $600 Premium Bottle Service Charge. Even if one were to avoid the big-ticket items, combining general entrance fees for multiple ticketed events could mean that heavily engaging with Pride cost hundreds of dollars.

The heavily commercialized quality of Pride was not uncontroversial. Bonnie, a gender-non-conforming queer activist in my Metro City sample, claimed she didn't enjoy attending because "Pride is particularly kind of corporate now… you go and…you get your…necklace…and your…whatever…you don't see one float or one handout that's not branded with something…I think it feels less about community…I think a lot of straight folks go to Pride, but as a spectacle rather than a community feeling." There was a sense amongst respondents like Bonnie that Metro City Pride had become more about privileged LGBTQ people consuming things rather than working for justice. This sentiment led some of my more social justice-oriented respondents to emulate student activists in other movements by divestment (Hirsch 1990; Soule 1997), refusing to buy into Pride and giving their patronage to alternate events during Pride week, such as the Metro City Dyke March—a non-permitted (and technically illegal) march where a mass of dyke-identified women and trans folks rejected the corporate trappings of Pride in favor of an organized political takeover of Metro City streets.

The Pride Board was well-aware of these critiques and alternative celebrations, but saw corporations as a necessary evil for putting on the kind of events that many members of the community wanted to enjoy. Finn, one of the City Pride board members, illustrated the complex dynamics of the issue nicely:

There's a lot of complaints about how many corporations…get premium placement, and 'why are we always in the back?'…I think that's becoming more of an issue…I think it's always been an issue, but just because the number of corporations that want to get involved right now…. I think it's just become more prominent…whether it's Walmart, or whether… it's Coca-Cola…Jet Blue ... I mean, without the corporations, quite honestly, we wouldn't be able to put on Pride as we do. And trying to get people to understand how expensive it is…maybe that's part of our problem. We need to get that out there.

For Finn, these corporations were just the cost of doing business. For others, corporations were viewed as honored benefactors and true supporters of the cause. For example, Becca, a straight ally, who was one of the march's organizers, defended their centrality during our interview:

When you look at what's going on in North Carolina [with the trans restroom bill], I think that a lot of the statements being made by PayPal and Target and NPR and Deutsche bank…like…"We're gonna put our money where our mouth is. And if the state won't listen on a human rights platform …they'll listen when we start pulling dollars out"… And I think it's smart because…it's …probably the biggest thing big companies can do, right? The biggest criticism I get for Pride…especially with respect to the march, is "Oh, it's been corporatized. And you have all these brands and all these corporations and…all these businesses that have taken over our march." And I'm like "You know that all these companies pay money…to participate?" That's what they can do to show their support. They're not…encroaching on the cause…they're supporting it…Without their ad dollars…we would have no march. Because they pay for all the shit that non-profits can't pay for.

According to Becca, these corporations were not defanging the movement, but rather bettering community events and leveraging their financial weight in the service of political change.

However, the defensiveness of these justifications for corporate allies spoke volumes about how contentious, and how visible, their presence was in LGBTQ Pride groups. This scrutiny was highly apparent in how Community Pride in University Town managed their collaborations with local venders and ensured they were sufficiently committed to the cause. For example, when the Board was debating the possibility of undertaking a city-wide 'Safe Space' sticker program that identified LGBTQ-friendly businesses in the community, they were anxious about how to vet them effectively. Claudia, the President, noted, "The thing we are dealing with is 'how can you tell they are gay-friendly'? They can say they are, but how do you know?...Like,

[a business] can say 'I'm gay friendly, but I haven't been safe-space trained." The fear was that they would give a local business Pride's endorsement only to find they had engaged in questionable practices later. These anxieties informed their arrangements with vendors at Pride as well, even ones that were seemingly not profit-oriented. In one Pride planning meeting, Board member, Nicolette, asked why the largest local animal shelter didn't have a spot at the festival, Bette rolled her eyes, saying "They wanted us to cut them a big deal, but Animal Rescue comes in, and you are a much bigger organization…If Rescue can pay to be here, you can, too."

And there were reasons to be skeptical of vendor intentions. For example, a straight ally volunteer informed me of an instance of homophobia at the festival, saying the funnel cake car— "the one run by the Black guys"—was hostile to the festival because she heard them say in disgust, "Can you believe these people?" While her racial marking of these men was concerning and spoke to Community Pride's sometimes-difficult relationship with the Black Community in UT (which will be addressed in Chapter 2), the homophobic interaction she witnessed was exactly the sort of bad allyship the group worried pecuniary incentives might attract. The financial aspects of vendor-Pride relations thus added an economic dimension to ally dynamics that generated skepticism about ally authenticity, which persisted despite the tangible benefits of having these allies (and their money) at the events.


*Vetting the Out-of-Sync Ally*

Ally vetting was not only targeted at celebrity and corporate sponsors, but shaped interactions with less powerful allies who made themselves visible through being disconnected with the community and its needs; these ***out-of-sync allies*** could be highly visible allies who contributions were being showcased, more casual allies testing the waters of the movement, or

more hotly contested allies who insiders worried might be enemies within. *Showcased allies* were powerful and visible allies who had their credentials called into question when there seemed to be a mismatch or disconnect between the ally's expectations of their participation and the group's ideals. For example, one of the tensest ally-LGBTQ conflicts I observed in my field sites occurred at the women's dance during MC Pride Week when a straight comedian, Torrance, gave a long set that fell flat:

> Over the course of the evening, Torrance struggled to maintain the attention of the increasingly intoxicated attendees of the women's dance as she filled the gaps between DJs. However, her humor seemed disconnected with the event's audience, which was almost exclusively LGBTQ women. At one point, she joked about dating men, saying, "Are we dating anymore?...I don't know how to do it. I date for food…because I'm straight, and that's one of the benefits…Just go to a bar and wait for some dude to be like, 'Can I buy you a drink?'" After her first sketch, a volunteer named Helen turned to me saying, "I don't get this comedian." Another volunteer, Brandy said, "Right?...I thought it would get better, but it didn't…she's just telling stories…nobody cares." When she came out after a DJ set and said, "I'm gonna talk with you a bit more if that's alright," another white older woman in the audience behind us screamed "No!" loudly. When the three of us turned to look, she explained, "I really don't like the comedy."
>
> The crowd continued to become more disgruntled throughout the evening. Torrance was mostly indifferent to the discord and persisting in plugging her upcoming one-woman-show, saying, "If I can promote myself in here, it'd be weird so I'm gonna do that. I gotta one woman show…It's about coming out to my parents as a sex worker!" Someone yelled, "Get off the stage!" The audience became more and more combative as the evening moved on, resentment rising with alcohol levels and a growing impatience for the celebrity headliner act. The next time she returned to the stage, her entrance was accompanied by audible moaning and women saying, "Shut up!" and "We want the headliner!" As the headliner performance approached, the crowd got so restless that the comedian was almost completely drowned out by disgruntled calls of "Where's the music?" Eventually, Torrance became vexed by the lack of engagement, playing the dissatisfaction for laughs and joking, "You guys don't give a fuck anymore that's fine! I'm just killing time until your headliner gets up here. I'll take your attention if I can get it, but it doesn't matter...I've apparently lost you…Are we ready to go folks?" before ceding the stage to thunderous cheers for the headliner.

Torrance's sketch and the visceral responses from the queer women in the audience illustrated the friction of ally-community mismatch. There was a significant disconnect between what the community expected (i.e., a comedian who could humorously speak to queer women's

experiences) and what Torrance actually delivered (i.e., a raunchy comedy sketch featuring attempts to bond with queer women over "worthless" men that were undercut by the hetero-oriented quality of the routine and her attempts at self-promotion). As the comedian was vetted and found lacking, civility increasingly evaporated.

This sort of ally vetting was not only targeted at straight people like Torrance who were given a highly visible platform within queer events—it was also directed at more passive and less visible allies like the *casual allies* who attended Pride festivals. For example, much as Tina, the comedian from Metro Pride, jokingly flirted with straight women in the audience, queer performers and drag queens at University Town Community Pride events engaged in an almost ritualistic testing of straight men's comfort through playful flirtatious interactions. A lesbian musician who played at the Community Pride pre-party, for example, joked, "Where my straight people at?" When several people cheered, she noted, "I'm so glad we can all come together in harmony—gay and straight. Where my single ladies at?" A loud "Whoo!" echoed through the restaurant. Then she asked, "Where my straight single ladies at?" A more muted cheer prompted her to caution, "Watch out. Your men are not safe with the drag queens here." The drag queens seemed intent on maintaining this illusion. Gigi, a drag queen at the Pride pre-party, clearly went out of her way to test the boundaries of men who seemed distant and non-engaged with the proceedings. At one point of her set, she hit on a presumably straight guy, sitting down at his table and mouthing the lyrics of the sexually-charged song directly to him. He didn't flirt back or tip, as was customary, but he accepted the attention without grimacing or shying away.

A final type of disconnected ally that invited heightened scrutiny were members of conventionally homo-negative and heteronormative groups seeking to build bridges with the

community. Martin, the director of the LGBTQ Services center, for instance, was extremely

nervous about fraternities being required to receive Safe Space Training:

> Martin noted, "The Uni Fraternity consortium like came to me and was like, "We wanna
> make Safe Space Training [an event Greek members can attend to meet their 'education
> requirements'], and I was like [*waved hands frantically in front of body*]. No. I don't
> want to make it something people have to come to because some of those people, love ya,
> but I ain't gonna give ya a sticker!" Donna, a lesbian in a sorority, agreed, "Yeah, I was
> there when someone suggested [that], and I convinced them to do a panel instead [with a
> group that does Q&As with LGBTQ people called the Speaker's Consortium]. There's
> some people that I wouldn't want to have a safe space sticker." Martin nodded, "Yeah.
> It's not for everyone…do the Speaker's Consortium…Maybe in a year and a half you'll
> be ready."

Martin here advocated for more rigorous evaluations of the ally credentials before putting them

on track to receive formal ally recognition, suggesting that fraternity brothers might be ready to

listen to a panel of speakers, but were not friendly enough to provide a haven for queer folks on

campus.

This skepticism of Greek life was widespread, even amongst members of the LGBTQ

fraternity. Another example of this cynicism about the potential of fraternity members to be good

allies occurred during Uni's yearly 'Love Wins' Valentine's Day celebration, where community

members and their supporters wore red tee shirts and stood together in celebration of love in all

its forms. Frat member Kristin pondered the presence of a Greek-heavy singing group, joking,

"Did anyone notice those acapella dudes weren't wearing the red t-shirt…not cool." Amara, an

ally, agreed, "They stuck out like a sour thumb. Still, I thought it was really nice that the frat bros

were coming out to support the event. Then, I was like 'Oh, they are just here to sing …not that I

think they aren't supportive. I mean they wouldn't be here if they were uncomfortable. I'm sure

they're down with that [*joking tone*] 'homo life.'" This sort of playful skepticism of ally

intentions signified that these allies did not belong fully within the community because they were

from groups on campus that had historically been seen as unsafe for LGBTQ people.

Together, these instances of boundary-drawing against allies highlight the vetting process that straight people interested in LGBTQ activism frequently face. Although typically only the most visible and powerful of allies face such high degrees of scrutiny, even the most casual festival attendee could find the quality of their allyship tested through subtle jokes at their expense. Whether directed at a celebrity or corporate ally being publically named and shamed for their lackluster support or a straight audience member at a comedy sketch or drag show during Pride having their sexuality playfully questioned or mocked, these vetting experiences set allies apart from LGBTQ community members, identifying them as outsiders without the same investment in the space.

### *Incorporating the Vetted and Valued Ally*

The existence of rigorous ally credential vetting processes does not, in and of itself, mean that straight allies were undesired or unwanted in LGBTQ service and activist spaces, however. When allies' credentials had been thoroughly vetted by powerful insiders and found satisfactory, they often became constant and valued members of the groups I observed. Respondents frequently spoke warmly about vetted allies and saw ally involvement as positive for the movement overall. For example, Raoul, an Indian-American trans man, spoke fondly about straight allies at Uni queer events and wished they were more present, saying, "I'm just always little bit taken aback by [straight] people who are so impassioned to come out to these things…But at the same time, I'm like, 'I need you to be here. You are the person that I want you come here'…Those who actually do end up coming in the end are kind of special and kind of a minority." For Raoul, ally presence at LGBTQ events is unexpected, but not an imposition—at least not if the ally in question is passionate about LGBTQ issues.

Most of the groups I observed had a minority of such "special" straight people in positions of prominence. In the LGBTQ Services Center, Martin hired two straight ciswomen to be interns. The LGBTQ-oriented fraternity on campus had two heterosexual members as well— one of whom was so well-regarded by the community that she was invited to give a commencement speech at Uni's Queer Graduation ceremony. Community Pride in University Town also had three allies in lower-tier leadership positions—the Children's Area Organizer, the Talent Manager, and the Treasurer. Metro City Pride had a similar straight presence, hiring two straight allies to manage events and promoting straight volunteers to powerful positions like Talent Manager and Volunteer Coordinator. Straight-identified (and seronegative) activists rose to prominence in the Radical AIDS Activism (RAA) group, and straight facilitators were, of course, ubiquitous in the Together with LGBTQ Friends (TLF) support group.

The positive affect directed towards these unusually active allies was sometimes institutionalized in the form of awards. For example, the LGBTQ Services Center held an annual Ally Reception where they recognize the efforts of a particularly impactful straight advocate. The year I observed the group, Martin presented the award to a woman in the Human Resources Department who had helped advance the status of trans people on campus. He had these words to say about her allyship before bestowing her award:

> Allies are a vital source of support for the LGBTQ community, and the LGBTQ Services Center seeks to recognize individuals who go above and beyond to support the community…This award draws attention to the important role allies play…We were moved by the actions of Izzie to include hormone therapy and surgery for transgender people in the benefits package…With her actions, she has placed Uni as a supportive, progressive institution, and without her support, we would not be able to extend these benefits to transgender employees.

Community Pride had a similar award, which they gave to the clerk who married the first LGBTQ couple in the state. In addition to these ally-specific awards, allies were also sometimes

given general awards, such as when Damon, a MC Pride march organizer allotted two of his three section awards to allies, Becca (who was hired to manage the event) and Riley (who coordinated other volunteers). To receive such an award or hold a position of authority in an LGBTQ organization was in many ways to receive an actual credential of allyship—physical proof of one's dedication to LGBTQ causes and the ultimate symbol of successful vetting.

However, the fact that allies could access these positions and be recognized by such awards did not place them truly inside the movement. The very existence of ally-specific awards spoke to the extra-community position of straight allies, treating their contributions as exceptional rather than expected. Allies who received these honors sometimes felt awkward about this recognition, especially when they felt their contributions were not so exceptional. For example, when I congratulated Izzie, the winner of the Uni Services Center Ally Award, she seemed discomfited by the attention and uncertain of why she was being recognized, observing, "I honestly felt disingenuous receiving it…I told Martin that I didn't make this happen, and he was like 'No, you were instrumental'…I was like 'OK so long as we have full disclosure." Such moves simultaneously centered and distanced allies from the movement, thanking them to a degree that sometimes felt uncomfortable and signaling that their involvement was unusual rather than expected.

It is also noteworthy that the idea of giving these awards was itself sometimes contentious. Lane, a young queer activist, exclaimed during one of my volunteer shifts at the Center that "it's ridiculous that this school has an ally award!" Perhaps more contentious, however, were the existence of allies in leadership roles. Martin, as head of the LGBTQ Services Center, was highly critical of what he considered an ally-negative culture at Uni, saying to me in our preliminary meeting, "I think your study will be really good for us. Lots of our allies just

don't feel very accepted—and I'm not OK with that!" Martin then gave an example of this ally exclusion:

> I brought an ally to the Creating Change conference, and one of the [campus] queer leaders came up to her and said, "Why do you get to go to the conference? You're taking a position from one of us"…I wasn't there when it was said…[but] the [ally] student came to me upset saying, 'Should I not go?' and I'm like, "Oh, you're definitely going...if you weren't before, I'm definitely going to make sure you're going now."

Martin thus saw a place for allies in Uni queer spaces, and he was harshly critical of LGBTQ students who resisted their presence.

However, over the year of my research, even Martin himself rhetorically distanced allies from the community on numerous occasions. One day, he discouraged me from attending an orientation information fair because an ally from another campus branch had volunteered to manage the Center table at the Activities fair, scoffing, "A regular staff member will be there. She's from the Multicultural Services group, and she said she could staff it. Really, bitch? Really?" In this moment, Martin was annoyed that a straight community member felt that they could represent the LGBTQ Services Center to students. Thus, he seemed less sanguine about allies taking on front-facing roles in the organization than he was about allies in other positions of authority.

His attempts to welcome allies sometimes sent mixed messages as well, such as when he joked at Safe Space training, "You probably assumed I was gay when you heard I ran the Center. Shame on you! A straight person can run the Center. No, they couldn't! It's a very gay job…Just kidding. A straight person could totally run the Center." This statement, while clearly intended to be humorous, made the absurdity of straight supporters taking on central leadership roles explicit. While Martin claimed that a straight person could run the LGBTQ Services in theory, his tone made clear that the notion was somewhat laughable in practice. Jokes like this thus made

a token attempt at straight inclusion, but implicitly signaled through humor that LGBTQ people were still meant to be driving the movement.

Even when allies were widely agreed to be 'good' and their efforts were appreciated, they were sometimes 'othered' in subtle ways. In Community Pride, for example, LGBTQ Board members often directed an elevated level of scrutiny toward straight allies like Rhoda and Clara, who were both first time volunteers. Claudia and PJ extensively micromanaged the parts of Pride delegated to them, such as Rhoda's family area:

> "We should bank on putting PFLAG and the youth group there, as well as the origami people," Bette noted. Rhoda was visibly alarmed by these new groups being added to her area, exclaiming, "Nobody told me about this! I've been recruiting other businesses like Trader Joes, Kroger, Barnes and Noble, the cupcake shop, and the chocolate store." Bette was initially indignant, chastising, "Rhoda! How is that family?" She was pacified when Rhoda clarified that they will be doing family-centered activities, but worried still that the length will leave them exhausted. Rhoda assured her that she was planning them to work in shifts. Claudia lightly scolded Rhoda, "You need to let people know you are talking to businesses because of possible conflicts—like if someone asked Trader Joes, but not Wholefoods." This scrutiny did not let up as the festival planning developed further. At another point, PJ pressed her about a particularly problematic vendor in her area, saying sharply, "Look at me!" She points her finger to Rhoda and back to herself, before saying slowly, "Remember! This is a guy that does not want to file his permits!" Rhoda never pushed back against this scrutiny, accepting the guidance and moving forward.

Clara didn't escape this scrutiny either. At one such meeting Claudia and PJ were griping about the entertainment, and Clara was scapegoated in absentia. PJ noted, "She's never been to a Pride festival…She won't listen when we say this isn't how this works…we don't have time for 25-minute sound checks. The crowd will leave!" Although Clara was a "good volunteer" by Claudia's own admission, this was not enough to shield her from these attacks on her preparedness to run her section of Pride.

Since Rhoda and Clara's straightness was never directly remarked upon in these critiques apart from implicit references to 'not knowing how Pride works,' it is possible that this micromanagement might be more about their age and comparative inexperience than their sexual

identities. However, even older, more experienced allies, like Chandra, could find themselves

"othered" if they disagreed with central queer organizers. This happened at the Community Pride

festival when Claudia and Chandra clashed over the aesthetics of the merchandise tent:

> Claudia was appalled by the state of the tent. She looked at the boxes and bags underneath the table, asking "What are these?" Chandra said, "They're for volunteer shirts." Claudia requested we move them, saying "We don't wanna get them thrown away." She asked, "Can we get a table cloth?...This is a gay festival. It needs to look nice." She turned to me and said, "You put that in your notes!" When Chandra grumbled about all the last-minute changes, Claudia said to me again, "Put that in your notes: That the gay person wants it to look pretty, and the straight person doesn't care." Chandra snapped back, "I care! You just have to tell me what to do!" Claudia soothed her, reaching over the table to give her a hug, saying, "I'm just messing with you, Chandra!" Later, as we were pulling a pristine white table cloth over the table and pushing the offending boxes out of the way under Claudia's beaming supervision, Chandra groused, tongue-firmly-in-cheek, "It has to look pretty…our mistress commands it."

Though this interaction was humor-laden, underneath the surface was a clear claim of

ownership—this was a 'gay festival' and LGBTQ folks had the final say in how it should be run.

The active allies developed distinct strategies for negotiating the complexity of being

simultaneously centered and "othered" in queer organizations. Some were highly reflexive and

self-conscious about their leadership roles and were concerned that they may be overstepping

their boundaries. For example, Courtney, the Uni LGBTQ Services intern whose trip to the

Creating Change conference created resentment, was ambivalent about her centrality within

LGBTQ groups on campus:

> There were moments that I didn't know about, and these weren't people...I was friends with, but…apparently when I got my internship at the LGBTQ center, a couple of people went to Martin and complained, "Well, she's just an ally. A straight ally. Like why would you hire her? She shouldn't...She has no place here because she doesn't identify as queer"…We live in a heteronormative society, so I see where they're coming from in the way of like power dynamics and stuff…Other than that, I can't think of many times when…people in the community have said negative things about me because of my identity as a heterosexual.

Courtney recognized that her straightness rubbed some community members the wrong way, particularly those who wanted to see queer people in leadership positions within queer organizations. However, with Martin and other LGBTQ people in her network being so encouraging about her public allyship, she felt justified occupying the position.

Other allies were more defensive about being called out. For example, Riley, an award-winning ally affiliated with MC Pride, was openly resentful of how she was criticized for running for an Exec Board position against an LGBTQ-identified person. She saw her ally credentials as exemplary and attempts to contest them were synonymous reverse discrimination:

> Sometimes an ally needs an ally. I've said that a lot, especially when you get pushback from the LGBT community...There's a member of the organization that doesn't like straight allies…or like straight people in gay spaces…straight bullies in gay spaces. I'm totally not a bully. I'm loud, I'm not a bully…What if I would have said, "I don't like gay people in straight spaces"…Why is it okay for somebody to say that about me, but…[it] would not be okay for me to say something like that?…I rocked the boat when I ran for co-chair….which I think is very sad. But, you know, you can't let one bad apple ruin the whole bunch… I feel like it's a…very, very small percentage of people [who are] like that. It's not gonna make me stop…You can't let prejudice win.

In this moment, Riley equated straight exclusion in Metro City Pride with homophobic marginalization, arguing that marginalizing straight people in LGBTQ activism was like oppressing LGBTQ people. However, the fact that Riley's bid for power was so contentious showed that this framing did not align with how most people saw allies in the organizations I observed. Her argument that allies need allies thus was in tension with the general centrality of queer folks within LGBTQ activism.


### *Conclusion*

When sexual identity is understood as biologically determined and LGBTQ activism centers the needs of queer people, straight supporters are kept outside the movement. They can

support LGBTQ rights and have their efforts supported by LGBTQ people in their lives, but they are not understood as having the same stake in its success. Hence, in this movement, the term 'ally' is simultaneously bridging and distancing. Even as it provides a label for straight sympathizers who want to distance themselves from homophobia, it keeps those supporters at arm's length by signaling their comparative privilege and singling them out for more extensive vetting. Yet such othering is not inevitable. If activists focus more on resisting heteronormativity as a system instead of focusing on the civil rights of LGBTQ people, it is possible to imagine a world where queer and straight people could reimagine themselves as both benefitting from LGBT activism. However, in the absence of such framings, straight allies remain perpetual outsiders vis-à-vis movement rhetoric.

# CHAPTER 2: INVISIBILITY, IDENTITY FRAGMENTATION, AND THE COMPLICATION OF LGBTQ ALLYSHIP

In the last chapter, we saw how essentialist understandings of sexual identity created barriers that kept straight allies outside the movement, even when their support was highly desired. However, there were three central challenges to LGBTQ mobilization that troubled these boundary-drawing attempts, creating some unexpected pathways for straight activists into the LGBTQ movement. First, the frequent invisibility of LGBTQ identity and the consequent emphasis on 'coming out' within LGBTQ politics sometimes camouflaged the presence of straight allies. This invisibility required straight allies to either mark their privilege through **ally disclosure** (at the risk being seen as afraid of being mistaken as LGBTQ) or obscure it though **rainbow passing** or **performative queerness** strategies at the cost of being called out for having the **transversal privilege** to cross into the LGBTQ community and leave when it suits them. Second, the existence of intersecting identities and increased identity fragmentation under the LGBTQ umbrella created opportunities for within-movement allyship that de-centered straight people in ally rhetoric, allowing for **internal vetting processes** to emerge alongside the **external ally credentialism** discussed in Chapter 1. Third, the rupture of the ally-insider binary that occurred within LGBTQ-oriented organizations serving highly specialized constituencies (e.g., people with AIDS) often made it difficult to know who was advantaged and who would best serve as a **bias barometer** for privilege problems in a group due to their marginalized status. Each of these challenges complicated simplistic allyship binaries, even as these binaries were re-drawn in the face of such complexity.

## The Camouflaging of Straight Allies

*Rainbow Passing, Performative Queerness, and Ally Disclosure Within LGBTQ Activism*

Sexuality is a largely invisible identity. Though there remains a strong cultural belief in the existence of 'gaydar' and some controversial scientific studies have suggested that humans and AIs can identify queerness based on facial features and behavioral patterns (Kosinksi & Wang 2018; Rieger 2013; Shelp 2003), LGBTQ people are often difficult to reliably locate in practice. In the absence of rhetorical signaling (i.e., 'coming out'), one's sexuality thus can remain a mystery to others. As a result, misrecognition of ally status occurred often within LGBTQ-oriented events, such as this mix-up during a Community Pride fundraiser:

> Claudia, PJ, and Rhoda looked for a place for the Community Pride group to sit at the mixer. Claudia spotted a young Black high-school age boy occupying a table alone at the event, saying "If we push those two tables together, we can all fit. Excuse me, are you waiting for someone? Would you consider moving so we can have this table?" He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, replying "No…but I'm not sure…" Claudia sat down and talked quietly with him for a few minutes before announcing to the group, "He's starting a GSA at one of his schools, so he's LGBTQ, too. He can just sit with us." He looked uncertain, hedging, "I don't know how much longer I'm going to stay." He kept his spot over at the far-left hand side, and Claudia sat down next to him, chatting a bit with him. After he left, Claudia turned to the group and announced, "He's actually straight, but he started up a GSA at his school because he saw they were getting bullied."

In this interaction, the student's ally status was misidentified—a mix-up that was only clarified when he declared his heterosexuality to Claudia outright. In the absence of an assertion of straightness, LGBTQ identity was often presumed.

The unknowability of ally status was amplified further in groups like University Town's Queer Social Central (QSC). In an attempt to avoid the kind of misinterpretation that happened above, QSC institutionalized formal policies emphasizing their meetings' confidentiality and mandating attendees not to presume members' sexuality, gender identity, pronouns, and level of being out. Concerns about confidentiality emerged in other campus LGBTQ groups as well. For

example, the LGBTQ Fraternity was very concerned about protecting its less 'out' members. Serena noted at the new member orientation, "Everything beyond open events and rush, those events are confidential; not everyone is OK with being out. We're going to be sending out a quiz to gauge how 'out' you are and how comfortable you are being tagged in group photos." LGBTQ Services Center volunteer trainings also emphasized the importance of confidentiality, as trainer Charlie emphasized when they cautioned, "Confidentiality is important…[Center users] might not want people to know. If you see people, don't just assume they are out to people. If you recognize someone from the Center out, don't make that known—even volunteers might not be completely out!" The presence of both literal and imagined allies in these spaces was valued because it gave 'questioning' people a cover—something Charity, a Center intern, appreciated about their yearly Love Wins tee-shirt campaign. "It's something everyone can be a part of—it's general…Someone who is exploring their identity can wear a Love Wins shirt, and no one is going to think anything of it," Charity said. However, this blurred signaling made it difficult to know who was an ally; for example, Avery observed, "I feel like there are maybe some straight people that go to like QSC [Queer Social Central] meetings… [but] the problem of like confidentiality [is]…you never know."

When sexual identity is invisible and confidentiality is the expectation, straight allies are faced with a choice—to signal their ally status or to allow others to assume what they will about their sexuality. For those allies choosing to explicitly signal their straightness, there were a variety of strategies they could rely on. Some straight attendees of LGBTQ events strived to signal both their support and ultimate outsider status through sartorial choices and accessories. Such symbols were a popular commodity at Pride festivals. Booths at both Community Pride and Metro City Pride were filled with tee shirts and bumper stickers with messages like "Str8t Ally,"

"Born Straight Refuse to Hate," and "Proud Parent of a Gay Child." Furthermore, festival goers wore shirts with messages like these as a way of self-identifying themselves as community outsiders.

In the absence of such symbols, allies were frequently presumed queer or interrogated about their sexuality. Managing these interrogations could be a delicate balancing act as allies struggled to clarify their straightness without giving the impression that it was bad to be mistaken for LGBTQ. The question of whether to engage in ***rainbow passing*** (i.e., allowing people to assume queerness) or ***ally disclosure*** (i.e., explicitly disavowing community membership) was a difficult one. "So that's been a challenge because…where I outreach with organizations or do things…people make assumptions," said Rhoda, a straight Community Pride member. "My hair is cut off, you know? I don't always wear my rings. I often have this Pride wristband around my arm, which I do now. People think I'm a lesbian, you know? And that doesn't bother me, but at the same time…it's not genuine, you know what I mean?" Though Rhoda did not want to deny queerness via ***ally disclosure***, perhaps out of a concern that it would appear homophobic, she felt equally guilty about the inauthenticity involved in ***rainbow passing***.

Some allies were firmly opposed to ***ally disclosure*** in social justice spaces. Carmen from Women for Community Change rejected the 'straight ally' label altogether:

> I won't use that phrase…You can use that phrase…but I won't use that phrase… I bristle at that phrase… Because I don't like being an ally……[pause]…and I hate the term straight. We have a pin [*points towards her door*]…'I'm Straight But Not Narrow'…can't stand it! Why do I need to proclaim my partnership?…I will never call myself an ally. And I don't [know] if that's good or bad…I think it maybe goes back to my feelings on 'white savior'—like if I'm an ally, I get to pat myself on the back for doing good as opposed to looking around at what others are doing and saying…I have a skill set or something that can supportive of an existing organization's work. And so, I feel sort of like the ally label is saying I'm conditionally supportive maybe. I don't know. I gotta work on this…I just don't like it.

Carmen believed the straight ally label distanced her unnecessarily from the community. By refusing to identify as straight and engaging in *rainbow passing* she hoped to signal a deep investment with and commitment to the community.

Others, like Chandra, a Community Pride board member, preferred a modified strategy of *ally disclosure*, not volunteering their ally status but opting to set the record 'straight' when interrogated by 'coming out' as an ally when their sexuality was questioned. During our interview, Chandra recalled, "One [woman] I play cards with…I think it was right after the Pride Festival, she went, 'Chandi, you're not gay, are you?' And I'm like, 'No.' 'Okay, it's just that I saw you at the Pride Festival…they tell me you're on the board.' And I'm going, 'I'm just an ally'… but…I've been assumed of a lot worse than that…Sometimes I feel like I need to say, 'But I'm an ally, I'm not gay.' And then I'm like, 'Well, what difference does it make?'…It just depends on the day whether I'm going to be sensitive about anything." Chandra, like Rhoda above, felt torn between disclosing and concealing her ally status. However, she was more ultimately more comfortable with disclosure while Rhoda leaned towards passing.

The uncomfortable quality of this choice led some allies to try to sidestep it completely, opting for a middle road strategy of *performative queerness* that flirted with queer sexuality while implicitly signaling a distance from it. This strategy unfolded during an awkward interaction between a vender at Community Pride and two straight girls perusing Pride merchandise. The owner approached the girls who were agonizing over which "Love Won" shirt to buy, asking, "Are you together?" There was an awkward pause, the girls staring back at her, unsure of how to respond. The vendor tried to change directions to save face, "I mean did you come together? This happens to me—one time where I was like 'Are you available?' And she blushed to her toes—'I mean available to sell me a size 9.'" One girl put an arm around the other

and noted, "We can be together." These girls responded to an uncomfortable presumption about their sexuality by using humor to save face, playfully flirting with queerness in a way that suggested tolerance while ultimately reaffirming their heterosexuality.

The passing-disclosure conundrum was a vexing one for LGBTQ respondents. Many were highly skeptical of folks who insisted on highlighting their straightness in social justice spaces and consequently uncomfortable with ***ally disclosure*** as a strategy. For example, Noreen, a trans woman active in queer and communist politics in Metro City, was intensely resistant to allyship rhetoric, saying, "I'm a little baffled with people that identify as straight… (*Laughs*) I find that really confusing. Like really? Like they're straight? What does that even mean? And then why they're showing up to a queer group is a little bit baffling, and then why they want to draw attention to their straight ally-ness is pretty baffling to me…If they actually were an ally, they would try to not take up too much space and instead get the work done, I think." When straight people insisted upon their straightness, some LGBTQ people began to wonder why they were so insistent. As such, extensive ally disclosure could put one's ally credentials in jeopardy.

Yet, rainbow passing had risks as well. We saw in Chapter 1 how such boundary-blurring steps were largely out of sync with a movement that essentializes sexual identity and draws a firm boundary between LGBTQ insiders and straight outsiders. As a result, occupying queer space while failing to self-identify could open one up to allegations of failing to sufficiently acknowledge ***transversal privilege*** (i.e., the ability to move in and out of the community without loss of advantage). This conundrum puts allies in a precarious position—if they acknowledge their straightness, they run the risk of coming across as defensive about the possibility of being labeled as gay, but allowing themselves to be presumed gay can come across as co-opting an identity-based movement. The invisibility of sexual identity thus allowed straight people in, but

there was a paradoxical pressure to re-make that boundary through acknowledging one's ally status.

*Ally Politics and Bi Erasure in Movement Spaces*

Even when allies were reluctant to self-identify as straight in queer spaces, LGBTQ people often still wanted to identify them as part of the processes of boundary drawing outlined in the previous chapter. The task of identifying allies then falls on LGBTQ shoulders. Considering the often-invisible quality of sexual identity, such identification is haphazard. The most common indicator of straightness seemed to be the physical or rhetorical acknowledgement of an opposite-sex partner or opposite-sex attraction. Rhoda's short hair and rainbow bracelet could be canceled out by the presence of her husband and young son at Pride events, and any confusion created by Clara's rainbow-tutu-clad presence on the Pride Festival stage could be neutralized when she publicly kissed her boyfriend at another event. Although such romantic exchanges allowed these allies to convey an outsider status without sounding like they were embarrassed to be presumed queer, these strategies relied upon a hetero/homosexual binary that ignored sexual fluidity and erased community members on the bi spectrum.

Such erasure was a problem generally in the spaces I observed. Bisexual participants in my field sites sometimes felt that they were invisible in LGBTQ groups, either being mistaken for gay/lesbian or presumed to be straight allies. Kristin, a former President of the LGBTQ Frat, noted in her interview that her relationship with a man meant "people certainly assume I'm an ally at times." Though Kristin could laugh about such mix-ups, which were not uncommon in my field sites, other bi-identified community members were more frustrated. For example, Sandra, an Asian-American bisexual speaker on a Center-sponsored intersectionality panel, complained,

"When people see you as straight…like 'Oh, you're there as an ally' things get dicey…I'm not going to be read as Latina, but I get read as heterosexual a lot…like a friend told me, 'It's so cool that you're involved in the Center—why do you care so much about it?'…(*snorting*)…she was confused because I talked about an ex-boyfriend…you get erased."

This erasure could lead bisexuals to feel underserved by community services. Demi, a young bisexual woman who volunteered at the Center, for instance, wished campus groups like Queer Social Central would make space for bisexuals to build community with other bisexuals:

> QSC [is] always like breaking up into little groups. I guess they would never do this, but if I was head, I would do a like, "Okay if you are a female—if you are a lesbian, let's split up—lesbian, gay, bi…whatever...like trans and ally...like see who's in your group…Because…there are different stereotypes for bisexuals then there are for like lesbians and gays and like that is something I would love to talk about with other bisexual people…[but] they believe so much in confidentiality…that no sexuality is assumed…They would never want to ask what your sexuality is.

Demi understood why such confidentiality was necessary, saying, "I have had friends who have come that are so in the closet that if someone said, "pick your circle," they would like leave…that's a legitimate concern;" however, she clearly longed to build community with other bi students. Thus, the very confidentiality clauses that were designed to protect questioning people created a culture where ally passing was common and bi erasure became increasingly likely.

This, often unintended, bisexual erasure was frequently exacerbated by more direct biphobia. Being allies to gay men and lesbians did not necessarily mean straight activists understood or supported bisexual community members. Though Community Pride member Clara provided valuable support to Community Pride and her lesbian sister, she had some less supportive words about bisexual men:

> I know it's such a double standard and I'll just go ahead and say it…I don't know if it's possible for a guy to be bisexual. I do think it is possible for women. And I know that's a

double standard...It doesn't mean I'm not an ally…Please don't mistake that…If a guy tells me he's bisexual, I'm like, "Alright, right on!"…That'd great, [but] not gonna lie, I think "Well, he's probably just…" We should be brave enough to just say he's gay…I know how that must sound, and…as I say it out loud, I realize that's probably not good for you to hear…I mean the fact that I'm working with Pride…and I'm honest-to-god supportive…But then I say "Well, I don't know if it's exactly possible for a guy to be bisexual," you know?... I'm supportive of whatever people want…I'm not gonna be a bigot about it and a dick about it, I guess is the right word.

Although Clara insisted that these ideas did not invalidate her allyship, it was unlikely that her words would be seen as supportive by bi men who already felt marginalized and unseen within the community.

It was not only straight allies who embraced these bi-negative attitudes. Gay men and lesbians sometimes struggled to embrace sexual and gender fluidity within the movement and the proliferation of sexual identities this generated. This conflict was particularly apparent in Together with LGBTQ Friends (TLF), which was dominated by older gay men. For example, Chip's resistance to sexual fluidity and new identity labels like queer was apparent when we chatted informally about arranging an interview; Chip explained, "I'm just an old gay man…I have two daughters who are lesbians… but one of them has decided she wants to date men—to be more fluid…I go to [speak to high schoolers], and I talk about my two lesbian daughters. And she said, 'I actually don't identify as lesbian. I prefer to be identified as queer' [*his face scrunched up in disgust at the word*]…I told her when I was growing up that that was the worst word you could call someone." His resistance to his daughters' fluid sexualities came across even more clearly in his interview:

I started to speak to the school kids [from a local Safe Space program]…I told them I'm gonna be…talking about them being lesbians. I was talking to the older. She says, "I'm not a lesbian." I said, "Wait a minute. You came out to us as lesbians"…"Oh, we don't like the labels." Same thing with her sister. "We don't like the label." They want to be referred to as queer... in high school… [they had] very few—no boyfriends really…But [my youngest daughter]…claimed way back then that she was a bisexual. And [my older daughter] now, would you believe, she's dating a man? Not just one. This is about the

> fourth guy… But we talk about in [the support group] especially women can be very fluid. One time they'll be interested in men, and then they'll be interested in women.

Chip's willingness to bring up his ambivalence towards his daughters' sexualities in group meetings, though it mostly induced fond exasperation from straight ally and gay men regulars, likely would have led bi- and queer-identified attendees to question their welcome—were they present.

This decentering of bisexual interests and obscuring of bisexual people made some bi respondents question their place in the movement. This was especially true of bisexual individuals who felt distance from LGBTQ community and political spaces. For example, Jackson, one of the facilitators of the Metro City Masculinity Talks group, confessed during our interview, "I've never dated or I don't think even kissed a guy…It's been there for a while, but maybe it was that concern about…'Am I legitimately bisexual? Am I bisexual enough to claim that term?"….Because for a long time, I was like, 'Oh, I'm straight. I guess…I like cute boys, too'…I guess I don't think I do enough…to kind of consider myself a part of it. I donate money…but I don't really do a whole lot.... I'm not especially active." Because of his minimal practical romantic experience with men, Jackson felt uncertain whether he could claim insider status in the LGBTQ community. Another bi-identified Masculinity Talks facilitator, Grace, shared Jackson's sense of disconnect, adding that it was "hard to not feel accepted by the gay community" because she had dated men in the past.

The uneasiness felt by some bisexuals within the community, particularly amongst those who were currently or who had been most frequently been involved with partners of the opposite sex, led some to identify more closely with allies than other LGBTQ folks. For example, Lucille, a young bisexual woman involved with Radical AIDS Activism (RAA) felt like she was not entitled to claim a marginalized identity despite her identification with the community:

I am dating a man, and (*laughs*) I feel very ashamed…I can't call myself queer because I have this relationship...It feels very inauthentic for me to call myself, as my identity, to be straight. But yet, I benefit so greatly from straight privilege, and I probably will for a really long time**…**I feel inauthentic to bear the torch of LGBT. You know, calling myself queer and then bringing my partner of 6 years…It's complicated for me…I haven't really found…that the LGBT organizations and movement embrace me.

Lucille felt as though her opposite-sex partner invalidated her claim to queerness; despite her serious past relationships with women, she believed that her current relationship bestowed her with privileges gay men and lesbians lack. Another bi woman, Trinity, a member of Male Profeminists United and Masculinity Talks, felt that sense of privilege so strongly that she identified herself as an ally, claiming, "I feel extremely privileged that I am right now living with a man, so I'm actually living as a heterosexual. So even if I am a bisexual, I'm the least discriminated possible letter in the…alphabet soup…But that's not a reason to not get involved... as an ally…I feel, even if I'm very privileged, I could still help out." Whereas uncoupled straight allies could potentially gain access to the community through ***rainbow passing***, actual rainbow members like Trinity were straight-washed by their past and present opposite-sex relationships.

The presence of ambivalence and ignorance about the dynamics of the bi experience pushed bi people to the margins of the LGBTQ community. When they were in opposite sex-partnerships, they were frequently mistaken for straight allies; when they were single or dating same-sex partners, they were often read as gay or lesbian. In both cases, their distinct bi identities were denied and erased. Some coped with this othering by decoupling from the community, like Grace, Jackson, and Lucille opted to do. Others, however, developed strategies to render their bi-ness visible, such as using bi pride symbols and other paraphernalia to signal their bisexuality. For example, at Community Pride, an opposite-sex couple I observed used sartorial choices to signify that they were not straight. The girl accessorized her black 'No One Cares' tank top and skirt with yellow, blue, and pink legwarmers; this unique color combination

is the same as the pansexual flag, sending signals to community members that she was not straight and was instead one of them. Her male partner used a My Little Pony Rainbow Dash tee and rainbow bracelets to indicate a similarly queer aesthetic, implying that he was no more a straight ally than his girlfriend.

Collectively, these observations and interview efforts show that ally politics cast a shadow on bi people. Attempts to draw strong boundaries against straight allies presume that heterosexual attraction is incommensurable with queer space. The invisibility of straight allies meant that these boundary-drawing efforts typically relied on evidence of opposite-sex attraction, which placed bisexual and pansexual people who experienced that attraction in a bind, leading bisexuals partnered with the opposite-gender to be excluded alongside straight allies while bisexuals in same-gender partnerships were presumed gay. Allyship politics hence ultimately reified the gay/straight binary in a way that erased nuance within the community and understated diversity.

### *Intersecting Inequalities, Trans Inclusion and the Question of Flawed Insiders*

*Racial Diversity and the Privileged Insider*

The invisibility of allyship was further exacerbated by the in-group hierarchies created by intersecting identities under the LGBTQ umbrella. Not all members of the community were similarly disadvantaged or equally included within the movement. For example, most of the LGBTQ groups I studied were dominated by affluent white people. Although discourse about intersectionality was less central to these groups than it was to the feminist groups I studied (and will discuss in the following chapters), LGBTQ groups in both University Town and Metro City

were forced to reconcile the race and class privilege of their members with their self-image as a safe space for all queer people.

Community Pride in University Town, for example, was highly self-conscious about the underrepresentation of people of color in Pride events—yet struggled to adequately identify the cause of their lack of involvement. Claudia was particularly keen to bring people of color to the festival, bemoaning an irksome city scheduling conflict at a pre-Pride meeting, exclaiming, "It's the Latin Fest that day at the Graffiti Park," sticking her finger down her throat and making a disgusted sound. Bette asks, confused, "Why 'Blergh'? Is it an icky festival?" Claudia replied, "No. I don't like the competition. I want the Latinos to come to our festival." Rhoda's recruitment to the Board was an attempt to further cement that pro-inclusive orientation—a fact she was clearly aware of, reporting in our interview, "They wanted me because I'm Black. And young. That was made clear to me (*laughing*) Like that's one of like their goals…They wanted to make it more diverse…and they wanna infiltrate the Black community." Clearly, the UT Pride board saw themselves as designing an inclusive festival where all members of the UT community should feel welcome.

However, Rhoda's interview also identified issues with how they went about building ties with the UT Black community:

> I haven't really been that helpful with [that infiltration], mostly because I'm not 100% on board with the goal. (*Laughs*)…So I haven't taken those steps because I'm not sure how I feel about that… Here's the thing…Some of these older leaders, [the] only really civil rights concern is 'Black.'…It's like I don't agree with you, but understand your perspective to the point that I feel like I'm maybe more respectful of that viewpoint. I don't know that I can make a convincing argument for them to like invest in this cause…When they're so invested in this other cause…which I mean they should be invested in... I think the most I could really ask would be Safe Space Training…or like just trying to build a certain degree of compassion…or understanding and not trying to make it like, 'Hey, acknowledge that this is a struggle!'… I think it's hard, especially for these generations who've really been traumatized...in a lot of ways to like…to be like 'Oh yeah! I'm gonna deal with your struggle!'

In Rhoda's view, board members who wanted people of color to be natural collaborators with LGBTQ groups had broadly unrealistic expectations. Rather than presuming they would turn up in droves for LGBTQ events, she thought queer activists should manage their expectations, recognizing that these groups had their own problems and striving for more modest levels of understanding.

Rather than recognizing this, however, Claudia tended to take personally the failure of communities of color to show up, seeing this lack of investment as evidence of their latent homophobia and rhetorically framing Black community leaders as adversaries. This adversarial framing was manifested explicitly at a UT Community fundraiser, where Claudia complained to Rhoda about her negative experiences with the Black community and its religious leaders during her involvement with the University Town Human Rights Initiative:

> Claudia said, "There's this woman…who I can say really hates my guts—hates who I am. She said to me one day, 'You'll never know what's it like to live in Black skin…you'll never be discriminated against that way.' I wanted to say…that on the one hand, of course, you are totally right. I'll never know what that's like, but just because I'm not Black doesn't mean I don't know what it's like to be discriminated against since I was a young child. Can't I at least understand that? …I know it's two different things, but I don't think it does us any favors to make this a contest about who is most oppressed." Rhoda tried to pacify her, saying soothingly, "I think you are just gonna have to let it go. You'll never get through to that group. Sometimes when you get organizations like that it's all about the competition." Claudia returned to her dealings with the Human Rights Initiative later in the afternoon, describing another negative interaction with a Black community leader—"You should have seen the minister from [a local church]… just sweating bullets…because PJ asked him if he was going to Pride…If he was going to support the gay community…and he was like "Do you want me to lose my job?...I have no problem with gay people…there's a gay man in our congregation..."

These anecdotes cumulatively illustrated both Claudia's commitment to cross-racial coalitions and her incomplete understanding of the concessions such community-building endeavors would require. Claudia wanted the Latinos to come to the festival and for Black community leaders to recognize LGBTQ people as similarly marginalized compatriots with whom they could build

solidarity, but her equation of her experiences as an LGBTQ person with people of colors experiences with racism got in the way of building those bridges.

Rhoda, though she was conciliatory to Claudia at the event, expressed frustration to me about her high expectations of people of color, saying, "People like Claudia really want to see Black people on board…But…it's hard…" She noted that Claudia failed to see parallels between Black leaders' reluctance to fully embrace the community and her own resistance to certain changes in LGBTQ community. "After one of our Safe Space Trainings, she was telling me about…how there's like that explosion of letters and all these different identities and that sort of thing [with younger people]. And she was talking about how 'I really just can't get on board with this like 100%...all the struggle we've gone through to get to where we are now, [and] they're trying to do all this,'" Rhoda recalled adding, "I was like 'Don't you think that that might be the same thing that…these Black church leaders are saying, too?" Rhoda also thought board members could be a bit more patient with straight allies in communities of color as they worked to catch up with a rapidly changing population—and a bit less likely to write off the local Black community as homophobic. Rhoda noted that such adversarial framings inspired "a certain degree of defensiveness" amongst Black residents, saying "nobody wants to hear their community being …generalized as homophobic…like…'the Black community really doesn't like gay people'… People say that at the Pride meetings!...Is there truth to that? I mean you could say the white community doesn't like gay people, couldn't you?" In Rhoda's estimation, the kind of community collaboration Claudia wanted will be impossible so long as she and her fellow board members continued to generalize the UT Black community as intolerant.

More importantly, Rhoda claimed such a rapprochement would be immensely unlikely so long as the group is reluctant to do the work of reaching out to Black community organizations

and dedicating time to their cause. For example, when I asked if Claudia and the Board wanted to help with racial justice issues in UT, Rhoda replied, "Not really. I think that…Claudia's on the Human Rights Initiative…she and PJ have an [interest] in things like that …like I know Bette and her partner adopted a daughter that's Black, so they maybe have an interest, but as a Board? No…and Claudia has said, 'We want them to buy into us, we need to start going to their things'…but…as a board? No. As an organization? No." While Rhoda saw the white board members as racially progressive in their personal lives, she found minimal evidence that they were truly working towards racial justice in their political lives.

The internal dynamics of the group Radical AIDS Activism (RAA) in Metro City were also shaped by this inability to engage with in-group advantage. Although RAA had a working group dedicated to HIV and youth homelessness, volunteered frequently with a local homeless shelter, and organized town halls to address the concerns of young homeless folks, they struggled to include homeless people within the group. This became apparent when Jonah, one of the group's few Black members, brought a young Black homeless man named Jerome to ask the group for help:

> Jerome opened his plea by softly thanking Jonah, "He took me in. I was evicted on the first of March." Franz interrupted loudly, "Speak up!" Jerome said he wants action against the Housing Assistance Association, the Department of Social Services, Human Resources and the Emergency Unit of the Housing Authority, exclaiming, "You wouldn't believe the things that occur, the kinds of things that are swept under the rug and not talked about…and there are people way worse off than me." Franz testily asked, "But what is your 'ask'? What's the thing you want? Do you want a demonstration? What's your audience? What you have is massive. You need to narrow it first." Jerome passionately said, "All of it! I wanna take their pay rates to the case workers. I want training, education—everything!" Paulie, a general member, insisted, "We need details." Joaquin, another member, agreed, "I think we need to table this until the details are worked out."

> After some debate about what Jerome should do and what his advocate should pursue. Jonah, a longtime RAA attendee, expressed his frustration with this conversation, saying, "This is not a criticism of RAA, but not all RAA members have experience with Housing

Assistance as clients. They cannot know that these suggestions have been made…The city…is not doing its job…Housing Assistance Association (HAA) is not following its own laws…they're supposed to have rooms for people like Jerome…We can fight this fight in HAA, but they'll still bring more people into a system that's not working…RAA needs to step in here and protect people who cannot defend themselves…the community wants them to do their job!...This action isn't something we need to decide today, but we need to start organizing on this issue."

Franz said dismissively, "I still think he would be better served with an advocate." Palmer, a young gay male activist who was involved with anticapitalistic activism, disagreed, saying they could use "carrots and sticks" approach of an outside protest to leverage advocacy efforts inside. Joaquin asked after some debate, "Have you gone to the media and tried to tell your story?" Jerome said, "It's only recently I'd had my shit together." Joaquin suggested, "Can you gather your thoughts together …you need a clear 2-3 minutes that you can put on the web…before you put them together try practicing them on yourself to the mirror." Jerome deflected, "I have to be comfortable with everyone in a room before they can know my story." Joaquin warned, "If I put a camera in front of you, you might freeze."

Jerome's case illustrated the extent to which this group was better at pushing for policies that were meant to help poor people of color than they were at truly empowering and incorporating those people. Rather than giving Jerome the help he explicitly asked for, they tried to refer him elsewhere (e.g., an advocate). When Jonah would not allow them to do so, they presented Jerome with an alienating list of intimidating instructions that were more appropriate for seasoned career activists with the economic and cultural resources to hone their craft – i.e., their recommendation to develop "a clear 2-3 minutes you can put on the web" – than a young homeless person trying to get redress from an unfeeling government bureaucracy.

These cases illustrate the uncertain location of privilege in social movements and raise important questions that complicates the stark insider/outsider binary that define allyship politics. Who is the ally in these instances? Is the reluctance of Black community leaders to support Community Pride a failure of straight allyship—or is Community Pride's lack of investment in Black community events a sign that they have not earned their white ally credentials from

antiracist activists? What about when it is members of your own community who are marginalizing you? The allyship rhetoric, as currently conceived, does not provide clear answers to those questions. These cases show that LGBTQ insiders can engage in oppressive acts targeted towards straight people who are marginalized along other dimensions (e.g., race), as well as microaggressions towards community 'insiders' with comparatively less privilege then they possess. Ally rhetoric that treats straight people as innately privileged ignores the complexity of privilege and disadvantage both within and outside the community.

*Trans Inclusion and Cross-Sexuality Allyship*

These politics were not just complicated by intersecting identities and coalitions outside the LGBTQ umbrella—divides within the community troubled a straightforward understanding of what it meant to be an ally. This chapter has already touched on how bisexual experiences and struggles were often ignored and erased within LGBTQ spaces, but the picture becomes even more complex when the 'T' in the acronym is considered. Whatever differences and disparities exist between cisgender gay men, lesbians, and bi people, these groups are united by the fact that they are sexual minorities whose exclusive or additional attraction to partners of the same-gender sets them apart from the straight majority. When allyship was discussed in the queer social justice sphere, the term 'ally' often implicitly referred to straight allies firmly outside the community rather than cisgender people (who could exist within and outside its bounds).

However, just because a straight person identified as an ally did not mean they were equally supportive of all members of the umbrella or that they are unequally informed on all LGBTQ issues. The organizers of Together with LGBTQ Friends (TLF) were aware of this, having separate support groups for friends of LGB people and trans individuals. This separation

helped tailor the groups to the shared interests of their members, but a conflict in the LGB

support group showed how this bifurcation allowed the straight allies to remain under-informed

about trans issues:

> Wendy, a straight woman, abruptly interrupted a meeting to exclaim, "It seems like the
> transgender thing is everywhere now. Like at Pride I saw this photo of a seven-year-old
> boy, and it said, 'Proud to be Transgender.' I don't understand how they can know that
> when they are seven. It seems like it puts too much pressure on them." Casey, an older
> gay man, rebutted her point with his own experiences, saying, "I knew I was gay when I
> was seven. Kids know." She insisted, "But I feel like gender is different than that." "Let
> me explain to you my theory of social evolution," Casey replied, adding "We treat kids as
> though they don't understand things, but they understand more than they let on…They
> know that there are men, and there are women, and they like different things." Wendy
> continued to press her point, explaining, "When I was a kid I was like the queen of the
> little boys, they followed me everywhere…But I was a girl…Maybe it would help to
> have someone come and speak to us from the trans group. Just to tell us about their
> experiences…there is still so much I don't know."

> Marci, another straight woman, agreed, "I think that a speaker would be a fantastic idea. I
> was talking to someone the other day and she brought up something I would never
> thought about—she said when she thought her son was gay that she worried he might go
> a bit farther into being transgender. I just had never thought about it that way." Jasmine, a
> much older straight woman, nodded, "I could see why someone would think it would be
> that way; these things are fluid." Jeff, a younger straight ally with more extensive
> involvement with LGBTQ issues, visibly cringed at these statements, saying edgily, "You
> know why that's wrong, right? Those are not like the same thing at all!" Marci said,
> "Yes, I know that but…" Jeff interrupted, "Because one of those things is about who you
> are attracted to; one is about what you feel your gender is."

> Wendy returned to her original point, more firmly insisting, "I just don't see how they
> can know so young. I feel like now there's this pressure—you have to understand, I was
> an educator in preschool, and we spent so much time teaching young boys that it was OK
> to play with dolls – God forbid their fathers ever saw them do it though. We told them
> how are you ever going to be good fathers if you never hold a baby or change a baby?
> That was a big movement in the sixties and seventies. Now, I just worry that we have
> kids saying, 'I do these things so I must be a boy' We worked hard to get past that." Jeff
> tried to reach her again, maintaining, "What you are talking about is gender roles—that's
> not the same thing as gender identity. And I agree a speaker would be nice, but I'm just
> not sure that they could ever really be able to convey to you what it feels like to be
> transgender. You have never lived that. I have never lived that. We can't know what it's
> like to feel like we are born in the wrong gender. To a certain point, we have to take it on
> faith." Jason, the gay male lead facilitator, used gender essentialist rhetoric to gently
> rebut Wendy's point before moving the discussion onward, authoritatively observing,
> "There is actually a fair amount of research on the brain that suggests gender is hardwired

fairly early. And that it is completely possible for your brain to be wired in a way that doesn't match your body."

In this exchange, Wendy, Marci, and Jasmine, three women with a long history of support and advocacy for their gay and lesbian children, showed that familiarity with LGB issues did not necessarily translate into support for the trans community. As such, straight ally, Jeff, and LGBTQ insiders, Casey and Jason, were called upon to be cis allies, educating these older women on contemporary issues facing the trans community on behalf of actual trans people, who were absent.

This absence was frequently a problem in LGBTQ spaces, especially since cisgender LGB folks are not always particularly informed on trans issues either, organizing their groups in ways that excluded and erased them. For example, Metro City Pride's past attempts to include women had the unintended side effect of gendering the organization in a way that was arguably trans-exclusionary. For example, when the group developed women-oriented events like women's dances as alternatives to the larger gay male-dominated parties, this move raised questions about which women were welcome there and whether the events were trans-inclusive. The group also had a rule that there must be a male and female co-chair every year, which implicitly "othered" trans men and women and explicitly excluded non-binary folks. Recognizing that trans people were almost completely absent in Pride leadership, the Board petitioned their general membership to revise this binary regulation in the hopes of diversifying their organization and being better allies to trans people in the Metro City Community:

> Ethan, the current co-chair, announced that Georgia, the Planning Committee leader, had new committee bylaws that must be voted on. She said, "If you can go to the second page, halfway down, you'll see number 1, the addition of a 'gender non-conforming co-chair'…it's always been a female co-chair and a male co-chair. If we had a transgender person, or a gender nonconforming person who wanted to run, if they did not identify as male or female, or they are gender fluid and go back and forth, there is no way for them to serve as co-chair. The committee had two full meeting about this—discussing and

debating…I'm going to…walk you through our questions about this, to get a sense of what we talked about."

She put a slide on the projector for each option. The first slide showed male and female symbols in pink and blue boxes—"Option one is that we do nothing—we have a female and male identified co-chair, no trans or gender non-conforming co-chair." She switched to one with all possible gender combos including a purple genderfluid symbol—"Option two is that we could eliminate gender identity altogether. We could have a male co-chair and a non-gender conforming co-chair, we could have a male and the same, we could have two males and two females. Our concern with that was that we worried about ending up with two men." A man named Saul mumbled under his breath, "What's wrong with that?"

Georgia either didn't hear or ignored him, switching slides to one with the trans man symbol juxtaposed against the trans woman symbol, noting, "The other idea we came up with would allow for a gender nonconforming person to be elected alongside a female or male—a female-identified person or male-identified person." She added, "The committee quickly began to worry what happens if we don't have anyone to run for the position, plus it limits to either one male at each time and one female at each time with a gender non-conforming person."

She wrapped up with a final slide, illustrating their actual suggestion—"After about four hours of debate over two meetings, we settled on this…We say at least one person must be female-identified…This is the winner for us…When one is female, one must be male or gender nonconforming. It's either female and nonconforming or female-identified and male. In the grand scheme of things, we do not have a lot of transgender representation. So, this may never play out. There's no transgender or gender nonconforming person on the board—much less as co-chair—but it's important for our committee that if someone did want to get involved, there would be a place for them. So, this is the committee's recommendation…are there any questions, comments, concerns?"

A man in the audience wondered, "Why not a trans person and a male?" Someone else added, "or a gender nonconforming person." After some discussion, Ethan said, "The committee felt…that we might end up with one with no women represented. Still, it's a discussion we can have—whether we agree a woman should be co-chair." Another male member said, "We're not voting for men specifically because they are men…Yes, women have been traditionally marginalized, and gender non-conforming people more so, but there are limitations to this option. It takes a step towards inclusion, but doing it that way limits men's opportunities to get involved. They can only run every four years or other." Georgia challenged this, pointing out, "They can serve in any other position. There is only one option not open."

After some more dialogue, Georgia firmly stated, "Pride reflects the community it's in…. in the end, we serve Metro City…Membership is open. We just haven't had transgender people on the board. We're trying to change that—open things up… Can we call the question and proceed?" Despite the critiques brought up, the motion passed unanimously

with no abstentions, and Georgia proceeded to the last change—"Good news, only one more. The next step we want to take is we want to change our initial paragraph [in the Constitution] to include bisexuals and transgender people. It used to say lesbians and gay men going back when the organization began. It was different time period…we want to be more inclusive now. We want to add bisexuals and transgender people to the first section of the bylaw." No objections were forthcoming and the bill quickly passed.

This conflict highlighted the difficulties of navigating diversity, inclusion and allyship in social justice spaces. A rule and regulation designed to empower women in the organization unintentionally excluded an even more oppressed group, trans and gender nonconforming people. Attempts to correct this exclusion and bring more trans people into the organization involved complex and contested organizational changes that were resisted by some of the groups most privileged members (i.e., cisgender gay men). Furthermore, the attempts themselves involved conflations of trans and non-binary people that may also be alienating, treating trans women and men as though they were not 'really' men and women.

Such efforts to be allies to trans people were thus not always empowering. In addition to exposing a lack of familiarity with trans issues, many attempts to diversify placed the responsibility for change on the shoulders of a group that was already marginalized. For example, Martin, the LGBTQ Services Center director, framed diversifying LGBTQ leadership structures at the Uni as the job of marginalized queer and trans students:

> I get questioned all the time about…why Queer Social Central is so white and cis… I don't try to turn it back on the community, but… I'm like "Well, why don't you go?"…By you being there, you're making it less white and less cis. And they're like "Well, I don't feel like it's a safe environment." And that that's where…I'll like challenge you on that…"You're wrong! It actually is very much a safe environment"...They can't just make it look, act or think that way until they get people who look like and think that way in the organization… I do think it's a two-sided issue here…when I do talk to the queer kids, it's not just me being, "It's all on you!"…but …"You need to do this if you want us to get change"…

> I actually had a trans person of color in my office…and he…is really awesome and wanted to get involved. And I was like "Oh, QSC is doing a new…VP…as well as a trans advocacy chair." And he was like "Well, I don't know…it's a little uncomfortable." And

tries to wishy-washy around it…and I go "Well, what? What do you want then?" And he goes "Well, I wanna get involved in leadership." I was like "I just gave you two leadership positions that are…in line with what you said you wanted." It's like "why don't you wanna do them then?" He goes "Well, because [the group's] leadership right now is completely cis." "OK…but do you trust yourself enough as a leader to give a voice to what you need and what you think your community needs?" "Well, yeah...of course." "So then…why are you dismissing yourself as a leader…?"

And let me tell you the end of the story was he actually ended up going for the position, got the trans advocacy role… and I was like (*claps*) look at that! We have a trans person…who's now on the board…we have a bi person who's now on the board…we have, out of the board of seven, there are three who are of color and…four who are white…majority are men…Yes, it's not perfect, but…we actually saw the organization pick of the two open positions…a trans man and a woman.

The group's lack of diversity was treated by Martin as a problem for the trans person in question to solve through his own gumption and grit, not a systemic problem that required white and cisgender folks' collaboration to solve. By telling the student to 'put himself out there' rather than admitting the very real barriers he faced, Martin's defensiveness reduced a real structural problem to an individual hurdle for marginalized folks to clear.

*'We Can All Be Allies to Each Other'*

The complexities of privilege negotiation within LGBTQ communities and the hierarchies of within-group advantage that occurred due to intersecting and fragmenting identity labels began to shift the discourse of allyship for younger respondents in my field sites. For example, the campus-based LGBTQ organizations in University Town experimented with new typologies of allyship that de-centered straight folks and generated opportunities for LGBTQ people to consider themselves allies to the community. Katrina, the lesbian President of Queer Social Central, expressed this more intersectional understanding of allyship, explaining the ways she feels she was an ally to her own community and to allies themselves:

…You can be queer and be an ally to…your own identity, but also like so many other identities...I guess I'm an ally to…fellow like gay, lesbian people, because I could be gay and hate gay people. That's real. But all the other letters…I'd like to think I'm an ally to them, you know? I care about their…needs that go beyond like the needs and struggles of like a gay person, and…I don't know how to think about this, but there's some aspect of being an ally to straight allies…I think you could easily be like "Peace out straight people. We don't need you." But they need support…if they're going to be…part of this movement… I just did a panel last week at a high school and a kid asked us, "What do you think about allies? And…I just said like, "You know, they're obviously necessary, I think." People are a minority and… [a] minority is not going to get much without the support of the majority…I think it's just understanding that queer people like have struggles and have gone through things that straight people haven't and maybe won't understand…A lot of being a good ally, as a straight person, or [as a] gay [person] to another group, is just understanding that you don't understand that struggle and…not trying to make someone else's…struggles yours.

Katrina clearly saw straight people as allies to LGBTQ folks, separate from the community and possessing greater social privilege than its members overall. However, she felt that this exclusive understanding of allyship understates two dimensions of community allyship politics: 1) it under-examined the extent to which allyship across LGBTQ identity labels was necessary for group cohesion, and 2) it largely ignored the extent to which LGBTQ people might wish to be a support system for straight people as they learn how to best support the community.

Katrina's point that members of the LGBTQ community need to be allies to one another resonated deeply with LGBTQ Services Center staff, interns, and volunteers. Although Safe Space training was clearly designed with straight allies in mind, Martin, the director, believed very strongly that LGBTQ students and faculty at Uni should be trained as well. The LGBTQ Fraternity took his advice and mandated that all members attend a personalized training during rush week. During this training, Martin argued, "Education is key. Even if you are queer, learn about bi issues and trans people. I am a gay guy, but I have no idea what it means to be trans or a black gay man. You're part of the community, but you're not the whole community. That's why I push for Safe Space Training in the community." This rhetoric, while still acknowledging

community marginalization, refused to treat LGBTQ people as equally oppressed and pressed more privileged members of the community to learn how to support others who were more deeply discriminated against, such as trans people and queer people of color.

Considering LGBTQ people as allies to other LGBTQ people generated new forms of ally vetting. When more privileged members of the LGBTQ umbrella excluded or otherwise marginalized less powerful members of the community, they could be held accountable like straight allies who engaged in oppressive acts. This sort of ***internal vetting*** occurred during the executive board elections of the LGBTQ Frat, one of the more racially and gender-diverse field sites in my sample, when a non-binary member of the group who used 'they/them' pronouns was misgendered:

> Cat and Avery left the room as the group deliberated on who would be the best President. Johnny, a cisgender member, thought aloud, "Avery has a lot going for him." Eric sharply interjected, "Them." Johnny looked confused at first, clarifying, "I said Avery." Eric refuted, "Then you used a pronoun." Johnny still looked confused, but Serena worked to defuse the tension, saying "Go on." Johnny spoke more about Avery's other commitments and Cat's management skills in the group before slipping up gain, "Avery, he…" Eric more sharply interjected, "They! They! I'll hurt you!" Johnny became visibly flustered at this point, fumbling, "They, uh, Avery (*laughs awkwardly*). Avery…has Avery's…" Eric refused to let Johnny replace every pronoun with Avery's name, firmly insisting, "No! Avery uses 'They' pronouns." Simon, another cis gay male member, tried to redirect the conversation by observing that "Part of their job is inspiring rushees—I see the President as more of a mother or father…" Eric called out this gendered language as well, saying, "Parent! I will hurt all of you [*pointing at multiple people*]!" Johnny transitioned from flustered to annoyed at this point, asking with an edge, "Well, would *they* be good at it?"

This tense exchange illustrated how comparatively advantaged community members could be subjected to similar kinds of credential vetting procedures that straight allies were faced with when they interacted with more marginalized members of the community. Though Johnny may have faced homophobia as a gay man, he could still be held accountable for his cisgender

privilege by trans and non-binary members of the community, like Eric, who were multiply marginalized.

The supreme irony of these ***internal vetting processes*** was that this greater willingness to highlight insider failures and hold LGBTQ people accountable led to softer ***external vetting processes***, increasing compassion towards straight and cis allies and leading to more tolerance for their mistakes. This paradox came across clearly during Safe Space Trainings, such as when Marcel, one of the Center interns, soothed a straight ally who was anxious about how much they needed to be doing to count as an ally. "We would all like to be nurturing… [but if not] we'll be supportive, which is fine…Even gay people like me and Darryl who run the Center, we might not be nurturing. You might catch yourself making a judgment like 'Why is that guy holding a pink umbrella? These are not always the best thoughts, but the important thing is to recognize those problems and change those ways of thinking…The important thing about being an ally is really no one is perfect. I know it feels embarrassing when you make a mistake. I make mistakes. Darryl makes mistakes. It's OK," he said. By noting that even LGBTQ insiders were susceptible to homophobic and heteronormative thoughts, straight ally mistakes became more intelligible and forgivable.

LGBTQ respondents, like Jim of Community Pride, were especially sympathetic to allies who slipped-up because they themselves struggled to keep up with all the proliferating identities under the umbrella:

> I think there's people in the gay community [who don't know how] to meet other people where [they] are. And I think it's unreasonable to expect people to go from 0 to 60 in their acceptance of the community. In the same way that 'coming out' is a process…there are certain things in that acronym list that I don't understand…so, when I'm thinking about Safe Space Training…We're having trouble with the L, the B, and we're having a lot of trouble with the T, and so to add in the AAINSB di-di-di-di-di, I think is hard… I believe in baby steps…I think it's hard to come at people with all of it, and be like, "We

need to accept of this right now and you need to celebrate us…immediately”…I think you can just be too politically correct and sensitive about it…

People can't connect to it, and so then you lose them…Like a straight person, who's never even been in the room with two gay people at the same time, is going to be like, "Fuck"…To tell them like that somebody is like "demi-sexed" and that means that sometimes they feel like a man and sometimes they feel like a woman…like you've lost them… I also think it's asking too much—to have people understand specifically what you are I think is selfish…I don't really care about somebody's specific blend of heterosexuality, right?

If even community leaders like Jim were struggling to understand the full contours of LGBTQ life, the reasoning went that it wasn't realistic to expect straight people to be perfectly conversant in community terminology. What this ironically did, however, was give misguided straight allies more leeway to make mistakes than LGBTQ community members, who were held to higher standards of education and self-awareness.

However, not everyone was comfortable with the degree of leeway given to these straight allies. Avery, the non-binary frat member who was misgendered, had the following response to a think piece I asked all respondents to reflect upon (See Chapter 1 and Appendix for more detail), wherein a cisgender gay man argued that the community is 'scaring away' its straight allies by harshly judging them for missteps, saying, "[The ally who felt attacked in the article] asks like 'In gay dating, who's the girl?" That's such a basic [thing]…if you've…been around the community for more than two seconds in your life." For Avery, the missteps of straight allies remain qualitatively different from mistakes made by more marginalized community members. Even less straight-critical respondents like LGBTQ Frat President Serena noted the limits of this forgiveness, saying, "You want to give allies the benefit of the doubt and give them space to learn… [but] you don't want to put extra burden on the queer community to do that…when…they've probably heard this question so many times, and it grates on them like every single time. 'Cause there are people…who deal with microaggressions…much more than I

do or who…don't have enough energy to deal with them." Thus, though recognition of insider

mistakes might have encouraged empathy towards straight allies, the strong outsider boundaries

drawn against them prevented many from seeing outsider slip-ups as completely equivocal.


### Complex Movements, Radical AIDS Activism and the Costs of Erasing of Allyship Rhetoric

We've seen already how the straightforward binary between LGBTQ insiders and

straight outsiders could be obscured by the invisibility of sexual identity, complicated by the

intersectional quality of social identity, and undermined by the proliferation of identities under

the LGBTQ umbrella. So far, however, the organizations we have discussed largely mobilized

around the empowerment of LGBTQ people, which rendered allyship language intelligible if not

perfectly reflective of reality. But what happens to allyship dynamics in organizations that are

mobilized around fluid or compounded identities? Who are the insiders, and, more importantly,

who are the privileged outsiders in such groups? In this last section, I will use the Radical AIDS

Activism (RAA) group to illustrate how the politics of allyship unfolded when the boundaries

were blurred.


*Gender, Sexuality, HIV Status and the Complex Web of Allyship in RAA*

Radical AIDS Activism (RAA) was founded by gay men in the 1990s, and was one of

several AIDS-related activist groups operating in Metro City at the time.  The group's expressed

mission was to use disruptive protests to pressure a reticent (and homophobic) government that

seemed determined to ignore the growing AIDS epidemic to dedicate time and resources to the

crisis. Later, their aims shifted to push pharmaceutical companies to speed up drug trials and

release treatments faster. Since gay men were initially the most impacted by the disease and the

stigmatization of gay identity was widely regarded as a clear cause for state under-investment in the problem (Adam 1989; Ghaziani, Taylor, & Stone 2016; Kayal 2018; Seidman 1988; Shilt 1987), the core constituency of old RAA movement was clear—people with AIDS, who were predominantly gay men. Though LGBTQ and straight women were involved in early AIDS mobilization (Corea 1992; Gould 2009), they struggled to be recognized as stakeholders and their contributions to the early movement were under-acknowledged.

Since the early days of RAA, however, the world of AIDS treatment and activism has shifted. The protests of groups like RAA got activists an unprecedented seat at the table in American drug policy-making decision (Epstein 1996). As a result, AIDS advocacy has become more institutionalized, as formerly disruptive activists became increasingly folded into public health interest groups and think tanks (Armstrong 2002). As these institutional changes altered the face of AIDS activism, the demographics of those impacted by the disease have expanded and shifted, leading scholars to advocate for a more intersectional analysis of AIDS transmission and service provision (e.g., Berger 2010; Stockdill 2003; Watkins-Hayes 2014). Though gay men remain most impacted by the disease in the U.S. (Purcell et al. 2012), men of color are disproportionately represented within community HIV diagnoses (Diaz, Ayala, & Bein 2004; MacKenzie 2013), profoundly under-served by AIDS-related activism and outreach (Cohen 1999), and more highly targeted by state sanctions (Hoppe 2017); trans women of color are also being increasingly recognized as a high-risk group (Herbst et al 2008). Furthermore, more attention is being paid to the rising infection rates of heterosexual women of color (Hader, Smith, & Holmberg 2001; Hammonds 1995; Moreno, El-Bassel, & Morrill 2007). Finally, as awareness of the global scope of the AIDS crisis spreads (Seckinelgin 2007), scholars and activists have turned their attention to the experiences and heightened vulnerabilities of queer men, trans

people, and heterosexual women outside the U.S. (Carillo 2002; Mojola 2014). Though the white gay male activists who were so visible in early mobilization maintain a stake in the movement to end AIDS, they are sharing an increasingly globalized field with other stakeholders and professional service providers.

This transition created tension within RAA between the old guard (i.e., mostly HIV+ gay men who survived the worst days of the epidemic) and new, younger activists—many of whom were straight and LGBTQ women—who came to RAA through a more distanced interest in public health. The very first meeting I attended, it became clear that much of the conflict between the new and old guard was intensely gendered:

> Before the meeting got started, a man Ozzie asked to speak, saying, "I have to address something…Anger and fury are absolutely required for our work…We've been to battle regularly, but having such fury and anger has been offensive to some. It's already pushed away one member. It's especially impacted women." The facilitator agreed, "We obviously must allow intense soul-searching; we've paid lip service, but we've never really stopped and re-assessed the ways we dismiss women…we've learned the hard way that we must dedicate our focus…the facilitators who were elected must commit to work on this and tackle it on point." Gendered tension also flared up later in the meeting when Esme suggested, "Maybe we should collaborate with other groups—ones that work with women and people of color." Jonah, a Black gay member, somewhat angrily responded, "We should try to concentrate on gay men with HIV…they are the highest risk group!"

Embedded in this exchange were serious inquiries about the purpose of RAA, the meaning of organization's goals, and the effectiveness of the way they communicated with each other. There was a gendered generational split between those who wanted to continue the group's historic centering of gay men with AIDS while other wanted to make the space safe for women and work towards serving new demographics.

On balance, the voices of the old guard seemed to be more powerful than the new. Palmer, a 40-year-old gay man who bridged this divide somewhat, was intensely ambivalent about the centering of gay men's perspectives in RAA, saying, "It's diverse in some ways, but

not in others. It's mostly gay men. I hate that the gender dynamic is so skewed, but then gay men

*are* marginalized. They need a space where they can share their experiences. I just wish it didn't

have to take so much space up." This spatial domination had implications for young women like

Lucille, a 27-year-old bisexual woman who often felt they did not belong in the group:

> It's so frustrating for me… Yes, it's absolutely [true] that…in Metro City…gay men are more likely than straight women to contract HIV and, and there is definitely a male bias...then you have to factor in maybe transgender people before women, if you're gonna kind of put people in boxes to target. But globally, it's women that you have to factor…. When we're doing these initiatives that are targeting gay men, it's really frustrating for me, because it's like, yes, this is super important, but I can't help but think of HIV globally, and you can't cut off women. And women are always cut out of everything, right? So, it's like, please don't cut us out of this, too, or, you know, we could surpass the men. If you do a great job of preventing HIV in gay men populations, it's not going to go away. It's just probably going to shift.

Lucille deeply empathized with how profoundly HIV/AIDS had shaped the lives of older gay

men, but challenged the idea that they had a primary or exclusive stake in the movement to end

the epidemic. In fact, she made a case that their exclusion of women and indifference to female

victims of the disease was counterproductive towards reaching that goal.


*When 'Allies' Are Oppressed*

By the rules of conventional ally rhetoric, these HIV-negative women who had more

recently joined the group should have been treated as privileged. Their seronegative status and

perceived (if not always actual) heterosexuality should have made them outsiders due to their

inability to experience life as a seropositive person and/or as gay men. While there were shades

of this familiar tactic in how the older gay men engaged with younger women in the group, the

ways these boundaries were drawn were often so intensely gendered that it became difficult to

untangle whether ally-vetting or gender-based exclusion was occurring. This tension was

particularly poignant and obvious when Isadora invited Nalini and Justice, her coworkers at a

Health lobbying group, to talk to RAA about a possible protest opportunity, jump-starting a

weeks-long debate about an action destined not to come to fruition:

> Justice said, "We're planning a march to protest, starting with a die-in…this is my first die-in…all are welcome." Greyson asked, "For those at the meeting, how will this impact them?" She explained the action, "The Danish government just decided to cut 20 million dollars US a year, which is unbelievably problematic. And other nations have followed suit—Sweden, Norway (the Nordic countries). France had cut a bunch then tried to hide it from us. If funding is cut then people are going to die. That's millions of dollars not going to HIV treatment of all kinds…"

> After some discussion, Joe, a long-time member, asked, "Have you done a die-in before?" Nalini said, "Yes." He asks, "Do you have all the materials?" She says, "Yes. We have signs and a megaphone." Elijah added, "The chalk for the bodies?" She nodded, then spoke to why she wanted RAA there, saying "International activists are often very leery to get involved in actions where there's a risk of arrest. It helps to have experienced activists there…I'm an international activist. I was leery. Having you guys around would quell their fears." Greyson asked at this point, "Have you let the police know what you are doing?" She said, "Not yet." He continued, "I ask because if we are going to be involved, I'm going to call the police after the meeting." She clarified, "We're not really asking for involvement. Just more of an announcement, but I'd be happy to talk to you about calling the cops." The pitch was tabled shortly thereafter and the group moved on to other business.

> Isadora brought the action up again the following week, saying, "So, last week some of us met to come up with an action with Health Lobby…Our target is going to be Paul Ryan, or some other politician we can identify. We want to raise the profile of AIDS in the media…We're trying to organize a big action in DC that focuses on funding...I'd like to propose a five-minute brainstorm." Isadora's plea for a brainstorm of ideas quickly devolved into a session of nitpicking of everything about the operation—from the targets to the timing. Silvio questioned, "Why this date?" Isadora replied, "There's no particular reason other than they wanted to lock down a time and that they thought Wednesday was a good day because it wasn't as busy as the weekend."

> Sandro suggested, "You should make sure they are in session." She said, "I'm not the one who is personally responsible for that, but we'll definitely check." Silvio had concerns, noting "My worry is 'Do our political methods evoke our demands?' Are we saying that Paul Ryan has blood on his hands?" Isadora replied, somewhat frustrated, "He's the Speaker!" He pushed back, "But does that equal him having blood on his hands? Has he done anything to cut funding?...We need to develop our demands then do protests that accomplish them."

This collaboration effort, which ultimately failed to get off the ground, highlighted the complexity of ally politics within RAA. It would be possible to read this interaction as one involving gay male insiders with decades long backgrounds in AIDS activism educating clueless young outsider allies about how an action should be done. However, this simplistic reading was challenged by the age, gender, and even racial dynamics of this collaborative effort. Not only did these young women experts possess valuable knowledge about global AIDS activism, but the older male men drew boundaries against the Health Lobby women in gendered ways that would be familiar to many women working in male dominated occupations (e.g., Kanter 1977; Solnit 2014). For example, it was striking how quickly the men in question took ownership of an action they were being invited to support. This could be seen in the way many used collective and possessive pronouns like "we" and "our" to describe an action for which they were meant to be auxiliary support. Furthermore, rather than recognize the expertise of Isadora and her coworkers, they were hyper-critical of every suggestion they made, seeming to assume incompetence at every turn. This distrust empowered them to make demands about how the action should unfold, such as insisting on notifying the police.

In isolation, this critical and combative approach to the Health Lobby coalition could be dismissed as par for the course for an organization known for its disruptiveness, its own members acknowledging it was often derailed by the "fragile" nature of many participants with large "egos." However, this conflict unfolded in the context of an organizational climate that was often inhospitable to women by its own admission. This fact was made very clear to me by concerned men early in my observation, such as the member who commented, "RAA has always bucked political correctness…against Southern respectability and state institutional politics. It was started by a group of gay men who are just now coming to terms with feminism and racism."

Palmer affirmed this resistant attitude shortly thereafter, observing, "We have a lot of older men who, when you explain privilege, they have never heard of it, or they are negative about it." Another gay man, Wilbur, was excited by my study explicitly because he hoped that my presence would help ameliorate these gender issues. The very first time we met, he gushed, "I'm so glad you are here. We need more people like you," before whispering in my ear, "If anyone says anything to you, please say something. Some of the gay guys here can be very misogynist. We've had problems before—and don't mind the arguing. People tend to focus too much on singular issues."

This aversion to political correctness, willful blindness to male privilege, and argument-heavy atmosphere coalesced to create an environment where women often felt uncomfortable contributing—and where they felt they were held to a double standard when they did. In our interview, for example, Isadora, critiqued the 'asshole' culture of the organization and how women were not given the same leeway to engage in it:

> I'm thinking of like one female member specifically…who is like very aggressive, and like very opinionated… like there have been a couple of men in that group who have complained to me about her. Just because she's another woman, and they don't appreciate her being in the room. And it's like, 'All of you guys are assholes, too, so it doesn't really matter. She's just a different gender than you.' (*Laughing*)…[It's just] them feeling very entitled most of the time…to speak their mind always without raising their fucking hands…that their issue is like clearly the most important. And then, when they're like put on the back burner for a minute, they're like, "Well, let me just say," and then they like say it anyways. I would never do that in group, or…I don't make a habit of that. I don't think that that's acceptable…I don't think that they're conscious of creating a safe space for everybody.

Isadora simultaneously felt alienated by the aggressiveness of the shout-down culture the men in created and annoyed that women were perceived as disruptive when they engaged in it. The fact that these women were being held accountable for the disruptiveness and forthrightness that were

arguably the cornerstones of RAA's radical activist image exposed how deeply that image was gendered.

*Trying to be Allies to Women and Falling Short*

Many men were committed, at least in theory, to resisting the exclusion of women in the group and becoming better allies to them. Yet, their attempts to address these disparities often reproduced gender inequality in unintentional ways. Consider for example how an effort to raise awareness of representational issues in an action ultimately ended up perpetuating gender-based exclusion therein. During the lead-up to the Democratic primaries, RAA joined a national coalition that pressed for meetings with Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders to discuss their commitment to the fight against AIDS. This coalition quickly generated conflict. Activists like Isadora and Esme became vocally concerned that the small number of people approved for this meeting by the white gay male organizers, including Liam Christensen and Neville Church, did not adequately reflect the diversity of the groups represented in the multi-group coalition. The underrepresentation of women and people of color were particularly remarked upon by RAA members. Although Darby, who was representing RAA in the coalition meeting, promised, "It looks balanced in terms of gender, balanced in terms of race" people in the group challenged this assertion. "Is anyone going who is not a gay, white man?...The [important] thing here is representation," Arturo said. The group became swiftly concerned that not all people impacted by AIDS were being included.

Over the course of subsequent meetings, these concerns grew. At one meeting, Esme, one of the most active young women members, said, "Everyone in this meeting has their own political agenda. There's just a ton of people who are there for the celebrity. I don't have an issue

with anyone RAA is sending, but there's this contingent of 'big people.' They want to sit there with the presidential candidates and get face time." Palmer and Esme were particularly frustrated with one organizer, Liam. Palmer noted, "I would want to hear way more about what 'homegirl from Nigeria' has to say about any of this than fucking Liam Christenson." Esme agreed, "It's good that they have space in there for her to speak, but I'm just worried that Liam is going to take credit for the whole damn thing at the end." After more back and forth, Esme threw her hands up, exclaiming, "You know I didn't want to be involved with this anyway. You know how I feel about not wanting my activism to get involved with shitty corrupt electoral politics, but they asked for my opinion. Why did they ask for my opinion and make me waste time working on it if they were not going to take any of my suggestions?"

After the candidate meeting, tensions rose to a boiling point. Milton, a general member, angrily interjected, "It's really fucking problematic representation for RAA." Jonah agreed, "They just called on Black people from other organizations so it looks diverse." Esme, who was more visibly involved, chimed in, "They reached out to the Human Rights Campaign to pull together token black MSMs [men who have sex with men] on PrEP[3]… and it's like sure, 'You can find a few black MSMs on PrEP, but that organization is not working to protect our trans sisters…I'm out. Drop mic. We endorsed BS." "It's totally not activism…the coalition is a façade," Milton concluded. "The coalition is blackface," Ford noted. Paulie argued, "We need to be more inclusive moving forward."

There were some members who thought all this diversity talk was distracting from the big picture, such as Greyson, who said, "It's a mistake to get involved in attacking and criticizing

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[3] PrEP, which stands for 'pre-infection prophylaxis,' is a drug taken by people to reduce the risk of contracting HIV; according to the CDC (2019), it is 70% effective at reducing HIV infection.

others who are involved with AIDS activism…Our enemies would be glad to have us fight amongst ourselves…They have young people of Asian-Pacific descent, black, white, working class whites. They have involved other people and made great strides." More common were people like Palmer, who thought this conflict illuminated how out of touch RAA was to the communities it served:

> It's just really frustrating…Part of me wants to be like [*rolls eyes*] 'You don't get it, Liam Christenson! You're never gonna get it… [but men like Liam and his co-organizer, Neville Church] can't talk to anyone younger…Like Isadora and Lucille are like, 'Fuck him!' They don't care…I looked at the people who were in that room. They weren't the people whose voices needed to be heard. We need to hear the young people, the trans people, homeless youth, people of color. Remember the guy who came…who was terminally ill? He's who we need there. He has a sense of *urgency*. Neville Church doesn't…He is a 50-something gay man, and men like that think every man lives like they do.

While HIV+ gay men like Neville and Liam had clearly suffered marginalization as trailblazing activists during the most devastating years of the epidemic, the group argued that their whiteness, affluence, and current access to institutional authority countered their marginality, making them poor representatives.

However, when RAA members met with Neville, Liam, and coalition representatives to mend fences, it became clear that RAA's gender problems were far from resolved:

> As the group tried to work through their differences, Isadora, one of only a couple women in the room, struggled to contribute to the conversation, saying, "We started out worried about the cabal…that you came to us, and it was like how can RAA help us? …The senior members of RAA are seen as…making decisions outside the floor. How can we address that?... Many people in RAA who are young feel that alumni try to come tell the floor what position we should take. Sometimes they stop the conversation…we felt that there were conditions from you guys about how we had to behave this way." Liam is very dismissive of her point, scoffing, "Look…realistically any person is not going to walk away and find it entirely what they want." After more dialogue about the conflict, Isadora tried again to voice her opinion, beginning apologetically, "Sorry, bringing it back to Neville. It's an important issue…" before Liam interrupted her again. Palmer, irritated, said, "Let her finish," but Liam ignored him, prompting Isadora to leave the room, tears of frustration streaming down her face.

In this meeting, the powerful members of the coalition were reluctant to respond to the diversity

issues raised in general, but they were especially reluctant to engage with the points made by

Isadora, verbally dominating and cutting her so thoroughly out of the conversation that she fled

the room distraught. Though men like Palmer called Liam out for this behavior, more powerful

voices in the group like Greyson collaborated by moving the conversation away from the

diversity question.

Greyson's actions angered other men in the group, which ignited a tense post-meeting

conflict:

> Gus turned to me, saying "Isadora was really upset. I actually got up to make sure she
> was OK… First thing: How do you sit there and talk about how you want diversity and
> then you shut down the only woman in the room who wants to speak? Two, Greyson [a
> long-time member] needed to shut up…I know he's the moderator, and he's supposed to
> drive us, but seriously?...The thing with Greyson…is that he suffers from Founder's
> Syndrome. They create almost this gerontocracy because that's how old some of them
> are! And it's hard for younger people to get in. It's not just that I would like to see more
> women involved, more transvestites, transsexuals involved…They're the interns, not the
> ones in big political meetings."

> As we were having this conversation, I saw Greyson eying us with interest, clearly
> recognizing he was the subject of Gus's increasingly loud rants. He came over and Gus
> laid into him, exclaiming, "I just wanna say that Isadora was really upset! She walked
> out!" Greyson was surprised, "She did?" Gus continued, "She came back, but she did.
> I'm tired of seeing all these women get shut down, and that's all I'm gonna say to you!" I
> later overheard Greyson say to Arturo, "Well, Isadora was late, and that was not
> acceptable. And I told her that she should be on time. I don't give a fuck what Gus
> thinks!" Either ignoring or not hearing this, Gus told me, "RAA has a problem with
> diversity. Look around you! See many women? Do you see poor people? We have a
> couple Latinos, but do you see Asians? Trans? They come and get shut out!"

Although there were voices defending Isadora like Gus, there were other group members, like

Greyson, who seemed determined to resist any criticism of group dynamics, content to place any

blame on women's exclusion on women themselves or dismiss diversity concerns as distractions

from the mission.

Even men who were sympathetic and sought to include the voices of marginalized people sometimes reached out in ways that highlighted and emphasized women's differences. This was particularly obvious in the gendered ways men engaged with me, making me feel simultaneously hyper-conscious of my status as coveted female representation and out-of-sync with the male-dominated group culture. Wilbur checked in with me often, taking me under his wing in a way that was intended to be welcoming. For example, he once took me aside when he saw me at the Metro City LGBTQ Community Center where the group met, handing me a flyer for next week's fundraiser, saying, "I really want you to be there to support Esme" before anxiously asking me, "I really wanna know. How you are finding it…I know I've seen men talk over women…have you?" At the end of another meeting, he revisited this point again, somewhat ironically insinuating himself into an unrelated conversation Lucille and I were having to ask, "I think the men are getting a lot better at not interrupting the women, don't you?"—prompting Lucille to respond noncommittally, "Now if the men would stop interrupting each other." This sort of concern, while well-intended, reinforced the otherness of women by highlighting the extent they are excluded and creating additional labor for them by tasking them to be *bias barometers* that constantly evaluate the levels of toxic masculinity and report back to concerned male allies.

These gender-bridging efforts could be overwhelming in other ways. While the regular contributions of women like Esme and Isadora were often unacknowledged, the basic involvement of new group members like myself were often overly praised. For example, after my first action, which largely involved me donning a silly hat and saying a few chants outside a pharmaceutical company, Franz praised my engagement to another group member, gushing, "She was everywhere…she really embodied it…That was some real immersion!" I was still receiving this sort of exaggerated praise months later near the end of my fieldwork. For example,

after staffing a booth at a neighboring Pride festival, Wilbur put his arm around me and gushed to other volunteers, "This girl! I tell you! You have no idea, we don't get girls to volunteer. Well, Esme showed up to a Pride one time, but it was for a couple hours. She stayed the *whole* time." Although Gus reminded him, "Esme was doing other stuff though," he remained firm that my contribution was exceptional. This tension between the undervaluation of Esme, who did exceptional work for the organization behind the scenes by organizing town halls and networking with other groups, and the overvaluation of my attendance at public events and protests, suggested that women may have been valued for the 'front-stage' contributions (Goffman 1959) to the group's 'diverse' image more so than for their actual contributions. In either case, as we saw when the UT LGBTQ Service Center presented its presented its ally awards, over-thanking women for modest contributions highlighted their otherness.

Furthermore, some men who attempted to include women in their social bonding rituals often did so without acknowledging the gay male-centered quality of those rituals. Many of the homo-social bonding rituals of RAA members were highly sexualized and oriented around a masculine homo-eroticism that was difficult for women to engage with.

> Wilbur turned to me at one point, "I like to play a game called 'Yes/No'—Yes, I Would/ No, I Wouldn't.' Gus, will play it with me sometimes…like "See that guy in the striped shirt? Definitely him!" or "Bear alert! I love bears. We should get some honey." When Wilbur noticed that I wasn't responding affirmatively to his appreciation of the male form, he tried to encourage me to engage with women, saying, "You need to get off your phone and flirt…that's how you sell things." He later tried to introduce me to a woman my age stopping by the RAA booth, saying afterwards, "How did I do, huh? She was cute, right? She liked you," adding later "I have her name and number if you want it." He and his counterparts seemed to be somewhat aware that this particular style of bonding was not working with me, or women in general, turning to me before we parted, and saying, "So, how was it? Were we misogynist at all?... We were cock-hungry, right? Tell the truth." I said, "Ehh," making them laugh. Silvio joked, "Way more than a little bit!" Gus apologetically said, "None of us encourage Wilbur's antics."

Such sexualized attempts at comradery-building have historically been common in male-dominated social spaces. Much as the 'girl hunt' (Grazian 2002) has been the cornerstone of young straight men's homosocial bonding (Pascoe 2007), gay men like Wilbur and Gus used the sexualization of men to bolster community relations. While straight women do have a history of bonding with gay men over a shared attraction to men (Moon 1995; Russell et al. 2005), this highly sexualized culture may have negative connotations for many women, as such sexually charged banter has often been a contributing factor to hostile work environments experienced by women in male-dominated professions (e.g., Gruber 1998; Rubino-Cortina 2004); queer women, who have often drawn boundaries against the perceived hypersexuality of gay men (Gordon 2006; Hartless Forthcoming; Jensen 1998), may be even more alienated.

Collectively, these moments illuminated something important about the complexity of allyship and privilege negotiation in movements with multifaceted constituencies. When the primary stakeholders of a movement were unclear, the process of boundary-drawing against non-beneficiaries becomes somewhat murky. Though HIV+ gay men clearly dominated the earlier waves of RAA activism and continued to be a strong driving force in the group today, their marginal status and singular authority could no longer be taken for granted in a movement that is post-intersectional (i.e., forcing us to reckon with how experiences with seropositivity are mediated by race, class, and gender) and global (i.e., compelling us to consider HIV+ people outside the U.S. gay male community). Though some older gay men in the group remained confident in their authority to speak over younger activists, who were often women, others increasingly interpreted such rhetorical and spatial domination of women as gender-based exclusion of a possible stakeholder rather than policing allied outsiders. Considering the politics

of allyship in Radical AIDS Activism illuminates the complexity of privilege negotiation when identity becomes fragmented and decentered in social movements.

## *Conclusion*

Though the invisibility of sexual identity does create challenges for drawing boundaries against allies, the faith that many LGBTQ activists have in the essential and immutable quality of sexual identity makes it hard to imagine the line between LGBTQ people and straight supporters could be completely blurred. However, the LGBTQ umbrella has become fragmented as the LGBTQ rights movement has begun to focus more on trans people, who have increasingly been under attack from 'penis panics' (Shilt and Westbrook 2015) and other attempts to curtail trans people's access to bathrooms (e.g., Steinmetz 2015) and right to serve in the military (Holpuch 2019). This proliferation of identity labels, accelerated by a growing pressure to think about how sexual identity intersects with other social classifications like race, class, and gender, to some extent, threatens to rupture the insider/ally binary.

But what happens when a movement begins to move away from identity-based mobilization altogether? Is ideology-based mobilization plausible, and what consequences does it have for allyship politics? In Part II, I will explore the politics of privilege negotiation in feminism, examining how the identity-based politics of activists who came of age during earlier feminist waves has given way to a more fluid ideology-based politics. Together these chapters will show how a more serious reckoning with intersectionality politics within feminism has created pathways for men into feminism, allowing them to potentially become insiders rather than allies, as well as the problems and limitations such gender-blindness generates.

## *PART II: NEGOTIATING MEN WITHIN FEMINISM*

The sun streamed through the window at Free Thoughts, the small independent bookstore where Masculinity Talks held its meetings. The group had foregone their typical place at the benches by the window in favor of pushing back shelves to make room for a small circle of uncomfortable plastic chairs across from the Queer Fiction section. I pulled my chair closer to Felix, the group's Black non-binary facilitator, and Alonzo, a young Black man who regular attended both these meetings and those of the Male Profeminists United group. We were joined by Daphne, a casual attendee with purple hair and combat boots, and Myles, a white Muslim man who regularly came to meetings.

Myles started our dialogue about gender violence. "Part of my personal experience is that it's part of the process of male heterosexual conquest to search out others you want to form romantic relationships with. And the ideal is to be aggressive when you approach the girl partner…The point is you show confidence. To me the push is to aggressively pursue females. Non-feminist men tend to dominate and be aggressive…when things are developing…It's like "I gotta put on the gas and not stop"…Women may encourage the behavior, and once it gets going it just snowballs…For me, I'm looking for a non-aggressive way in a sense…My strategy has been to use humor a ton. I've been…going to the bar and asking women 'Are they feminists?' A lot say no, and I'm like 'Great. I'm a feminist'…When you are a guy and say like 'I'm a feminist,' it puts them on the spot…I'll let someone else talk—I'm rambling."

Felix tried to reframe what Myles suggested, packaging it in less gender essentialist terms, saying, "We are supposed to have a conversation about new ideas [for addressing violence]. You bring up a good point about courtship…Men are supposed to value strength and have a degree of aggression. We are taught that the only way to secure a relationship is through aggression—that the only way to keep our agency is to dominate women. You make a good point, but I wouldn't blame women. You talk about it like it's a self-fulfilling prophecy." Rather than hearing Felix's subtle chastisement, Myles insisted, "That's absolutely right! It's self-defeating behavior…It's classic—since 1950 we've seen the way this plays out. Then when they get married their true nature plays out. The way to stop it is to first eliminate the aggression in males first."

Daphne interrupted, "I don't know what you mean by self-defeating." "On the part of the female person," Myles said. Daphne mumbled under her breath, "Not all females." Myles conceded, "Heterosexuals—in a sense that's the traditional heterosexual contract that bolsters male supremacy. Men are told to be aggressive." Daphne said, "That's just heterosexuality." "Heteronormativity," corrected Alonzo. Myles said, "It's traditional gender. If you don't appear confident, you don't succeed." "I'm asking about your definition of self-defeating. It's like you are implying it is her fault," Daphne pressed him. Myles shrugged, "Kind of. Look, they have to regulate their own behavior. All of you are saying ways society encourages aggressive behavior, rewards you for being aggressive and confident." "How is that self-defeating on the part of women?...It seems like you are blaming women," Daphne insisted. Felix nodded, adding, "It *is* victim blaming. You have to consider the ways women are policed and how they are taught to

want aggression. It's not the women's fault. They are involved in a system that men create." Alonzo took issue with this statement. "There's no one alive today who is involved in creating the system," he said. "The system is there, and we all have contact. We're all involved. And we must take responsibility for destroying that system."

In the anecdote above, Myles' lack of familiarity with feminist ideology and tendency to dominate and derail Masculinity Talks' discussions were clearly disruptive and contentious. On the surface, Myles' domination of this space had much in common with the actions of the straight allies who took up space at the Pulse Vigil in Chapter 1. Similar to that case, some movement insiders, such as people like Daphne, vetted his credentials unfavorably and held him accountable for his objectionable behavior. However, this encounter differed in two central ways that suggest interesting divergences between these two movements. First, rather than being critiqued for denying the 'truth' of *gender essentialism* as allies like Wendy and Lillian from Together with LGBTQ Friends were in Chapters 1 & 2, Myles was judged for denying the *socially constructed quality of gender*. Second, rather than being framed as a clear outsider whose credentials must be vetted, Myles and the points he raised were given serious consideration—he was treated, not as an *ally* that must be vetted, but rather as an *insider* with general, de-gendered **feminist credentials**.

In Chapter 3, I will illustrate how the proliferation of **post-identity politics** and **intersectionality talk** within feminism decentered women within and created new pathways for men into the movement through **gender-blind** and **male-focused feminism**. I will then complicate this picture in Chapter 4, showing the limits of such intersectionality talk in the movement and examining how residual gender essentialism limited the insider status of such men and their ability to truly *own* feminism.

# CHAPTER 3: INTERSECTIONALITY TALK AND POST-IDENTITY FEMINISM

Feminism is in many ways a movement in transition, moving from a largely identity-based form of mobilization towards an increasingly post-identity model based on individuals' willingness to adopt a feminism ideology—a transition with important consequences for men and their place within the movement. As the feminist movement has become increasingly shaped by intersectionality theory and confidence in gender-based mobilizing falls, new doors have opened for men to become more deeply involved in feminist activism. When we compare the more ***woman-centered feminism*** popular with activist groups dominated by older women (i.e., Women for Community Change) with the ***gender-blind*** and ***male-focused*** endeavors of young college-age women and millennial feminists, we can see how the ***intersectionality talk*** that is ubiquitous amongst young feminists has led them to decenter women in their activism and made it possible for men to claim an insider status in the movement that was unthinkable in earlier waves.

### *Woman-Centered Feminism and the Intersectionality Question*

For the women (and men) who came of age during or immediately after the second wave, feminism was predominantly a movement for women's rights (Mann and Huffman 2005). This woman-centeredness could be clearly seen in Women for Community Change (WComm), the reproductive justice group in University Town, whose very name signified that it existed primarily to serve the interests and needs of 'women.' WComm's board at the time of my observation was completely composed of older white women. This exclusively white female leadership team was mirrored by a predominantly white female membership. It is thus perhaps

unsurprising that the older white women who dominated WComm placed women at the center of feminism, and consequently tended to conceptualize racial justice, economic equity, and LGBTQ equality as tangential to the movement. Though some members, like Amelia and Elmira, had a history of involvement with antiracist organizations like the NAACP and fair housing initiatives, they often framed this work as separate from their feminist mobilizing. They also were significantly more likely to address other inequalities in problematic ways that were not always conducive to nurturing diverse organizing. For instance, Carrie used outdated terms like "homosexual" that may have made some LGB folks feel unwelcome. People of color might have been similarly discouraged by some statements Amelia made like "We're all African-American." Feminism was of central importance to these white women. Other concerns, like racial justice and LGBTQ equity, while typically supported, were secondary.

However, my interviews suggested these older women were starting to think more reflexively about how this attitude might be alienating women of color. Much of this reflexivity was due to the efforts of the group's younger members, particularly 40-year-old Carmen, whose years at the local University and active presence in the social justice blogosphere led her to believe that "feminism, by definition, should be intersectional" and caused her to dedicate a significant amount of time and effort to making WComm less exclusionary. Perhaps due to Carmen's influence, other respondents in WComm had begun to think critically about their own privileges and how it shaped their attitudes towards social justice work. We can see evidence of this greater reflexivity in Carrie's musings on her feminist awakening as a medical student in the pre-Roe vs. Wade days and how she became passionate about abortion access:

> I can actually remember, to this day, being in the operating room, seeing wealthy women in our hospital…[I] saw people with a whole range of socioeconomic status, but a lot of upper-level income people. Wealthy women [were] going into the operating room and getting a "DNC" by their private gynecologist. Now, DNC stands for dilation and

curettage, and what that means is they put a little instrument and dilate the cervix, and go in and basically scrape out the uterus. Well, guess what they were doing? (*Laughs*) Women with money had a DNC…What they were doing was getting an abortion, and it was illegal…They had money, and they could pay their doctor, and the doctor figured out a way to just sort of slightly go around it. But poor women didn't have that opportunity. They went to back alleys, and then they would come into the hospital in sepsis…just terrible things. And, you know, that made an impression on me as a young student…

Being attentive to inquality made Carrie retroactively aware of how women in different income brackets faced distinct barriers to reproductive technologies, an awareness that continued to shape her activism today.

This sort of introspection led the women of WComm to reflect on how the absence of women of color in their organization might adversely affect their efforts to ensure all UT women had access to reproductive health care and abortion services. For this reason, Karla, one of the WComm's white board members, was deeply inspired by the words of a Black male keynote speaker at a reproductive justice conference she attended, telling the group during a monthly planning meeting, "He said that if you're not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. He said we need to diversify our boards so that the people you serve look like your Board. It shouldn't just be tokenism." This statement struck a nerve with WComm's President, Amelia, prompting her to ask another board member, Carmen, whether she had successfully gotten in touch with Gabby, a Black woman who worked towards reproductive justice in the UT community. She replied, "You mean [the woman] at Planned Parenthood? I talk to her regularly, but never about being on the Board." Amelia, "Can I have her contact? He's right…we need to look more like the people we serve." Karla's post-conference attempts to convey information about the racial dynamics of reproductive justice to the Board thus inspired its members to suggest practical steps for addressing the absence of people of color within their own organization.

However, the group's attempts to further this outreach work exposed the extent to which they misunderstood what was alienating people of color and how to best address that alienation. For instance, the group persisted in seeing racial justice issues as separate from feminist ones and understanding the concerns of women of color as distinct from their own. This was made clear when the board discussed an upcoming reproductive justice conference:

> Carrie, a white board member, commented "[They are] having a summit in the Fall…a Pro-Choice Advocacy Summit, specifically for women of color, about reproductive justice and choice." Carmen, familiar with the summit, interjected, her voice radiating irritation, "It's not specifically *for* women of color—it's *about* women of color." "Sorry…I misunderstood," Carrie apologized. Carmen, insisted, "White people should be in the room." "My point is that we should encourage Gabby and whoever comes to go, and if they can't afford it, we should pay…This is just how we have to reach out to the community," Carrie continued. "To the women of color that we know," Bertha added. Carmen was visibly frustrated by this conversation, asserting firmly, "Guys, this goes beyond women of color! It's white women who have to know! Women of color live this. This is something *white* women need to know. Black women live it every day."

What Carmen was trying to convey to the group was that that their overtures were not going to appeal to women of color because they aren't recognizing that those women's concerns were also 'feminist' issues. Rather than understanding *themselves* as needing education and reflection about the distinct way women of color experience reproductive health, they offered to pay for these women to attend a conference to learn about their own experiences.

To speak to these issues, the group organized a dialogue about how to make feminist activism more inclusive, which they asked me to moderate as a service to the group.[4] This meeting, which they chose to market as "How Feminism Has Failed," was attended by Board members, a couple activist friends of Carmen's, and a few women of color from the community who did not regularly come to WComm events, including Gabby—a Black woman who ran an

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[4] I was typically not this directly involved in shaping programming in the field. However, one of the conditions for my observation of WComm was that I would use my skills as a researcher to contribute to the group. This meant I intervened more directly in this field site than others. Please see the Methods Appendix for more about how I negotiated this deeper involvement and the consequences for my data.

education program at the local Planned Parenthood—and a diverse group of local UT youth

interested in the topic. This programming exposed how new dialogues about race were to some

of the older white women affiliated with the group:

> I opened the meeting by asking, "Intersectionality—when you've heard that word, what is it talking about? What does it mean to be intersectional?" I was met by several blank stares from white audience members. An older woman, Blythe, shrugged "Never heard of it…" "Never heard of it?," I repeated. "Nope," she replied to much laughter. Amelia tried to answer, saying, "I know what an intersection is—two roads come together, paths cross. Intersectional is within right? [Or] intra is within." I saw Carmen, the white woman who often raised diversity questions in WComm, fidgeting in her seat, so I turned to her asking, "Carmen, do you want to speak about this?" "It's Carmen's word," Loretta joked. Carmen said, "From where I sit…it's a super simple concept… which…states [that] some people may share common experiences…but a lot of people have lived experiences that are not shared by upper middle class white women."

This event, though it brought an unprecedented amount of diversity to the group and had the

potential to generate meaningful conversations about race that might otherwise have been absent,

exposed how foreign conversations about diversity were to many woman-centered feminist

groups.

Although WComm members were interested in learning more about intersectionality, two

barriers prevented meaningful exchanges on this subject at this moment: 1) White women

attempted to build community and generate solidarity with women of color through claims to

shared experience that were not accepted; and 2) These women persisted in outsourcing the

emotional labor (Hochschild [1983] 2012) of promoting inclusivity to women of color. The first

barrier manifested when the group discussed how to best build solidarity amongst diverse groups

of women.

> Bertha, a board member, noted, "I would say that sometimes one experience can inform another. As a woman, in the '70s, I was highly criticized…because I was put in charge of some men…And that was unheard of…I remember walking into the meeting room, where I was the only woman, and here's a table of men. And I walked in, and, in that moment—and I will never forget this!—in that moment, I had an understanding of what it's like to be a Black person!" Crosstalk erupted with Carmen interjecting, "They're

different experiences." But Bertha continued, "This is what it feels like to walk in a room…and be judged solely on the package. They didn't know me. They didn't know anything about me. They didn't know what I was going to say. But the judgement was already there…That was an enlightening moment for me. And we all have our own enlightening moments…" The room erupted in a sea of affirming noises.

The statement, however, did not receive a favorable response from Gabby, the most vocal woman of color in the room, who tried to explain to Bertha why her statement troubled her, saying, "So, even if [it] did offer [you] kind of that window of clarity, I would probably be a lot more hesitant even to say that that even equates remotely to how people relate to race. Because it's not a window—it's a life that you live which is complex, and more nuanced than just, 'Oh! I've been privy to an experience which is …kind of enlightening…but if you haven't been living it, I would just kind of caution you, in the future, to not use that as an example…kind of like 'Oh, it's relatability.' Because it's not something that you experience. Because additionally…" Bertha interrupted, "Oh no, of course not," drowning out the rest of Gabby's sentence.

This could have been an opportunity to 'call in' Bertha for her mistake, and Gabby was on the right track to do so, but instead the conversation moved towards other topics without any sign that Bertha understood why her words were not well-received.

Indeed, when I interviewed Bertha a couple of months later, she still seemed confused about why her attempt at feminist solidarity was rebuffed—"She said, 'Well you should never think that you understand the lived Black experience.' Which I totally get…but she seemed almost offended by me saying that, and ever since then, I think about it all the time…What about that could bother her? Presuming that I understood the Black experience, which I didn't mean to say—'cause I don't. But that…was an experience for me that changed my trajectory in life." Thus, Bertha could read the room well enough to understand her perspective was perceived as problematic and seemed truly mortified to have caused offense, but she remained unaware of why her statement was seen as 'wrong' and prioritized what the incident meant to her over how it was critiqued by others.

In addition to pursuing solidarity through such equivocation of experiences, WComm members and other white participants created a second barrier by expecting their women of color guests to solve the diversity problems they raised at this meeting. For example, Amelia framed education as the job of more marginalized group members by saying, "…I know that I have blinders…And I need people to help me pull them back. Sometimes I don't even know what question to ask or what to bring up. Sometimes I need someone to hit me with a two-by-four a little bit... For all the new people at the table, it almost was harder for you to come here tonight than it was for me…because I've been here before, I know those others I've seen tonight. But I also know it's really important for me to go to other places that [are] new to me. And to reach people where they are…because it's so much harder for them to come here." Amelia framed people of color as mentors, imbuing them with almost mystical powers to enlighten white feminists like herself, much like the 'Magical Negro' (Hughey 2009; 2012) guides the white protagonist in popular cinema fare.

A particularly poignant example of this unwanted emotional labor occurred when a white WComm member named Gina looked to Gabby for answers on how to resolve racial tensions within feminism:

> Gabby commented, "I sometimes go into these spaces, and I'm very, very hesitant to even come start conversations about white feminism. Because…I don't wanna offend anybody." This prompted Gina to ask, "So how will you change that?" Gabby visibly clammed up at this question, saying sharply, "It's not something…even I can answer…it's that kind of minority complex…you go into a space where you're the minority, and people look to you for answers, which I do find offensive…because it's not *my job* to do that." Carmen interjected, "Exactly!" Gabby continued, "…to find out how we can be better. It's actually *our job* as a collective to find new ways to work together because that's when we start becoming inclusive. It's not trying to 'Oh, let's make it better for you.' No, let's just make it better for all of us…I do believe in that, I really do."

Carmen, in her interview with me, expressed how she was appalled by how, in this exchange, "the burden of education was put on…the shoulders of someone whose job was not to teach [a

white woman] to be a better antiracist." Through these white women had good intentions, their

tendency to outsource this labor to woman of color alienated the very women with whom they

were trying to build bridges.

These tensions were further exacerbated by the way WComm's **woman-centered**

**feminism** implicitly and explicitly demanded that woman of color sublimate racial concerns in

the name of gendered solidarity. WComm's white board members largely saw racial

underrepresentation as a problem that could be solved if only women of color acknowledged

common ground with white feminists and educated them on what they needed to change. For

instance, there was an older white woman attending the workshop who was visibly annoyed by

the language the group was using, particularly the discussion and critique of "white feminism"—

a term used in social justice circles to describe a variant of feminism that centers the "knowing,

loving ignorance" (Ortega 2009) of white women and excludes women of color (e.g., Rodriguez-

Cayro-2018). Mid-way through the workshop the term 'white feminism' was challenged for the

first time:

> A white woman raised her hand to interject, "What about the fact that we're using the term 'white feminist'?" "That's a thing. Capital W, Capital F," Carmen responded. The disgruntled attendee continued, visibly flustered, "Maybe we're talking about white feminists who are privileged, or have money, but…I don't feel like I would fit into a category of 'white feminist,' even if somebody might try to put me in there. But I mean, all white feminists…all Caucasian, light-skinned women and feminists are not coming at it at the same—it's an overgeneralization!... I'm not exactly white. You don't know my heritage… It makes things divisive… Why not say 'white-privileged feminist'? That way, [with] white feminists, there can be a friendly rapport." Gabby, one of the few woman of color in the room, tried to explain the utility of the concept to her gently, noting, "When I hear 'white feminist'…it's not that they're not trying to be inclusive...It's the problem of representation. Because when you go into these spaces, as a minority, it's [a] largely white narrative…It's not that they don't try or they're not being inclusive enough, it's just because the narrative is not as diverse as I can think of it being or envision it being."

> Despite Gabby's attempt to explain the importance of remaining aware of race, the specter of 'divisiveness' kept rearing its head. Another white attendee responded,

"Dividing people in the ways that we're talking about…I see that as…a way of disempowering women. It's sort of like what Martin Luther King realized in the civil rights movement—if you convince poor white men that they are threatened, their jobs are threatened by Black men, then you divide poor people, and you can more easily exploit them. So, something about this conversation reminds of that…unless we find a way to overcome our tendency to group people and…think my oppression is worse than yours, and, therefore, we can't talk—if we can't overcome that than we can't unite and really have the powerful voices that we need to overcome the structure that oppresses people…I don't have a great vision of how we get there, except talking to each other and saying let's not fight among ourselves."

Carmen pushed back against that perspective, saying, "But I don't think critical examination is division. And I think that's how it gets presented very often. That when someone has a criticism of a movement, everyone starts waving their hands in the air and says, 'No, no, no. We can't move forward if you don't agree with us. If you don't agree with our agenda.' So, when someone is critical of something…they're put into the position of being against us. 'You're creating division. We want to create unity. You're creating division by raising this issue'…which is integral to your life! They're not creating division, we're creating division by refusing to listen…And…'we' is a general overarching term, but I think…what you're describing is that reaction—that we need to be unified! Well, yeah, we do, but we also need to listen…"

Despite the efforts of women like Carmen, neutralizing this defensiveness took up much of the meeting's time. Gabby's astute observations about why it was difficult to be a woman of color in a majority-white feminist space were silenced by white women's pleas for unity and demands that criticism be given gently—pleas that sometimes relied on misappropriating and misinterpreting the legacy of civil rights figures like Martin Luther King Jr. This environment had little to offer women of color like Gabby, who already know about the struggles of being a Black woman in America, making it unlikely to do the diversification work it was intended to do.

Although the majority-white Women for Community Change group wanted to address the concerns of all women, their efforts were thwarted partially because their understanding of feminism was thoroughly centered on women's rights. Their passion for empowering women and belief that the best way to do so was to collectively mobilize with other women prevented many older women from realizing that their pleas for unity and fear of divisiveness were

preventing them from building political community with women whose lived experiences diverged from their own, especially women of color. Because they were so ***woman-centered***, they were leery of any criticism they perceived as threatening to women's solidarity—without realizing that it was perhaps their silencing or rejection of such critiques that was ultimately threatening group cohesion. In the next section, we will unpack how these conversations develop in movements less rooted in identity politics before examining how this shift towards to ***post-identity politics*** impacted groups' inclination to integrate men into feminism.

### *Intersectionality Talk, Diversity Politics and Post-Identity Feminism*

Conversations around diversity and inclusion took a demonstrably different forming feminist groups populated by younger women. Many of the young men and women I observed in organizations like University Feminism in University Town and Metro City groups like Masculinity Talks and Male Profeminists United, came of age as activists in a world that had already been profoundly shaped by intersectionality theory and Black feminist thought. As Martha, a young queer feminist in Metro City, noted, "I don't think you can talk about feminism without talking about intersectional feminists. To me, it's the same thing now." For these young feminists, "everything overlaps" [Federico; Hispanic, University Town], and making feminism truly intersectional was essential because it "tries to tie in issues of race and class and gender all together to…make things more complicated…so we have to tackle issues like very comprehensively with a complex approach" [Serena; Asian Genderqueer Feminist in University Town]. For these activists, true feminism must be intersectional if it aimed to bring about meaningful social change.

Considering this 'post-intersectional' orientation, it's unsurprising that the feminist and LGBTQ-oriented spaces I observed were in many ways far removed from the oppressively racist and aggressively race-blind activist groups that defined so much of early feminist and LGBTQ mobilization (hooks 1984). These groups were neither completely white nor solely focused upon a single central identity category at the expense of all others. Younger feminist and LGBTQ groups were particularly conversant in the language of 'intersectionality' and viewed it as a central goal for their organizations. Far from being unaware or indifferent to the absence of diversity in their organizations, activists were often hyperaware of these absences and deeply anxious about ameliorating them. These diversity-related anxieties manifested and coalesced into *intersectionality talk*—an almost constant stream of rhetoric about how 'important' intersectionality and diversity were and what could be done to maintain and increase them.

That this appreciation for intersectionality was common in the accounts of both white and non-white feminists reflected the theory's deep integration. Many feminists of color, like University Feminism's Mindy, embraced intersectionality because it gave them a pathway into a movement that had historically alienated and ignored them:

> Up until college, I was still very much in the mindset of feminism as white feminism…I had noticed…that exclusion of minorities…but I didn't understand what intersectionality as a word meant. I was taught through my friends in high school…through our gender equality club [that]…all oppressions are intersect[ing]…We can't solve this oppression without solving other oppressions…I [could] never understand how I, as an Asian-American, fit into feminism…[Now] I think unless your activism is intersectional, I'm not interested in it. And I think a lot of women won't be interested in it.

These sentiments were echoed by other young women of color, like Amara, an Indian-American straight ally in the UT LGBTQ Frat, who noted that while she would "probably agree with the views of most straight white feminists," intersectional feminism was something she could "identify with more because [she's] not white." To the extent that feminist activism

acknowledged the importance of fighting for racial justice, class inequality, and LGBTQ equity, these women felt they possessed a stake in the movement.

Young white feminists expressed an attachment to the concept of 'intersectionality' as well. University Feminism President, Josie, for example, insisted that "intersectional issues are really…essential to feminism. It's not just, like, we're a movement about gender…We also care about…non-cisgender people, and nonwhite people… I really care about gender issues…but [I] also really care about race and racial construction and things like that. I feel like I've become way more aware of these things...I wonder if part of why I'm so interested…is because I come from a pretty sheltered upbringing." For young white feminists, like Josie, adopting an intersectional worldview helped them understand and come to terms with the privileges they possessed and shaped the ways they approached feminism.

Of course, these young white feminists did not approach intersectionality in the same way, nor were they free of reservations about the increasing centrality of the paradigm. White feminists involved in labor activism, like the members of the Metro City Feminist Resistance Marxist Reading Group,[5] for example, were often cynical about how the identity-focused quality of intersectionality-based mobilizing decentered the materialist concerns they viewed as most consequential for resisting patriarchal domination. These activists, like male feminist Bobby, preferred a feminism that was more "about abolishing the material system that produces inequalities or powerlessness of any group" than the politics of navigating intersecting identities. Another group member, Starr was even more explicitly critical of intersectionality. Despite describing herself as "very committed to multi-racial, multi-gender organizing" and framing

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[5] I did not directly observe this group. However, I interviewed several members to capture a strand of Marxist feminism that would have otherwise been unrepresented in my data. For more details on why it was selected, see the Methods Appendix.

intersectionality as a gateway to a movement she once claimed she didn't "give a fuck about," Starr worried it falsely levels and equivocates systems of inequality in a non-productive way, saying "I don't think…you can understand…patriarchy and things like that without…the framework of capitalism. And I think intersectionality theory…sort of sets that aside and sort of tries to see classism in tandem with sexism. But, to me, capitalism and the mode of production is the only way you can understand." Though these activists worked within an intersectional paradigm, their whiteness gave them a 'distance' from it that made them feel like they could 'objectively' qualify its worth.

What was notable about these white feminist critiques of intersectional organizing is not that they existed, but rather that they did not meaningfully contest the worth of intersectionality as an explanatory paradigm or model for activism. This suggests that intersectionality may be a dominant, if not completely hegemonic, discourse for millennial and post-millennial feminists. It can be challenged, resisted, superficially implemented, and mismanaged by young feminist activists—as we will see in Chapter 4—but it cannot easily be ignored. Young feminists in groups like University Feminism were thus often deeply anxious about how to make their programming appealing to all—not just to women of color, but to queer and trans people as well. Such concerns were raised, for example, when the group planned an event on feminism and health:

> Josie suggested we title the event, "Gender and Healthcare." Bernadette asked, "What about Intersectionality…do we want to signal inclusivity by putting it in there?" Josie shook her head and replied, "I don't think anyone looks at 'Intersectionality' and feels included…how about we call it Gender, Race, Class and Healthcare?" Ginny, a visiting feminist activist, noted "The trans perspective is also crucial to address." Jessica suggested, "How about Health and Discrimination." Josie fired back, "Health and the Gender Spectrum?" Jessica said, "That idea leaves out race." Josie agreed, "Yeah…your idea is better…it allows us to talk about intersections."

This back-and-forth about how to brand and market UFem's Health discussion illustrated the group's awareness of intersectional rhetoric and the centrality of intersectionality to planning the group's events.

This proliferation of *intersectionality talk* meant that any suggestion that there was a lack of diversity within UFem was a cause for serious concern. Josie, a group leader, was often worried about widespread perceptions that the group was exclusionary and unwelcoming to people of color—a concern she explicitly raised near the end of the semester at an Exec Board meeting, saying, "I want to talk about intersectionality before we go…I really want to turn around the stereotype that UFem is 'too white.'" Anxiety about this perception inspired majority-white UFem to reach out to a new feminist group on campus, University Sisterhood, which was run by women of color:

> Johna announced, "I just found out that there is a group called University Sisterhood!... The thing is that they are a feminist group that is having an opposite issue in that they can't get white people to come…" Mel interjected again excitedly, "Oh my God…let's all be friends!" Johna agreed, "We should cosponsor like everything together…small feminist group plus small feminist group equals massive feminist group!" After some discussion, Jessica suggested, "We'll invite them to one of our Exec meetings." Darlene quietly added, "And go to theirs." Johna asked, "Should we co-sponsor the [upcoming] ice cream social with University Sisterhood?" Mel said, "Good idea," but Jessica shut it down, saying, "I don't know. Let's invite them." Lila agreed, "There's not much to co-sponsoring that kind of social. It would just be paying half." Jessica continued, "Right. And I don't wanna just be like, we don't know you or anything, but would you like to pay for half of this social?"

By co-sponsoring events with this woman of color group, the predominantly white feminists of UFem hoped to both help the nascent group bolster its numbers and address its own diversity issues without exploiting them financially.

Other feminist groups did more than talk about diversity in their interactions; they tried to institutionalize intersectionality by embedding it into the formal norms and practices of their organizations. A perfect illustration of such attempts at institutionalization were the ritualized

readings of discussion 'guidelines' and key 'concepts' at the Masculinity Talks discussion group in Metro City:

> After everyone had gone around and listed their names and pronouns, Grace read a list of quick ground rules from her phone: "Always speak in the first person…Be aware of how much space you are taking up. Listening is important—just as important as speaking. Silence is fine. Speak one at a time. Assume ignorance not ill-intent. This is a safe space…" Once she finished, Felix listed a few key terms to help with discussion, including "Intersectionality is the intersection of different forms of oppression including but not limited to race, class, and gender. We want to be sensitive to the fact that the experience of being male is affected by other identities, such as sexuality, race, and class. It is important not to assume that all male members of the group share the same experience of being male/female."

By reiterating this message before each meeting, facilitators tried to signal the that is was a safe space for a diverse array of feminists, signaling the centrality of intersectionality to their group and avoid the exclusionary practices they had seen in other groups.

There were thus noteworthy differences in how gender and its intersections with other inequalities were treated by Women for Community Change, which was run by older women, and groups like University Feminism and Masculinity Talks, which were dominated by millennial and post-millennial feminists. Although both groups were heavily white, they approached questions of racial inclusivity in divergent ways. While ***intersectionality talk*** manifested occasionally in groups dominated by older feminists like WComm, it was largely peripheral and often dismissed as divisive when brought up by younger members in the group like Carmen. In University Feminism and Masculinity Talks, on the other hand, such intersectionality talk was constant, shaping the kinds of programming that was offered, the way meetings were run, and the sorts of co-sponsorships that were pursued. I will conclude this section by showing how this shift in identity politics increasingly decentered women within feminism and helped men understand themselves as movement insiders rather than allies.

### *De-Essentialized Feminism and New Pathways for Men*

This transition from identity-based feminist mobilization to increasingly ***post-identity feminism*** built new pathways for men into the movement. Before exploring those pathways, I will briefly unpack how the woman-centered politics of Women for Community Change sidelined men, treating them similarly to how LGBTQ activists understood straight allies—as valued outside supporters whose participation in the movement was desirable if not expected. I will then show how the attempts of younger feminists to build more intersectional groups decentered women therein, encouraging them to mobilize around feminist ideology rather than a womanhood that many young feminists no longer see as shared. I argue that this move levelled access to feminism, allowing anyone who embraced the feminist label to see themselves as a stakeholder in the movement, including young men who were increasingly understood as negatively impacted by the rigid constraints of a hegemonic masculinity that expects them to always be dominant and on top of the social hierarchy (Connell 1995; Pascoe 2007). This shift has important implications for the politics of allyship in the movement, paving a path for men to understand themselves not as allies, but as tentative feminist insiders.

*Men's Limited Access to Woman-Centered Feminism*

When women remained at the center of feminist activism, men engaged with movement primarily as supportive outsiders. We can see evidence for this point in the largely peripheral quality of men's involvement within Women for Community Change—the University Town activist group dominated by older white women. WComm's leadership was exclusively female for most of the duration of my observation, and its events were predominantly attended by women. When men were present, their numbers were very small. Furthermore, these men's

participation was qualitatively different than that of their female counterparts, as they were vastly more likely to attend entertainment-based events like film screenings than they were to engage in social justice-oriented work like staffing a Pride table. Additionally, these men often attended these more social-oriented offerings *with feminist women* rather than *as feminist men*. For example, one man attended a talk on Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives (LARCs) with his wife so they could better parent their teenage daughter, saying, "We're going through this right now with a 15-year-old girl…I have the Internet, but why not hear from the experts?" Rather than being the targets or initiators of WComm's feminist events, these men appeared to be casual attendees.

This underrepresentation was not something WComm board members seemed deeply concerned about as they went about the daily business of fighting for reproductive justice. Though the absence of other demographics of women (e.g., Black feminists or young women) was occasionally remarked upon, WComm members seldom questioned why men were not coming to the group's events. When the presence of men was remarked upon, it was rarely framed as 'bringing men as a class into feminism,' but more commonly as allowing individual men with specific skill sets to help. This was especially clear in the last WComm meeting I attended, where the board decided to allow Carmen's husband, James, to draw on his budgeting skills to assist Gina with the group's money management. Rather than giving him a formal leadership position, they described James as being "upgraded to *helping* with Treasurer"—keen to clarify that Gina "officially" held the position.

This does not mean, however, that all women in the group agreed that feminism was just for women or that men had nothing to contribute to the movement. Amelia, the President, was particularly positive about the possibilities of bringing men into the movement. In our interview,

she reflected unfavorably upon how an attempt to organize a Take Back the Night March in University Town several years ago considered excluding men:

> Okay, so the men that are here, we're gonna not allow them to march, even though they're gonna do a lot of work and take care of the kids, or whatever it is, right? Putting up the stuff, the posters, and the PR, and contacting people and getting mic systems…And then you're going to exclude them from the march? And you're going along the street and some man joins in...What? Are you gonna stop and out him? You're not gonna do that. So, who have you hurt? You're hurting the men that support…That's a public moment. That's a moment where they really needed to be seen. And so, it took a bunch of talking, but that's where we ended up. So, men have always been a part of that. But it was a real conversation back in '89...I should hope it's not as big a conversation anymore.

However, what Amelia was objecting to here was not the centrality of women within the movement, but rather men's explicit exclusion from feminist events. The men she was talking about in this anecdote were still treated as supporters rather than true insiders.

Amelia also understood that even this tepid attitude remained highly contested amongst her peers. For example, she spoke about the reluctance of a male WComm secretary to seek higher office, saying, "He did not feel that people would accept him as president…I was like 'You've done your time…run for president.' He was trying to fool himself—a complete feminist. He earned it by his actions, right?... If he'd [not] been a man, he would've been there a lot earlier as president.…I've never been in an organization where within three to six months they haven't asked me to be an officer." Although Amelia was supportive of his potential candidacy, this anecdote illustrates the centrality of women within the second wave feminist ideology that permeated organizations like this and the barriers to men's involvement; whereas a man must extensively prove his feminist ***ally credentials*** to even be considered for leadership, a competent woman could rise to the top of an organizational hierarchy with comparable ease—a gender reverse of the 'glass escalator' (Williams 1992) that typically elevates men in women-dominated professions.

This implicit tension between the centering of women in second wave-style feminism and a growing desire to find space in the movement for men only became explicit on one occasion—when the group was debating whether to establish a Meet-Up account for WComm meetings and what they might call it:

> "Meet-Up Women's Empowerment Group," Stella suggested. Patricia chimed in, "I don't like that it excludes men." Bertha suggested, "Meet Other Progressives Interested in Women's Empowerment." Patricia mused, "Something…Social Justice." Karla added, "Advancing Feminism." Stella began to look frustrated, saying snidely, "Pass the ERA!... Joking." Someone else thought out loud, "It needs to be inclusive." Stella chimed in again, "Wonder Women for Equality!" Now Patricia looked frustrated, asserting strongly, "That does not include men!" Stella replied sharply, "I'm sorry, but as a feminist, I don't always care about including men." Bertha turned sharply to her and bit out, "I'm sorry, but, as a feminist, I care very much about including men because we can't do it without them." Carrie nodded, "It's about allies, right?" Stella mumbled under her breath, "Well…Wonder Women includes men…'Men' is in there…."

Embedded in this exchange were two competing feminist ideologies that had distinct implications for the proper place of men in the movement. Stella adopted a traditional understanding that feminism was an identity-based movement that was by and for women—one where including men is not a priority. Patricia and Amelia, however, were moving towards a more contemporary form of gender politics oriented around egalitarian ideology—a framework that not only welcomed men, but rendered their exclusion discriminatory.

Yet, these attempts to draw boundaries around men were awkwardly juxtaposed with the centrality of womanhood to WComm. Even women who wanted a place for men in the movement did not question their overall peripheral quality. Despite Amelia's frustration with men's exclusion from feminism, she was deeply empathetic towards women who wanted to create safe spaces without men, saying, "You have to understand, some women come, and they've been really hurt. So, they've made a generalization that they hate all men, right?...Women are never all going to agree, never." Similarly, Bertha's firm declaration that

feminism needed men co-existed uneasily with a profound skepticism that men could do

feminism well:

> I think their relationship [to feminism] so far has not been stellar... I think men are for the most part completely ignorant…They have lived their whole lives in a sheltered existence…where things came easy for them, things were given to them, things weren't expected of them…And they don't have an inkling of the work that women...do to hold the sky in, basically…So, I was upset at the meeting the other day [where] Stella, says, "I don't like hearing about men." And I'm like, "No, no, no, no, no, we need to have a man involved," because it's important…And I think their role should be the same as ours, I think they should be doing childcare…I think they should be doing housework…And I think they should be doing the reading and the self-reflection, and thinking… [But] they have to be really enlightened men. They have to be men who are able to self-evaluate well and hear themselves and observe their own behavior. As women have done for eons, right?...That's what women are taught to do…I guess men would have…become more like women.…We have walked that hard road, and I don't feel sorry in the least for men…if they have to become more like women.

Bertha's statement makes clear that she is not looking for men to come into feminism because

they will gain something from it, but rather so that women will not have to continue to lose

ground—ultimately, women remained the touchstone for feminism in her mind.

Similarly, though Carrie believed feminism was "helping to free both men and women

from stereotypical roles," she shared with Bertha a belief that "[men] can never fully understand

what it's like to be a woman…they're not women…But if we talk to each other and really listen,

and [they are] really are willing to learn what it takes to be a good ally and not expect cookies

because you say the right thing…they're really valuable…we need them and they need us."

Though these men could join feminism as 'allies' they could never truly be on equal footing with

women. This ***woman-centered politics*** reinforced the boundary between women and men,

treating the former as the beneficiaries of the movement and the latter as outsider-supporters.

This gave women the authority to engage in the sort of ***ally vetting*** that was common within

LGBTQ activism, evaluating men's ***ally credentials*** and determining the extent to which they

could support women's rights. This rhetorical move ultimately reified and essentialized the

boundary between men and women—a tactic that had consequences for people, such as trans individuals and non-binary folks, whose experiences were often erased or invalidated by such binary understandings of feminism.

Although trans-negativity was exceedingly uncommon in my feminist field sites overall, it perhaps unsurprising that the least trans-inclusive group was WComm, whose board of older white women predominantly saw abortion access as a (cisgender) women's issue. And it is worth noting that one of the rare trans-exclusionary statements in my interviews came from Karla, a lesbian WComm board member, who was critical of University Feminism's interest in transgender rights:

> It seems like when I look at the posts on Facebook about UFem that they're very interested in transgender issues…sort of to the exclusion of 'real feminists' as I see it…I think it's somewhat of a feminist issue, but I don't think it's as important as reproductive rights…Trans women…especially people that transition later in life…they haven't gone through pregnancy scares and worrying about birth control and not getting the same pay that a man does and…being…ignored or not heard in a room of people.…I've been in groups where it seems…some of the trans women sort of monopolize the conversation. And I see women as 'give and take,' and sometimes I see a man as a 'power elephant.' And I think that's a hard lesson to unlearn…[And] when a man transitions to a woman and then continues a relationship with a woman, do you call that person a lesbian?…I have some difficulty wrapping my mind around the whole issue…especially if that person chooses not to undergo bottom surgery and is still a woman with a penis who identifies as a woman and has a woman lover.

Karla's reflection on trans issues within feminism and LGBTQ communities spoke to the struggles of older feminists as they moved towards a more trans-inclusive future. She clearly was aware that trans rights were commonly viewed as feminist issues by younger women, was (somewhat) familiar with the lingo, and distanced herself from rhetoric that refused point blank to recognize trans women as women. Yet, she implicitly questioned the realness of trans women's gender by elevating what she perceived to be their masculine past over their feminine present. She also clearly felt threatened by the time and resources trans rights pulled from what

were, in her mind, 'true' women's issues, as well as by the possibility that trans women could demand entry into lesbian communities and relationships.

As such essentialist understandings of feminism came into question, however, this trans-exclusionary feminism was challenged (e.g., Nanney 2017; Williams 2016). Even within woman-centered WComm, Carmen, the group's youngest board member, was keen on pushing for more gender-neutral language, saying that she made sure the group was very careful when applying for social justice grants and that "when we talk about abortion services, we try to use 'inclusive' language." Thus, as feminist groups became increasingly concerned with diversity and questioned the merits of mobilizing around unified understandings of womanhood, adopting a robust intersectional and trans-inclusive feminist politics became more pertinent to feminist activism than 'being' a woman. In the next section, we will show how this deconstructionist, ***post-identity feminism*** created new pathways for men (and more oppressed groups like trans people) to 'become' feminists.

*Deconstructionism, Intersectionality, and the Place of Men in Post-Identity Politics*

The incorporation of intersectionality into feminist discourse and praxis and a growing skepticism towards the 'realness' of womanhood decentered gender identity within groups like University Feminism, Masculinity Talks, and Male Profeminists United. This decentering was apparent in how young feminists in these groups engaged with trans issues. Although trans people themselves were still very scarce in the millennial-aged feminist groups I studied, young feminists were much more likely to understand trans issues as important parts of feminism and explicitly distance themselves from trans-exclusive variants of the movement when asked what kinds of feminism they don't identify with. For example, Grace, a Masculinity Talks facilitator,

noted that "TERF [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism] troubles [are] upsetting to me... I don't share that belief…we should be inclusive [within] feminism." The association between trans-exclusion and radical feminism led young feminists like Trinity to decide they "can't associate completely" with that sector of the movement.

The feminist-identified trans women in my sample, though acknowledging trans-exclusionary forces were hardly a relic of the past in the movement, were thus largely able to carve out space in the movement. For example, Jodie, a young trans woman in Metro City, saw feminism as highly relevant to her life and was frustrated by anyone claiming otherwise, saying, "They don't know how I've 'been female' when I walk across them in the street…when the risks I'm subjected to are the same, when the standards of beauty I'm held to are the same, and when the societal expectations, if anything, apply more to me because I have to doubly justify my inclusion within female spaces…it's doing yourself a disservice to say I don't belong." However, she found that these women "are fortunately a minority within the feminist community," adding, "I think a lot of people realize that…when you accept trans women for the identities that they are… if you acknowledge them as females… you are capturing more of what it means to be female. And you're missing out on that if not." Overall, she saw more trans-positivity than negativity, and admitted, "Honestly, I haven't had that many negative experiences except for trolls on the Internet." The de-essentialized rhetoric of contemporary feminism thus helped make room in feminism for trans people like Jodie.

This de-essentialization of feminism did not only make room for trans people—it carved out pathways for men to enter the movement as well. Rather than treating men as outsider allies whose credentials needed to be subject to additional vetting, these ***gender-blind*** activists understood them as feminists in their own right. Younger women hence drew boundaries around

men in three key ways: 1) invalidating the very concept of gender boundaries through the recognition that gender is socially constructed; 2) understanding attempts to exclude men as similar to marginalizing other underrepresented groups like women of color; and 3) holding women accountable for bad and non-intersectional feminism.

Consider how Donna, a young lesbian who was causally involved with UFem, described feminism and men's role therein:

> There are some people who don't think that men can be feminists because they're not women…that doesn't really make sense to me…If it really just means equality then anybody can be involved…And I don't really think there can be a feminist ally, because you're either feminist or you're not. If you support feminism, then I would just call you feminist…You either support it, so then you're a part of it, or you don't support it, so you're not ... I think anyone can be an advocate of equal rights regardless of your gender… I think it's definitely not just women who have restrictions…I can wear pants or a skirt, but a guy can't wear a skirt…just like men being raised to be hyper-masculine and things like that…It's not just about women, but it's trying to get equality for everyone.

This common framing device used the constraints men faced under patriarchy to argue that they had a similar stake in bringing about a more gender egalitarian world. Jolie, a contemporary of Donna's who was on the UFem Exec Board, agreed that men's distinct standpoint within the system of gender relations meant they had valuable contributions to make to the movement, saying, "I think there are personal experiences that women have that like inform feminism, but…there are some issues of masculinity and hypermasculinity [that]… [men] have more direct or better experience [with]...that women don't have." Using this logic, the ally concept had little relevance to feminism—gender was seen as a fiction, meaning the most salient boundary was between antifeminists and feminists, not between men and women.

Postmodern feminist theory clearly contributed to many young women's affinity for this de-essentialized feminism. Donna justified her ***gender-blind feminism*** by saying, "We're reading Judith Butler in my gender studies class…[so] I don't even know what a woman is

anymore…It's hard to define like what feminism should cover." To many young feminists, especially those who learned about feminism in their college classes, gender essentialism undermined feminist efforts and minimized the movement's impact. Samira, a young Metro City resident who co-founded a **male-focused feminist** group called Male Profeminists United group, outlined a similar disdain for essentialist feminism when she reacted to a men-critical article I asked her to read during our interview:

> I am concerned 'cause I think that 'feminist' in this article is gendered...They don't refer to female feminists, they say 'feminists,' assuming that that means female feminists. And they said 'men allies'...I think that that already, with that paradigm, [it] becomes a problem when there are men that...aren't fully aware of their privilege...and blaming it on the fact that they're 'men' as opposed to blaming it on the fact that they're 'feminists that [haven't] done enough unlearning, which is a critical distinction…That [article] is just...saying [that] a whole population is unable to fully understand these ideologies when…really we all have brains and can fully understand it...Of course, people are going to make mistakes, and I'm sometimes misogynistic too, obviously... But I think…it's difficult to just…completely gender the word feminist...I think [it] is counterproductive to what we're trying to do as a movement…which is separate ourselves from these gendered expectations. But I don't like using the word feminist in a gendered way…because it's an ideology. So, why are we gendering and creating roles within a movement that's trying to dismiss [them]?

In Samira's estimation, relying on gender identity to determine who is inside the feminist movement did not help hold men accountable, but rather gave them an excuse for inactivity. Furthermore, it distracted feminism from reaching out to antifeminist women and unlearning their own internalized misogyny.

A major driving force beyond this deconstructionist bent was the **intersectionality talk** that defined the young feminist organizations that I observed. The anxieties that white millennial feminists that dominated these groups felt about the possibility that their organizations might be perceived as not inclusive of people of color made them exceedingly leery of any rhetoric or action that could be perceived as exclusionary. Male feminists clearly benefited from this because women feminists increasingly viewed attempts to exclude men from groups or

rhetorically render them as outsiders to feminism as failures of inclusivity that were similar if not necessarily identical to marginalizing women of color within feminism. As such, these men directly benefitted from general concerns about diversity and inclusion.

These sentiments were particularly apparent in the observations of and interviews with participants of the three young feminist-dominated groups I studied, especially members of the two *male-focused feminist* groups specifically designed to build bridges with men. For example, in a Masculinity Talks discussion about domestic violence, one casual participant's takeaway from the meeting was an appreciation for how the group recognized that such violence afflicts all genders, noting "feminism is inclusive—it does not just mean women; that's narrow." Male Profeminists United leader, Samira, similarly understood the separation of men and their interests from feminism as an exclusionary act:

> One time I met with a group of radical feminists…[and] they were very, very focused on terminology and…what it means to be a male ally...[asking] 'can men even be feminists?'...I guess I want to move away from that…because I just think that…it's another form of labeling…it just creates separation. It divides... It just limits what we want to do as a group, which is go towards a society that's more inclusive. So, I feel like it's very paradoxical to kind of say that, "Oh, you're a man, and you can't be a feminist"...It's just adding this definition to be exclusionary…Don't we want to live in a society that's just loving and accepting, and we work together as opposed to like "Oh, you've had privilege for thousands of years, therefore you're not allowed into this new club that we just made"?...I do understand the importance of safe spaces, but I do think that in terms of activism, there is no way that we can't have everyone included because then what are we even trying to do?

Samira's rhetorical framing echoed the *intersectionality talk* common within millennial feminist groups; like other adoptees of this discourse, she highlighted of the importance of not being 'exclusionary,' but instead of referencing the inclusion of marginalized feminists, she was worried about "othering" comparatively privileged men. This rhetorical strategy signaled that anyone could adopt a feminist ideology, leveling the distinction between identities that were typically understood as hierarchical. This strategy equivocated the exclusion of the oppressed

demographics *intersectionality talk* was meant to address with 'othering' powerful community members who were once regarded as privileged outsiders.

Young feminists justified this post-identity politics and the inclusion of men in movement by comparing the good feminism of male feminists with the 'bad feminism' of women who were insufficiently intersectional in their rhetoric and activism. Millennial and post-millennial feminists across racial and gender lines were thus often reluctant to assume women were the ultimate authorities of what 'counted' as feminist due to the historical and contemporary failures of white women to sustain a feminist movement that addressed the needs of women of color and poor women. For this reason, Josie, President of UFem, was critical of an article I provided in our interview that chastised men for telling women how to do feminism:

> She seems to be criticizing men who do the righteous thing, but I think that can also be said of women. Like women can say very righteous things about like, "Well, this is what feminism is!" And that can turn into a sort of universalizing thing like, "Of course, you know third world women are oppressed by this or this"…I think righteousness is something that men and women…should avoid. Because women can do feminism wrong. They have in the past at times…My take-away is that they're saying like guys [can't] be you know, an authority…And they shouldn't be telling women how to be a feminist. And I think for the most part that's all true…but I would also say like women should also be wary of saying, "I'm an authority on feminism…I am righteous, and I know what feminism is"…like women might say you know, "Well this is feminism…every woman should be on board with this." When like women in…Uganda might not be on board with [it] …I don't think anyone is a righteous expert on feminism for everybody.

For Josie, women's own intersectionality failures made them imperfect arbiters of who was feminist, leaving space for men to weigh in on the question. The best feminism thus was a feminism that focused on egalitarianism and built cross-movement coalitions to fight injustice.

Rather than having women evaluate men's ***ally credentials*** through a gender-specific vetting process, both men and women's ***feminist credentials*** were evaluated on a more individualized case-by-case basis. Trinity, an attendee of Masculinity Talks and Male Profeminists United, argued that this produced more rigorous and effective feminism, saying,

"It's not because you're a woman, and you're a feminist that you're doing everything right, that you can't have any constructive criticism. And so, as a truth seeker, I wanna hear it all…I don't want any censorship…I want to hear anything that could remotely be valuable. And let me decide if it's valued or not." Alma, a co-President of UFem, took this a step further, arguing that this case-by case evaluation should extend to leadership positions. Though she admitted she had a "gut reaction" or "instinct" to be skeptical of white cisgender men in feminist leadership, she ultimately concluded, "I don't feel too strongly about it because like I have faith that the general body will elect a good person…if the person is qualified and if they're like genuinely feminist…I can't really complain." When identity was an unreliable measure of feminist authority, actions became the primary arbiter of what was feminist.

*Post-Identity Futures*

The attention to intersectionality that accompanied and bolstered these critiques of essentialism created new possibilities for feminist activism. Thinking about feminism intersectionally inspired the young feminists in my sample to question the binary between male oppressor and female victim that defined much early feminist mobilizing. For example, Mindy, an Asian-American feminist affiliated with UFem, noted that it is particularly important to deconstruct monolithic feminist identity politics to make space for collaboration with men of color:

> I think it's a non-intersectional view…to say men can't be feminists. I think that's pretty offensive actually, because I would see a lot of men of color as being more supportive of my cause than white women…Rich cis white women, you're telling me that—I don't want to play Oppression Olympics—but that you need feminism more than the queer poor black man? Like, how does that make sense? Because feminism is so complex, there's so many intersections of oppression, and your gender identity is not the only factor…And [to say] that men universally as this general group can't be feminists…that's upholding…these binaries and it's generalizing all men into one group, all women into

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one group…And also feminism is not just about equality, right?...We're re-envisioning a new world where gender is different—at least my idea of feminism…and in this new…ideal kind of world…we can't have this division of just men and women, right?

Mindy felt that grouping all men as patriarchal oppressors and separating them from the movement made enemies of marginalized men who could be collaborators, foreclosing important opportunities for coalition-building.

These efforts to include men were not simply rhetorical—they shaped who was in leadership positions in feminist groups and what sort of events they ultimately organized. For example, unlike WComm, who had no men in positions of power and did not create male-oriented events, younger activists, like the women of UFem, insisted feminism was project for anyone could buy into, and they lived that ideology in tangible ways. Though UFem's membership and leadership were majority women, men were visibly present and their presence was largely a non-issue. During both semesters of my observation, a man named Karl was the group's Vice President, and the second semester, he was joined by Tim, a young man who was elected to manage the group's digital presence. There were also multiple men who were frequent attendees of group events. The significant involvement of men in these spaces meant that there was often programming designed for them, including a professor-moderated discussion about masculinity and a screening of the popular film, *The Mask You Live In* (Newsom 2015), a documentary covering the damage toxic masculinity does to men.

The presence of men was even more pronounced in the two ***male-focused feminist*** groups I observed in Metro City. Masculinity Talks, for example, was founded by two women, Grace and Judy, who were frustrated about the absence of men in a feminist reading group they were both a part of. Grace eloquently described how their experiences with this ***woman-centered*** inspired them to develop a new kind of feminist organization:

It was all…female or women-identified. A couple people in the group were really adamant about having it remain that way…and I sort of questioned that. I was sort of like…"It would be good, almost, to have kind of male voices come in and read these texts with us"...[But] they wanted it to remain a safe space for the other people…I was talking to Judy about how that sort of frustrated me, and how I wished that there were spaces where men and women could come together and discuss feminism because that just wasn't happening, and she completely agreed. And she said that she had been thinking…about young boys, and how they don't get any kind of education, really, in terms of feminism or gender equality…We came together on this, and we were, like, "Okay, so what can we do to get men and boys thinking about feminism, and you know, gender equality?"…We were, like, "We have to do something. We had to get men talking about feminism"…I suggested that we make it masculinity-focused, because that seemed like an effective way to get men to come and talk to us because they will have experiences in masculinity.

Male Profeminists United had a similar origin story. Founded by Samira and a male feminist named Edwin, this group was also invested in finding a pathway for men into feminism, a fact that was made clear at the first meeting I attended:

Samira convened the meeting, clarifying the mission. She said that she wanted the group to have two focuses—"internal, which means learning and de-socializing ourselves, discussing certain types of masculinity, healing ourselves, living a feminist lifestyle in a non-feminist world…and external, which is recruiting male feminists to the movement…this is my primary focus…I've noticed few men are active…[or] people identified as the male gender…Something I've thought a lot about is what a great role men can play moving forward." Edwin added that men need to think about "how to comport oneself in a feminist space, how much space you take up, when it is appropriate to contribute—when we as male pro-feminists can engage with conflicts…I've seen some touchy instances in feminist groups that caused me to second guess how I've [acted]."

The purpose of this group was to provide a place where men could develop their feminist identities without harming women, in the hopes that they would take these lessons and deploy them in more political activism.

### *Conclusion*

Young feminists, unlike their older counterparts, thus are operating within a movement that mobilizes around gender egalitarian ideology more so than gender itself. As contemporary

activists question the wisdom of organizing around unitary models of gender that naturalize gender difference and obscure diversity, there has been a shift towards a post-identity strand of feminist politics. This politics blurs the boundaries of feminism, providing men with pathways to insider status that were previously unavailable to them and remain unthinkable in many other identity-based movements. Should this trajectory continue, it possible that the male feminist ally may be deconstructed out of existence. This post-identity politics thus creates exciting new opportunities to expand and diversify feminist activism.

However, alongside those opportunities, new challenges have emerged that feminists must negotiate. When a social movement is based upon ideology, identity politics becomes less salient within its bounds. This leveling of identities within feminism has some advantages. Respondents often spoke appreciatively about how examining masculinity and incorporating men into the movement allowed feminists to address gender-related problems that had been neglected. For example, they argued that a feminism that is more interested in deconstructing oppressive gender norms than in advocating exclusively for women's empowerment can spend time and resources on gender issues that are pertinent to men. However, these blurred identity boundaries produce challenges for activism—gender may be a social construct, but it's a construct with real consequences that post-identity politics struggles to grapple with. In the following chapter, I will unpack these consequences, exposing the costs and limitations of this post-identity feminism.

# CHAPTER 4: CAN (AND SHOULD) EVERYBODY BE FEMINIST?

We saw in the last chapter how post-identity feminism addressed many of the challenges of woman-centered mobilization. By building solidarity through the collective adoption of an intersectional feminist ideology instead of around a shared womanhood (that could not capture the full scope of women's experiences), millennial and post-millennial feminists in my field sites were able to work towards a feminist praxis that did not erase trans people or ignore the needs of more marginalized women, while helping men understand the movement as relevant to their lived experience. However, these post-identity politics, far from being a panacea for problems of earlier feminist waves, created new challenges for the movement. In the first part of this chapter, I will illustrate how these post-identity politics facilitated the development of a ***power-blind feminism*** that made it difficult to address male co-optation of feminist spaces and complicated the development of 'safe spaces' for women. I will then show how frustration with such abusive male behavior merged with the continued ***intersectionality failures*** of contemporary feminism to reconstitute the very gender binary post-identity feminism was created to contest.

## *The Costs and Consequences of Post-Identity Feminism*

*The Risk of Power-Blind Feminism*

When men were understood as feminist insiders, women no longer had a firm, privileged position from which to vet their credentials. While men who were disruptive of feminist spaces or expressed troubling antifeminist sentiments could certainly have their general feminist credentials called into question by women, this was perhaps less a case of an insider evaluating the quality of a supporter's allyship than an instance of two insiders disagreeing about how activism should be done. Post-identity politics thus leveled the distinction between men and

women in the groups I observed—a move that led to an individualistic ***power-blind feminism***

that masked the privilege men brought into activist spaces, making it a challenge to call men out

for bad behavior.

The difficulty of negotiating masculine domination in a post-identity feminist movement

became obvious during one University Feminism (UFem) event:

> As the participants of Trivia Night started to disperse, a young man named Brian walked
> to the front of the classroom to make a statement. He authoritatively announced, "I just
> came back from an activist conference, and I am pissed off…People got fired up after the
> recent sexual assault scandal on campus, but aren't interested in doing anything. Why are
> we here? To talk and feel good about ourselves? If so, that's OK…but I haven't heard
> anything this semester about responding in this group…We said we were going to
> spearhead it…We did a couple of events, but that's it…I'm just so over how fucked up
> institutionally this campus is…If you're not, come talk to me…I don't want to be the
> feminist group from Portlandia. I want to drive social change!"

> The co-President, Josie, asked, voice tinged with irritation, "Do you have any concrete
> suggestions? He proposed, "I want a sit-in at the Board of Directors' meeting!" "We
> already did one," Josie replied. Brian scoffed, "A polite one…I want us to sit in and say,
> 'Thank you, Board of Directors…we are the new Board of Directors!...You haven't done
> shit!'…We have so much more power, and I want us to use it." "I'm down for gettin'
> rowdy," a young woman named Johna chimed in. Another woman in the crowd
> wondered, "How do we not alienate people?" "We're already a small group," Josie
> agreed. Brian dismissed her concerns, saying, "That's just defeatist…We already aren't
> getting respect."

> Josie tried to ground the conversation by saying "As radical as we are as individuals, we
> are a University group…if we are too radical, we will lose that designation…what's
> better to have a feminist presence or be radical?" "So we should just bow to the system so
> we don't lose resources…that's the cornerstone of privilege," Brian angrily interjected
> People other than Josie were visibly irritated. For example, Katherine, another board
> member, asked, "Do *you* have a proposition or are you just telling *us* to do something?"

> These tensions persisted after the event in question—with Brian's co-option of the
> meeting being a heated topic at the next group get-together. Josie, the President was
> particularly irate, saying, "I saw him in class the day before and he did not give me any
> indication he was going to do something like this…And he never came to the Exec Board
> and said that he had an issue with the way UFem did things. He went directly to our
> membership—membership we can barely maintain because of people's negative
> perception of feminism! And said what the leadership is doing is not feminism…He
> doesn't seem to realize what UFem is…we're not Brian's radical social change
> organization—they aren't university affiliated. We are. We can't just go out and engage

in radical activism. That's not our job—our job is cultural education… Don't go in front of our membership and say UFem isn't doing its job if you don't know what its job is...I'm sorry…that's pretty much all I have to say—I actually have a list. I literally left that meeting in a rage."

The Brian incident, on the surface, had all the makings what my respondents consistently defined as bad male feminism. With his announcement, Brian commandeered an event that was supposed to be about feminist trivia to start a conversation he wanted to have about the group's insufficient radicalism, pressing attendees to stay well-past when the event was meant to end. In addition to dominating the space and demanding the group's time, Brian adopted an aggressive and chastising tone as he 'explained' to the women of UFem how to most effectively engage in feminism. And many of the women of UFem shared Josie's anger at how Brian behaved that evening. However, what was most interesting about this anecdote was not what Brian did, but how UFem members interpreted it. Rather than responding to Brian's co-optation of Trivia Night as a case of poor male allyship and vetting his credentials accordingly, the group primarily framed it as a personal betrayal and an individual-level failure at feminism.

This reluctance was clear in one of my interviews with a member of the UFem Exec Board, who was reluctant to understand Brian's antics as examples of bad male behavior, saying, "Brian, I found so pretentious. I'm sorry…like the things he would say… I'm sorry this is going to come out as rude…They were not very insightful…but he would talk about them like he was being so intellectual and he was bringing up these things that no one else would think about, and he would ask these questions to clarify things that were obviously not needed to be clarified unless you were being completely ridiculous…Every time he would like raise his hand to talk I would like cringe. Because I was just so sick and tired of hearing him." Despite these critiques, she insisted, "I don't think it necessarily has to do with him being a male feminist so much…him, in general, I just did not like, which is [*pause*] a personal thing…I think if it had

been anyone I would have been like, seriously?" When asked whether his gender at all contributed to her discomfort, she admitted, "I guess…because—yeah, he is a dude who just kind of likes to hear himself talk in a feminist space—that kind of adds a different flair to it, doesn't it? (*sighing*) I don't know." However, though she was aware that Brian's behavior technically fit the description of masculine domination of a feminist space, she was clearly reluctant to draw a strong boundary against him as a man.

When feminists conflated the socially constructed nature of gender identity with a belief that gender is not real in its consequences, this could lead to power-blindness within the movement. The desire to acknowledge that there was no universal experience of womanhood and that binary gender norms were limiting could easily give way to a denial that gender mattered. However, much as not 'seeing' race effectively means refusing to see racial power dynamics (Bonilla-Silva 2013; Bobo 2011), refusing to see the gender of activists like Brian could hence lead to a ***power-blind feminism*** where male privilege went largely unchecked. Seeing these conflicts as the result of individual bad acts rather than understanding them part of a systemic problem, hobbled many organizational efforts to negotiate privilege.


*Re-essentializing Men and The Risk of Male-Centered Feminism*

When such ***gender-blind feminism*** coincided with efforts to directly recruit underrepresented men into the movement, these men could become centered in a way that unintentionally worked against the post-identity politics of feminism. Such attempts to include men often drifted towards a re-essentialized ***male-focused feminism*** that sidelined women and even flirted with antifeminist narratives of men as the true victims of sexism. This slippage was common in UFem's Masculinity-themed events, which focused heavily upon the emotional costs

weathered by men under patriarchy. To draw attention to these issues, UFem invited Rose, a popular educator at Uni, to facilitate a group dialogue about masculinity and to moderate a discussion of the film, *The Mask You Live In* (Newsom 2015). At the first event, Rose laid out a clear case for what feminism and its male supporters gained from thinking critically about masculinity:

> Men are a huge presence in our culture…we have relationships with men, and there are guys in here…For a group to be so present in culture, it's miraculous how little we talk about their experiences…In terms of privileged groups, we seldom talk about the power group…Whiteness is largely invisible…So is straightness…and maleness to an extent as well…We talk about violence and how it is a result of patriarchy…We don't talk about the experiences of men…not that we should ignore oppression…but [their] history is not talked about.

Rose helped the meeting attendees unpack masculinity by drawing a 'Man Box' on the board and asking them to brainstorm what attributes made someone a man; the goal of this exercise was to help them realize the impossibility of any man living up to those expectations and strategize how to build healthier masculinities.

Central to both this exercise and her post-film de-briefing were concerns about the emotional capacities of men. At each event, she mentioned boys' troubled relationship with crying. At the *Mask You Live* In screening, she pointed out, "Say we have a boy and we have a girl, and they get a skinned knee. They both cry and feel sad…My friend is a police officer, and he will comfort his three-year-old girl, but his six-week-old boy cried, and he said, 'he needs to learn to buck up.' Then he turned to me and said, 'Wow…did I just say that?'" Through anecdotes like this she tried to convey to men that they had a stake in feminism and that they also stood to benefit from it. And there's some evidence that such events were successful in getting that point across as men were typically more present in spaces and events where their issues were centered.

These conversations had some potentially undesirable results, however. At times, Rose's attempts to bring men into feminism had the (perhaps unintended) consequence of equivocating the hardships men and women face under patriarchy and downplaying the advantages men possess. This tension between including men and acknowledging their complicity in patriarchy was particularly prominent in an anecdote Rose told about a student who tried to talk to her boyfriend's roommate about gendered violence; she recalled, "He said, 'I find that so offensive,' and shut down." Rather than reflecting on how the roommate's privilege might be driving his resistance to the conversation, Rose empathized with the resistant man, saying these conversations are hard because "most men aren't perpetrators, but most perpetrators are men…which means that a few men are doing a lot of damage." This was not the only time she deployed such rhetoric as a boundary-bridging strategy. At another point in the dialogue she noted, "Women take my class, and they're like 'that's why that conversation with my boyfriend or my father went like that'...not all men are cookie-cutter…some men…not all men…but some guys aren't trying to be an asshole…they just don't know how to have that conversation." While more nuanced than the "not all men" used in MRA circles to discredit feminists and devalue their concerns, these rhetorical strategies were defensive and did not acknowledge the disproportionate amount women suffer and the benefits men receive.

Such strategies provided a pathway for men into feminism, giving them a 'good guy' identity to embrace and helping them distance themselves from the 'bad men' that hurt women— and Rose's cross-gender popularity at the University suggested that it was an effective strategy. However, in less practiced hands than Rose's, this male-centering tactic sometimes meant discussions of masculinity and men's stake in feminism drifted towards antifeminist talking points. For example, after the film screening Rose facilitated, one woman noted, "I'm glad to see

guys here…after seeing the part on gun violence, it's clear we're not the only ones oppressed in our society." Statements like these brought men in, but the use of words like 'oppression' to describe the damage done to them by patriarchy rhetorically equivocated centuries of women's subjugation with the unexpected costs of masculine domination.

This equivocation of suffering sometimes made young feminists sympathetic to antifeminist critiques. For example, in Rose's Masculinity discussion, Bernadette, a UFem board member and Women's Center volunteer, described an interaction with a hostile man at a campus activities fair, saying, "I was staffing a table from the Women's Center and a man came up to me and asked if we had a Men's Center. I was like 'Well, no, but men and women can come to the Women's Center.' He was not having it and wasn't really listening. He left and was like, 'I'm just saying.' I was really resistant to what he was saying 'cause he was kinda mean. And then I thought about it, and I guess he had a point." Bernadette's attempts to bring in men by de-essentializing feminism left her with limited options for responding to men seeking to invalidate 'women's spaces.' She found herself boxed in by her own rhetoric, leaving her little choice but to concede an antifeminist point, even though she clearly did not agree with it.

This dynamic was not unique to UFem, playing out in my Metro City field sites as well. For example, at a Male Profeminists United Meeting, Edwin, the co-facilitator urged us to treat the protesters at abortion clinics as victims of the patriarchy, saying, "Should we avoid simplifying these people?...We all experience patriarchal rule…[They're] brainwashed…We shouldn't treat them as ignorant, stupid, and savages." With this statement, Edwin used de-essentialized feminist rhetoric to silence the women who were angry about the protesters and made excuses for the actions of one of feminism's most violent and dangerous opponents (Medoff 2015; Pridemore & Freilich 2007). These leveling strategies not only allowed men to

adopt a 'victim' identity that absolved them of interrogating their own privilege, they also made 'victims' of movement outsiders with a history of working against feminist interests, paralyzing efforts to resist them.

These examples cumulatively showed how gender-blind forms of feminism provided opportunities for men to find a place in the movement, helping feminism address new issues like men's difficulties building relationships and sexual violence against men that were ignored or under-examined in its more woman-centered waves. However, focusing on gender rather than women's issues invited new problems for feminist mobilizing. Most notably, unreflexive attempts to de-essentialize feminist politics not only erased gender difference, but obscured the workings of patriarchy itself. In the face of such leveling of identities within the movement, 'men are hurt by patriarchy, too,' could easily slip into 'men are just as hurt by patriarchy as women are,' and, if left unchecked, could devolve into antifeminist rhetoric asserting 'men are patriarchy's real victims.'


*Finding Woman-Centered Community When Feminism is Gender-Blind or Male-Centered*

If such power-blind centering of men made feminism uncomfortable for women, a return to more ***woman-centered feminism*** might seem appealing. However, my research suggests that such woman-oriented spaces were difficult to access. It is true that woman-centered groups have far from disappeared. In fact, both Masculinity Talks and Male Profeminists United were established in reaction to such spaces. However, these sorts of protected spaces were often contested and felt increasingly irrelevant to many of my respondents. The difficulties of maintaining such woman-exclusive spaces in an increasingly post-identity movement were illustrated by the experiences of the short-lived Feminist Circle group, which explicitly excluded

men. The organizer had previously attempted to start another group exclusively for women, but

found resistance and indifference to her mission:

> So I had this women's writing Meet-Up, and this guy showed up, and I was like "This is a woman-identified space…Are you a woman and identify as a woman?"…He was like "No…I'm not…I'm interested in the differences between masculine and feminine writing." I was like "This is a woman's-only space," and he was like, "But what if this was a LGBTQ space, and I was questioning...but I'm not." I even gave him a chance to be an asshole and be like "I identify as a woman," but he didn't even do that…and one woman was like "I don't care if he stays"…and I was like "But I care, and it's my Meet-Up!" And he was like "I think we should take a vote," and I was like "This is not a democracy, dude." I was just really disheartened by how few women seemed bothered by his presence. It made me really discouraged from organizing a woman-only event."

The difficulties the organizer had in galvanizing interest in a woman-only group, along with the

proliferation of ally-bridging groups like Masculinity Talks and Male Profeminists United,

showed how thoroughly post-identity feminism had become mainstreamed, with older male-

exclusionary, identity-based models becoming displaced by ideology-oriented ones that offered

men a path into feminist activism.

However, there were unintended consequences to the sacrifice of such women-oriented

spaces. Even people that were supportive of post-identity feminist spaces, like Judy of

Masculinity Talks, had reservations about rejecting women's spaces all together, saying "There's

a need for them for sure….I feel like the world at large is generally a giant safe space for

men…everyone should be able to go out into the world and feel like they can be themselves

without risk of anything happening...But women can't do that a lot…So female-only spaces are a

place where you don't have to think about being female…You can just be you." Thus, even some

of the women who were most invested in encouraging men to invest in feminism were reluctant

to completely relinquish spaces where they didn't need to negotiate the patriarchy.

However, it was important to these young feminists that such attempts at re-centering

women not come at the expense of trans people. Tosh, a lesbian Metro City feminist, for

instance, felt it was possible (and extremely important) to balance trans-positivity with addressing issues relevant to cisgender women, saying, "There has to be room in feminism for trans women. I think there also has to be room in feminism…[for] people specifically with vaginas because…that is an important part of a lot of people's lives…It's a point of shame for a lot of people because of the suppression of periods, because of the inequality of the orgasm… [but] having a vagina can't be a requirement to be a woman…It's this very tenuous place where there needs to be room for both." For people like Tosh, safe spaces where men's presence could be regulated and controlled were important, but the criteria for their exclusion could not be based upon biological sex.

Two of my trans women respondents highlighted promising strategies for escaping this dichotomy between women-only spaces that were trans-exclusionary and gender-blind feminist spaces that struggled to eject cisgender men. Jodie, for example, showed how women-only spaces could be remade as trans-inclusive spaces if one drew the boundary along the lines of gender identity rather than biological sex. She noted how meaningful it was to have her cisgender women friends include her in woman-centered bonding rituals:

> My friends have really gone out of their way to include [me] in things that were otherwise—not otherwise—but were women's spaces. One friend of mine said, "Well, first of all, you're coming to my wedding. You're dancing at my wedding. I'm rooming you with my other female friends coming in from the Northeast. You are absolutely on this side of the wedding…And I'm going with you to [the boutique] before they close…and we're buying you a dress." And she went out of her way to make sure. And I've been invited to other women's spaces that my friends have put together. And it's just an acknowledgement. "Oh, Jodie's on the bridge now."

Jodie's friends, rather than eschewing a gender divide altogether, reaffirmed her gender identity by *de-essentializing womanhood* through ritualistically including her in gendered rituals. Their willingness to do so showed that woman-centered spaces were not inevitably trans-exclusive ones.

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Chrystal, another activist in Metro City, was involved in a group called Trans Ladies

Luncheon that resolved this issues in a different way. Rather than reimagining women's spaces,

this group opted for ***compartmentalizing womanhood***. In other words, the Trans Ladies

Luncheon developed a safe space within feminism and the broader trans community specifically

for trans women:

> I think it is very important for people to have community if they choose to—in a space
> that feels safe. And I think that that is especially important for people who identify…as
> maybe someone who is targeted or marginalized…And to have that that room to sort of
> talk about problematic shit that cis people say…just to have the space to vent and be
> understood and not have people that get defensive around you all the time and derail the
> conversation—have people who truly understand and share your experience…That's why
> Trans Ladies Luncheon was created…. [The founder] wasn't creating it to exclude trans
> men. She wasn't creating it to exclude your partner who is a cis lesbian and straight
> ally…She specifically put that in the mission, too…"So you may be asking
> yourself…"My boyfriend's a trans man can he come?" "Nope. We love trans guys…We
> love our allies! We love trans men and non-binary people! This space is…for trans
> ladies"…It's very much against like policing someone's identity...like anyone who comes
> in and like says "I'm a trans lady"…can be…It doesn't matter if you show up in board
> shorts and a polo, you can still call yourself a trans lady. You can still say your pronouns
> are she/her and hers…No one's going to kick you out of the space…It's there for people
> to talk about their shit and to explore their identity and their gender expression.

This strategy built space for trans women that they might not find in traditional feminist spaces

dominated by cisgender women. Much like the women's consciousness raising groups of the

second wave, these sorts of groups created spaces for marginalized people to heal without

interference from the dominant group. Though perhaps not a long-term solution for transphobia,

this strategy included trans women in feminist spaces without sacrificing gender-segregated

buffer zones.


*The Paradox of Post-Identity Feminism*

It was this tension between the desire to include men and trans folks and the need to

protect the interests of women (cisgender and trans) where the tug of war between woman-

centered and post-identity feminism was most keenly felt. The post-identity impulse to decenter identity politics opened new opportunities for men to see themselves in feminism. Yet, these efforts to extend invitations to men in a movement that increasingly individualized feminist politics, had unexpected consequences. Such initiatives could integrate men into activism by blurring the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, but they did so at the cost of centering those men so extensively that they ironically re-essentialized the very binary they were trying to deconstruct. As a result, efforts to implement *gender-blind feminism* all too easily gave way to a *male-centered feminism* where calling out troubling male behavior was a challenge. This led some feminists to advocate for a re-centering of women that challenged cisgender men's presence in certain sectors of feminism—a move that tentatively re-established the gender binary, at least in some groups.

### *Intersectionality Talk & The Limits of Post-Identity Feminism*

In the last section, we saw how post-identity feminism created pathways for men into feminism while hobbling activist strategies for negotiating male privilege in gender-blind or male-centered organizations. However, it is easy to see how activists might come understand this inability to "other" men within feminism as a fair trade for a less identity-obsessed movement that is more inclusive of a variety of feminist perspectives, including those of marginalized women (e.g., women of color). In other words, it might be worth it to tolerate an inability to correct male missteps in the movement if this de-gendering process decentered white women. Yet, a closer look at the *intersectionality failures* of groups like University Feminism reveals that embracing *intersectionality talk* and caring about diversity did not necessarily translate into truly inclusive organizations.

While the young women of UFem claimed to value inclusivity, they also were resentful when critiqued for not sufficiently ensuring diversity:

> During a conversation regarding critiques that UFem is exclusive, Bernadette sighed in frustration, "UFem really can't win here—the thing is, if you try to include people, you're doing it wrong, and, if we didn't, it would look bad." Josie, the President agreed, saying, "[My Muslim friend] Rabiah is like we're all white, right? She didn't like that. She thinks we talk about feminism from a Western perspective...She doesn't want us to talk about what feminism is…She has a point about UFem's demographics…but that's not something UFem is responsible for. I see our problem as attracting people to our group." This prompted Bernadette to ask, "Is Rabiah is running for Exec?" Josie replied, "No…She's just like 'You guys are too white, but I'm not going to your group.' This does a disservice to the group because then we can only get knowledge about women like Rabiah and their feminism secondhand—I can Google stuff that matters to Black women…but that's that." Bernadette was more ambivalent about the taken-for-granted desirability of diversity—"I want Black women in UFem Exec, but I wouldn't want to turn to them for everything."

This exchange reflected problems in the group's outreach to communities of color. They were sensitive to the importance of inclusivity and wanted the group to be more diverse, but, much like their older counterparts in Women for Community Change, they put the onus on women of color to bring about that inclusivity. And because they were unwilling or unable to do this outreach work, women of color were scapegoated and treated like the cause of the problem rather than its solution.

Mindy, an Asian-American feminist who was the Outreach and Activism (O/A) chair and the sole woman of color on the newly elected Exec Board, suggested a structural solution to this problem at the tail-end of her first Exec meeting—create an O/A co-chair position and appoint another woman of color, Josie's friend Rabiah, to help her run it:

> Mindy started by explaining her reason for wanting a co-chair, saying, "UFem has been criticized in the past. It's a lot for one person to take on. It's hard to be the only person of color on UFem Exec next year. It's not that I don't love you all…[but] we really wanna to make UFem more inclusive. The co-chair not being a person of color…that's not going to help us be more inclusive…My friend, Rabiah, said she would be willing to step up to be co-chair." There was initially some positive momentum for the suggestion with Mel noting, "I'm 100% on board with adding someone…I know Rabiah personally. I'm not

saying she will be it, but I really trust her opinion on things. I think it's a good idea. It would be nothing but helpful to have her."

Jessica, the President-elect, conceded these points about representation, but argued, "Just in terms of what UFem isn't doing well, I think the problem is that we're just not doing enough…Representation is a problem. We are diverse in terms of…the types of people we draw, but not in racial background. But making one Exec position wouldn't make it diverse. I know you have a friend in mind, but we can't decide to add a position with it in our minds that we're making it diverse. We need to create a pool of applicants. We need general membership to be more diverse."

Mindy questioned her logic, noting, "It's not just representation. I feel like past events have often not been relatable. People with different experiences don't think they can come. We need to convince them their story matters. The problem with building from the bottom-up is that it's not that we're not doing outreach, but it's the events we hold and the language we use. That's why representation matters…it's not a good environment right now…" Jolie, a graduating member, agreed, saying, "I'm Asian, Latina, and a woman. I can't separate any of those from my identity, but I have to choose what things to invest my time in. I think representation is important, but I just don't think we're going to get more people if we don't have events that engage them…we need to focus on creating meetings that people care about."

Bernadette, another white board member, wanted the group to instead focus on all the progress that is being made, asserting, "I want to say that although UFem hasn't focused on outreach with other groups, this year we have been moving forward. Whether it's far enough is up for debate, but we're really making strides…I just wanna put it in a more positive light." Her friend, Misty, similarly downplayed UFem's issues, saying, "I do think UFem is turning some corners…it's a very different organization than it was when I first joined…like Bernadette said, either way I see us as improving…just adding an Outreach and Activism chair is great for us."

Johna, another white board member, moved the meeting in a more confrontational direction, saying, "Are we allowed to know whether Mindy would stay if we didn't add a second position? Sorry, I don't mean to put you on the spot." Mindy replied, "I would love to be involved, but I've been a token for so long…this is just another time where I've been the only person of color in a feminist group…It's hard being the only person to bring difficult things up…not that people here aren't trying, but it's hard to always call out…That's kind of where I'm coming from…I like the organization…It's just hard." President-elect, Jessica, who spent most of this conversation guardedly crossing her arms and checking email on her phone, asked pointedly, "Does that mean if we had the position, and it didn't go to a person of color you'd still step down?" Mindy replied, "Probably…I don't want to put UFem in a complicated position, but I don't want to not do the best job…this will just be another time where I'm the one person of color of five people in an Exec Board."

After some debate, Alma, the past co-president, suggested, "If we wanna keep it transparent, we could have a referendum. We could ask the membership if they're OK with it. If not, then we can have an election. That way it's still democratic." Jessica responded, "My main issue is that going into it saying we've picked Rabiah—I don't think it's fair to the general body since Rabiah didn't run…What if someone who didn't run thinks they'd be a good candidate, but we've picked Rabiah? I'd like the idea of the referendum if she had run in the election…what about others that didn't run?"

At the next Exec Meeting, where Mindy was notably absent, it was revealed that the group had opted to have a co-chair. However, instead of appointing Rabiah, they were allowing her to run for the position against other interested parties:

> Bernadette asked, "How many are running for Outreach/Activism?" Jessica replied, "Six…and only one person is a person of color." Josie said, incredulously, "They're all white?…There's no other person of color?" Jessica said dismissively, "Well, I don't know their other background or religion…We'll pass that bridge when we come it …We'll see how it turns out." Jolie, the past-board's sole person of color, said, "Rabiah would be such a great Outreach and Activism chair!" Tim, one of the two white men in Exec echoed, "Team Rabiah!" Jolie added, "Alma made a good point at the meeting that representation might not seem important, but it matters."

> The others at the table were more resistant. Bernadette sighed, "I had hoped that sitting in at the meeting would change Mindy's mind a bit." Josie, the past president, replied, "They've been contacting me a lot individually." Jessica added, "It seemed like it was happening under the table." Bernadette was very defensiveness, saying, "I'm frustrated. A lot of people think diversity is important…That may be easy for me to suggest we have good representation." "Representation is important. We don't want UFem to be white," Josie agreed. "That's why openness matters. I tried to be open, but I think my face showed I was annoyed," Bernadette admitted. Josie added, "Neither of them were that involved before elections. Rabiah wasn't even at the election."

> "Whatever happens, we'll just let it go. We made the right choice to have open elections…At least things will be fair, Jessica concluded." "Even if she ends up not being involved, we'll take the criticism," Josie agreed. Despite her tensions with Mindy, Jessica insisted, "I want her to be a part of it." Josie was more pessimistic about that prospect since "they already feel alienated." Bernadette, however, remained focused on her anger, concluding, "It's hard not to take it personally. I definitely take it personally…I think, 'What did I say to make it seem like-' but it's important to take a step back and not make it personal."

Despite Bernadette's claim that Mindy and Rabiah's critiques of UFem's whiteness shouldn't be taken personally, it was apparent that these individual hurt feelings had already begun to shape the fate of her campaign.

By the night of the special election, the tide had clearly shifted against Rabiah. To make matters worse, Mindy—Rabiah's key proponent—was unable to attend the election due to illness. Still, Rabiah gave a passionate pitch for why she was a good fit for the position:

> "I love UFem, but I don't love the way it runs now," Rabiah said. "It claims to be for everyone, [but] I don't love the fact that it's mostly white. People of color look at UFem and see that it doesn't represent their voices. We want to ensure they don't feel uncomfortable. I have experience with multiple multicultural groups…I want to change the direction of the organization…I want to create a safe space for feminism that all people can use. I want to implement programs on 'white privilege and 'Black feminism.' And I can do the minority collaborations the group needs, including ones we have yet to tap into. Also, I am good friends with Mindy, and can work well with her to get things done."

> After her presentation, she was asked probing questions about how she was going to execute her vision.  A general member, Claire, asked, "I know you are really busy. You're involved in lots of things…how will you balance that with UFem?" She answered, "I've cleared my schedule. This is one commitment I care a lot about." Misty, a board member, asked, "What are examples of some of the things you're thinking about? It seems lack of diversity is clearly important to you. What are you doing to directly address that?" Rabiah replied, "For example, Mindy and I talked with Josie after the sex positivity talk you had—about how the title of the event could be changed or the nuances changed. It's hard when you don't come from a minority background to not produce events that have a white feminist perspective." She noted that building coalitions with other groups will help us do this work, adding "We shouldn't just be checking off a list like 'we covered...these people before.'"

Themes of intersectionality and diversity were significantly less prominent and nuanced in the speeches by the rest of the candidate pool, which had decreased to four white women by election night. For example, even one of the more intersectionality-oriented candidates, Lila, seemed to mistake solidarity with sameness, concluding, "If you don't believe all organizations are feminist and that we're working towards the same thing, you're missing the point!" During the Q&A, she

was asked to elaborate more on how she would build those coalitions. She responded, "If elected, I'll contact the head of the Black Student Association and bring UFem members to BSA meetings, just to show solidarity. And BSA is not the only one—I don't remember the other acronyms—but I want…to go to their meetings." On the surface her solution was like Rabiah's proposal, but she lacked the pre-existing network connections and familiarity with antiracist campus groups that would nurture those connections.

After their presentations and short Q &A's, the candidates were asked to leave the room for the group to collectively deliberate and then vote. It was here where the anger and resentment that had driven the "back stage" (Goffman 1956) tensions amongst UFem Exec members were brought to the attention of the general body:

> Johna, a Board member, begun this derailment, announcing to the group, "It's important to acknowledge the fact that Mindy will step down if her best friend doesn't get the position." Josie tried to de-escalate the oncoming conflict by qualifying, "We're not sure that is happening," but the damage had already been done. Bernadette continued the escalation, fretting, "I'm worried about her wording of things—like saying 'we don't want people to think UFem is a joke.'"

> Claire, a general body member who casually attended events, took particular issue with Rabiah's understanding of intersectionality and her prioritization of race over other intersecting identities and gender-related problems: "I agree race is intersectional and important, but it shouldn't be put above others. She didn't mention sexuality or STEM representation. It's sad Mindy didn't show up to the meeting to discuss concerns. It's a big problem, 'intersectionality,' going forward." Bernadette agreed, adding, "I think ideas of reaching out to the minority groups—we've agreed to do that. Anyone who is elected will be held accountable. We don't want to speak for other experiences, but I don't think being a woman of color makes you able to speak to all woman of color. Rabiah mentioned the Black Student Association, but that's one group. I'd be wary just of having representation where we still do the same things."

According to these critics, electing a woman of color like Rabiah was neither necessary nor sufficient for true inclusivity; they seemed to be simultaneously suggesting that anyone could do the work of reaching out to other marginalized groups and that Rabiah was ill-suited to this work because she couldn't embody all oppressed identities.

White candidates did not seem to be held to such high standards. Whereas the much of the post-election discourse seemed to be oriented around whether Rabiah was sufficiently qualified, acceptably committed, and adequately intersectional, the other candidates were not subjected to similar scrutiny. Instead, they applauded the persistence of women like Lila, saying "I was impressed…she didn't get elected last time and she came back." Another general member, agreed, adding, "Lila went to every meeting I've been to." While Rabiah was framed, as being too invested in non-feminist things, too critical of UFem, and not invested enough in the community, candidates like Lila were praised for their commitment to UFem. There was very little reflexivity within the group about why women or color like Rabiah attended the group less, much less why white women could have found it easier to dedicate themselves to the community.

That is not to say that Rabiah had no defenders or that no one was critical about the racial dynamics of what was going on. For example, Rachel, a young white feminist from the broader UT community who sometimes attended UFem events, cautioned the group not to ignore diversity, warning, "When you look at an Exec board of a big company and see that everyone is white…I don't see them leading change. I'm not saying every white person is evil, but do we want our Exec board to be like mayonnaise?" However, critiques like Rachel's were rare. Instead, Mindy and Rabiah found the language of diversity and inclusion weaponized against them; Misty closed the deliberation with a clear example of such weaponization, boldly asserting, "I think we do a disservice to Mindy and Rabiah if we vote on them because of their race and not look at their credentials. We want them because they are good, not to make them the poster child—that was what Mindy was looking at when she asked for the co-chair. We don't want to tokenize them."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this 'fair' election did not work out well for Mindy and Rabiah. In the end, Rabiah lost the election, and Mindy resigned. Mindy's co-chair idea was implemented, but instead of Outreach and Activism being run by two women of color, the offices were given to Lila and Darlene—two white feminists with minimal ties to other marginalized communities on campus. When the UFem Exec board reconvened the following semester, its officers were completely white. Alma, a former co-President, worried that the group's diversity issues would worsen as a result:

> The only people who they've heard of giving the criticisms [that UFem is too white] are Mindy and Rabiah… if it weren't for Mindy and Rabiah…I probably would not be aware at all that that was something that people were talking about…which I guess just goes to show how easy it is to like be unaware… It's clear when we're in meetings [that woman of color] Jolie's the one who always brings up intersectionality. And maybe if she wasn't there someone else would bring it up eventually, but…it's obviously not at the forefront of people's minds…When Mindy was talking about how she…didn't want to be the only one who was always…bringing up intersectionality and feeling like the only one who was…paying attention to it, and everyone in UFem…were kind of like, "We really do bring up intersectionality though"…To an extent that's true. That usually does end up being a part of our discussions, but I was kind of like holding the back of my tongue, like, "Okay, we do talk about it, but we aren't the ones bringing it up"...Honestly, it might have worked out better for UFem in the long run…for Rabiah to have been elected.

Thus, Alma worried about what this election would mean for the internal power dynamics of the group.

Others, like Rachel, were more concerned about what this choice might mean for the ability of the group to nurture ties with other organizations on campus:

> We're trying to show that we empathize…"We care about you. We want to be allies with you." How does that look to them? It's terrible…It's the worst outcome that could have happened…I even spoke up while I was there like "This is the opportunity for change that we have in front of us right now. Are we going to let it go past, again?"…It's just a huge bummer…especially when UFem is trying to become a more active organization, a more inclusive organization…We have failed already... I'm pissed off, audibly. And, I've talked to a few other people…who feel the same way. But there's enough people in UFem who don't feel that way that speaking up is not going to make a difference anymore… I was just sitting back watching…and being like, "How is this happening in front of my eyes right now?"

Despite the confidence of white Exec members like Jessica and Bernadette that they had managed the co-chair question as best as could be expected, there were contingents on the margins (and even at the center) who had serious reservations.

However, these reservations could not compete with the ***structure-blind antiracism*** that thrived in the obscured power dynamics of ***gender-blind feminism***. Respondents wanted inclusion, but found the structural changes necessary to encourage diversity at odds with their personal understandings of individual rights. This ambivalence was present in the reflections of Josie, one of the past presidents, on the Mindy conflict prior to the election:

> I absolutely welcome criticism. We need that kind of criticism to grow… But…we have to have democratic, transparent elections. So, if [Mindy] wanted this to be the case, I wish she had brought it up earlier. Because…we could have just…voted on a co-chair [during the actual election]…But I feel like now that it's getting later and later in the semester, it's going to be harder to have a process that is transparent…Because I don't want the general body to be like, "Okay, we had these elections, and then we just decided to add somebody new that we wanted." Like, I want it to be very democratic.

Josie saw redistributing power without the direct consent of the general electorate as unfair. And, it is easy to see where she was coming from—if the members of UFem were all equally powerful and capable of having their individual will enacted within the organization, then such a top-down decision would indeed be a self-evidently corrupt use of power.

However, Josie arguably undertheorized the extent to which seemingly 'fair' democratic practices might ultimately disadvantage people of color within UFem like Mindy and Rabiah. As we've learned from classic political economists like Alexis de Tocqueville ([1835] 2003), democratic practices without proper safeguards can lead to a 'tyranny of the majority' that disenfranchises minority groups. We can see evidence of such 'tyranny' in UFem. By holding a special election within a majority-white organization, UFem set a high bar for Rabiah's success—pitting her against four white candidates and having her credentials evaluated by a

majority-white electorate. Josie and other board members saw nothing troubling about this because they believed themselves to be racially sensitive. However, research suggests that people of color are often evaluated more harshly than their white counterparts, being less likely to be hired for jobs (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan 2004; Pager & Quilian 2005) or viewed as authoritative and qualified for leadership positions (e.g., Ayman & Korabik 2010; Rossette et al. 2016; Rossette, Leonardelli, & Phillips 2008; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis 2010). The likelihood that implicit biases (e.g., Jost et al. 2009) and unconscious racial stereotypes shaped leadership choices and merged with the overwhelmingly white demographics of the organization called into question the dominant narrative that electing a co-chair through open elections was the most equitable solution.

The ***structure-blind antiracism*** of many UFem members thus obscured how the racial dynamics of the group may have made it harder for Rabiah to occupy the organization and build ties with its members. For example, Alma noted that Rabiah's disengagement with and criticism of the group was contrasted unfavorably with Lila's longer, more positive engagement, saying, "Rabiah doesn't really come to many UFem meetings, whereas Lila has come to pretty much all of them, and she's always very friendly and likable so I could just imagine…that the UFem general body like knows Lila, and they like her, and she obviously seems like she has skills that would be helpful to Exec…I could see why they would vote for her." From an individual standpoint, this sentiment was understandable since common sense suggests one might wish to elect an officer with longer ties to the group who cares about its success than one with more peripheral investment.

But this individualistic framing ignored the structural barriers Rabiah perceived within the group (and within Western Feminism more generally):

I'm part of UFem, but…I'm not an active member because I don't like that they're very westernized in their feminism. And I have a problem with Western feminism obviously… as a woman who wears the hijab because they really like their white savior complex… When you talk about colonialism and…people are like, "Oh the scarf is so oppressive, and blah blah blah"…[And] when we talk about UFem like it's really hard because…I love a lot of the young ladies…but I also think that when I go their meetings, I feel alienated because I have a different feminist experience. And my Black friends have different feminist experiences…The queer students I know have different feminist experiences. The queer students who aren't white have different feminist experiences…I mean Asian women have a history of being fetishized and silenced, and they have a different feminist experience…I was with my friend, Mindy, and we both talked about how we felt tokenized because I was the one Muslim girl they reached out to, and she was the one Asian girl, and [we] were like, "Nah, this isn't okay." So…we stopped.

Taking this less than welcoming context into account, Rabiah's under-involvement appeared infinitely more understandable. Furthermore, her evaluation as less "friendly and likable" than Lila became more troubling, begging the question of whether critiques of white feminism must be sacrificed for white feminists to see women of color as suitable for positions of power in majority-white feminist organizations. Much as diversity hiring initiatives are often undermined by committee members who falsely believe that they are 'objectively' evaluating a candidate's 'fit' for a position (Sensoy & DiAngelo 2017), UFem's electorate were largely non-reflexive about how their decisions were mediated by their own social positions and those of the candidates they were evaluating.

These individualistic models of fairness also ignored the extent to which the elections themselves were structured to allow the defensiveness of a segment of white feminists to sink the former's campaign. It was clear in the meetings preceding the election that there was much resentment of Mindy's desire to appoint a co-chair and how she went about requesting it. Tim, a white male UFem member who supported Rabiah, explicitly mentioned how this resentment tainted the electoral process in our post-election interview:

…The whole roasting of Mindy…the talking behind Rabiah's…back at the election…I think Lila's gonna win. Just 'cause so many people [were] rebelling against Rabi…So

many people [in] Exec have turned against [Mindy]. I mean I haven't 'cause I still like her, but…the way she speaks and her ideas in general don't jive with the white female ideas. I think about like the 'interrogation' at the exec meeting… I mean that's what it was…or just people in Exec talking behind Mindy and Rabiah's back—that sort of riled them up… And there was Jessica and Bernadette who were also…talking to other people and saying negative things probably… Like I didn't witness it, but that's what I suspect…By the time Rabiah talked, there was so much negativity towards her…You saw several people at the election be like, "Oh, we shouldn't choose her 'cause of her skin color," implying that that was the only reason that we'd choose her…That was… like dog whistling… It seems to mirror like anti-affirmative action rhetoric…It seemed like there was almost like a white persecution complex at UFem on a small scale.

This backtalk could have been contained within a small subset of the UFem electorate were it not for the decision of the group to have an open post-speech debate about the candidates' suitability. Without this open forum, Rabiah and Mindy's critics might not have been as able to funnel the sort of backtalk Tim was outlining above into the election decision-making process.

Blindness to structural barriers to Mindy and Rabiah's inclusion along with widespread defensiveness concerning the critiques they made of the organization led to a troubling *weaponization of intersectionality talk* wherein superficial and individualized understandings of diversity and intersectionality were paradoxically used against Rabiah and Mindy during the election. Any attempt to talk about Rabiah and Mindy's race was interpreted as reducing them to their racial identities, which made it difficult to talk about what their candidacy added to the group. This re-interpretation of the 'tokenism' concept (Kanter 1977; Garcia Lopez 2008) was profoundly structure-blind, presuming that any reference to Rabiah and Mindy's position in the structural hierarchy of U.S. racial relations was a denial of their agency as individuals. UFem members' commitment to individualistic notions of fairness and abstract ideas of transparency led them to engage in *structure-blind antiracism* projects that were ultimately unable to advance the interests of racial justice in their community because they ignored the actual causes of their diversity problems.

The direct result of this ***structure-blind antiracism*** was a profound disconnect between the organizations that white feminists thought they were creating and the organization most women of color on campus perceived. For white feminists like Josie, UFem's former President, the group was actively engaging in a serious effort to diversify—efforts they believed that people of color would recognize if they just came to UFem events:

> What we've been really trying to work on and think about is how to be a group that is more attractive. Because we're already completely open. Like, part of the frustration to me, is on some level, I'm like, "There's no dues, there's no application, anyone can show up"…We try to create a space that's welcoming…I think part of the problem is that we don't know exactly how to be welcoming…because we're not always aware of the kinds of things that are bothering them and how to work around those things—not work around them—but how to be open and welcoming….What I'm concerned about is that some of the criticisms [Mindy and Rabiah] brought against UFem…just show that they don't know UFem at all… You haven't been to UFem. How can you criticize something you haven't actually been to?

For Josie, UFem's bad reputation is undeserved, and women of color would see that if they just have them a real chance.

Rabiah and Mindy, however, knew a very different UFem, a group that was, at its core, a white feminist organization—albeit one with filled with white feminists they personally liked and thought were trying. Their experiences running for UFem Exec ultimately reaffirmed their shared belief that the group was not really for them. Mindy, for example, when reflecting on her short-lived time on the UFem Exec Board, said, "I think they try sometimes. I'm not saying that…they don't care…but… it's not the right environment currently…And a problem with [a] group that is so homogenous in racial aspect[s]…is that when…things that…could be perceived as offensive or exclusive to minorities come up, no one has experience there to say, 'Hey, stop. Like this is not okay'… I was in Exec for probably like 4 weeks …I went to those meetings, and I didn't feel comfortable bringing up problems when I saw them because I'd be the only one…

I'm still supportive of the organization…but [that's] why it's not the organization for me and why I ultimately quit leadership." Rabiah felt similarly to Mindy:

> I am personally very glad that I didn't get the position… partially because… I don't think I would have been happy…I think it would have been too white washed for me…I would not have felt comfortable at all…The few meetings that I did stay the full length for…I would try to interject with my perspective as somebody who wears hijab and is a Muslim…but I felt like people kind of ignored it like it was the elephant in the room when we were talking, and [it] would go straight back to the white feminist perspective. They're a great group of people, and I know a lot of people in the group, and I love them a lot, but I also think that they don't know much [about] my perspective, and, how could they? Because they haven't sat down and talked to me about it. And it doesn't feel like they're willing to."

Whatever positive feelings Mindy and Rabiah had about individuals the group, UFem never really made a case that it added anything to their lives.

Cumulatively, the case of UFem illustrates what happens when diversity initiatives were inattentive to structure—they produced individual-level solutions that did not adequately address the real causes of the problem. Dealing with the diversity issues in UFem would require either an intentional top-down change in how the organization was run (e.g., by appointing people of color to positions of power) or a revolutionary grassroots mobilization on the part of the electorate to recruit more people of color into membership and leadership roles. Without true diversity in leadership, it was difficult to see how UFem could shake its white feminist reputation. In this conflict over leadership in UFem, the limits of post-identity feminism became apparent. While these young feminists embraced the idea that gender is socially constructed and largely eschewed gender-based mobilization in favor or drawing boundaries around all who embraced intersectional models of feminism, they did not live this in practice—their blindness to how their actions were exclusionary, pushing out women of color and centering white women as a result.

### *Re-Making the Gender Binary in Feminism*

We saw in the last two sections how post-identity feminism brought men into the movement, but did not ultimately provide activists with the tools they needed to neutralize male privilege or respond to the intersectionality failures it was meant to resolve. In the last section of this chapter, I will further examine the limitations of post-identity feminism, exploring barriers to men's integration into feminism. I will first outline how the visibly embodied quality of gender limited how deeply men could blend into feminism and how this shaped their position within the movement. I will then show how intersecting identities limit which men get to claim feminism for themselves, illustrating how complex metrics of advantage and disadvantage impact whether men's ***feminist credentials*** are favorably vetted or rendered questionable.

*Male Feminists Instead of Feminists Who Happen to Be Men*

The long history of feminism as a woman's movement, coupled with the often visibly embodied nature of masculinity and the continued underrepresentation of men in feminist spaces, made men's insider status profoundly precarious. As such, the desire to include men in feminism in my field sites often co-existed with an impulse to keep women centered therein. Felix of Masculinity Talks provided a definition of feminism and its goals that outlined this tension poignantly:

> Feminism is a movement and belief system that aims to dismantle patriarchal oppression in all its forms… So, to me, it's not just about liberation of women but also…queer and trans people, and also the liberation of men from the ways in which patriarchy causes us harm…I think some staggering statistic like 80% or like 90% of all the violence that's committed in the world is committed by men…. And a vast majority of it is towards like other men's bodies…it's all wrapped up around patriarchal masculinity and emotions around how like violence is the ultimate way to kind of solve your problems and come to final decisions and these sorts of things…[So] I think like feminism is for everyone, but it definitely centers woman, fem, trans people.

Felix's understanding of feminism melded traditional models of feminism as women's liberation with contemporary ideologies that focused on the general ills of patriarchy, attempting to build a movement where cis men have a role but not at the expense of decentering women and trans people.

However, in practice this was a hard line to draw. This difficulty came across most clearly as respondents reckoned with how to label men within feminism. While almost no respondents objected to the classification of men as feminists and most resisted framing them as 'allies' as a result, men's feminism was often qualitatively distinguished from that of women, and women were sometimes seen as having a privileged position to weigh in on the movement. This linguistic ambivalence was particularly apparent in Trinity's interview where she discussed why she preferred to call men 'male feminists' rather than 'pro-feminists' like Edwin's group did:

> I think that if a male pro-feminist is...not acting properly then you have to… tell him to check his privilege because it's already included in the term…There's 'male' in there…Privilege is already in the name. So, you don't need to add another separation with the 'pro.' We understand that he's speaking from a position of privilege... I don't know about later on, when you get to a more equal society, but right now, I feel like the male feminists have a specific role that's not exactly the same as a feminine feminists'… I feel like there's no need for this distance of putting the "pro"…There's no risk that it's not going to ultimately be in the women's hands…They created the whole thing… As soon as a man starts saying something misogynistic…in that moment, then, I see them as a man. But when he's advocating for a cause and nothing he is saying is problematic… [just] saying all the right stuff, [then] I see them as a human being. I see him as a fellow feminist. I don't see him as a man…He becomes a man when his privilege comes out, and he's not checking his privilege, and he says something offensive.

With this rhetorical move, Trinity simultaneously built men a pathway into feminism while acknowledging that they still had power and must be checked accordingly. Masculinity Talks facilitator, Logan, was cognizant of (and resistant to) this linguistic 'othering,' saying, "I've said I'm a male feminist to kind of…drive the point home that you can be a man and be a

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feminist…[but] no one's ever said, 'I'm a female feminist'…So, there's no reason to say "I'm a male feminist.'" Much like people who enter occupations dominated by the opposite gender, male feminists were treated as exceptional and their experiences were understood as particular in a way that worked against giving them true insider-status.

Reservations about men's involvement tended to be particularly poignant around feminist issues that directly affected women's bodies. Women for Community Change member, Bertha, despite being otherwise very encouraging about men becoming involved in feminism, drew the line at the notion that men had something to say about abortion access, noting, "The only thing that I see that women do…that men can't do, is give birth…Once a woman is pregnant… just stay out of it. It's her choice…That's the only area where I'd say men have no right to say anything." Though many feminists in my sample were glad to have men serve the movement, there was a widespread agreement that men should not speak directly for women or about experiences they know nothing about.

The question of leadership within feminism also posed barriers to men's complete integration. There was frequently resistance to men in feminism taking on leadership roles, especially the highest positions and those positions within groups that were specifically dedicated to 'women.' Karla, a WComm board member, for examples, addressed both concerns, noting, "I certainly don't want a man to be President of our organization...A woman's voice [needs] to be head of an organization called the Women for Community Change...I wouldn't feel comfortable with it…I would feel suspicious about it if there was man at the head…Are they really in the interest of women if a man was the President?…I've seen men take over and force their views in a way on other people without really getting a consensus about things…Who's going to fight for our rights the way the oppressed women are?"

While younger feminists were often more willing to entertain the notion of men's leadership, even those who expressed a willingness to elect men, such as Masculinity Talks founder, Grace, often set conditions for that leadership:

> I think the biggest potential risk [of having men leaders] is that women are deprived of more positions of power or that men end up getting more credit for something that…was born [of], and fought for, mainly by women. I would hate to see that co-opted, almost, by men. But most feminist men I know are very wary of that and don't want to take any attention away from women…and they're kind of just happy to kind of be in the sidelines…So, if there were, you know, mainly men at the top of feminist organizations, that would be my concern…But I would hope that any men that would be involved in a feminist organization would be fairly 'vetted,' with like two or three certain processes that would make it clear whether or not they really understood what it was that they were fighting for.

In this reflection, Grace maintained that masculine leadership was not inevitably a problem, but implicitly distrusted the credentials of potential male leaders and wanted to pre-emptively limit the scope of male leadership. The prospect of men in leadership thus raised significant questions about the limits of men's insider status. In these moments, the gender-blind evaluation of *feminist credentials* that men were typically subjected to in post-identity feminism gave way to a more traditional 'vetting' of *ally credentials* that had much in common with the boundary-drawing occurring in woman-centered feminist spaces and LGBTQ activism. Thus, when men gravitated towards leadership positions or spoke too seriously about women-specific issues, they became hyper-visible as 'men' and were vetted accordingly.

This "othering" led some men to question the proper extent of their engagement with feminism. Men in my sample, despite typically feeling comfortable applying the feminist label to themselves, were often profoundly anxious about their place in feminism and reluctant to speak as an authority. For example, Donnie, when asked if he would ever run for a feminist leadership position in University Feminism, said, "No…I believe very strongly in self-emancipation of different oppressed groups… the vast majority of [feminism] is about fighting for women's

rights, and I'm not a woman, so I think it's definitely their struggle." This reluctance frequently persisted, even amongst men like UFem's Tim, who held leadership positions. Despite working on the publicity team, Tim insisted, "I wouldn't want to be the activist in outreach or the vice president or the president really…I wouldn't want to know I had too much power. I…wouldn't want to be the force choosing the main direction. I wanted to be a voice and have influence but not be steering the ship… I'm not the face.... I'm behind the keyboard, so to speak."

This questionable insider status could occasionally lead to paralysis, as men struggled to figure out how to show they cared about the movement without investing too much and being accused of 'white knighting.' Edwin, a founder of Male Profeminists United, was particularly prone to these bouts of paralysis—much to the consternation of his cofounder, Samira. During one meeting, Edwin brought up a debate that occurred during Masculinity Talks about how to best intervene if you saw gender-based violence amongst people you don't know:

> Edwin argued, "We mostly should…avoid the 'white knight syndrome'…What do you guys think?...It's something I'm still trying to figure out…What about a case that's less violent? Say there's a situation where two women are walking past a group of construction workers and they say, 'Ladies, Smile!" and I say, 'No, don't smile'…If I stop them, am I making the violence worse…or should I tell the men 'Hey, how about you smile'?…I think I err on the side of not doing anything. I don't want to look like I'm stepping in to solve their problems every single instance. Others might feel like they should step in and act. What can we do as feminists?…How do men know….are they letting it go on for too long or are they intervening too early?"

> Trinity gamely replied, "It depends on the context." Samira, however, was visibly frustrated, saying, "I disagree. It's your privilege not to be affected…that [attitude] creates a fear of intervention. I think the first goal has to be keeping people safe. It's fine then if she's like 'Get outta my business.'" Edwin agreed, "Oh, I say that we should make sure everyone is safe…but that's not my goal…My goal is to alleviate sexism…It feels sexist for me to step in and try to solve her problems." Samira exclaimed, "This shouldn't be that complicated…Privilege exists whether you use it or not! If you refuse to enter into a situation, that does not take away from your privilege. The only thing you can do is use your privilege to work towards equality…it becomes a problem when you unfairly benefit…If I was in trouble, and I needed help, I wouldn't care about your privilege…I think it's best just to say, 'Hey is everything OK?'…you are not addressing it in a sexist way as a male, but rather as a human."

Edwin clearly felt that his maleness was intrusive within feminism, causing him to so thoroughly

second guess the most feminist action in any given situation that he often did not react at all.

Samira appreciated Edwin's conscientiousness, saying, "I love working with Edwin. I think he's

very competent...He does no mansplaining whatsoever…just like solidifies my belief in men."

However, she found his propensity for self-reflection non-productive:

> He's hesitant to do external things—not because he's a bad person or because he doesn't want to. It's because…he's aware of his privilege and is very hesitant to even do external feminist activism because of his privilege…And he's been told that at radical feminist group meet ups, like "You shouldn't be calling yourself a male feminist, you should be calling yourself a pro-feminist ally. Don't put that label"...So he feels restricted, he feels hesitant, and I don't want that because I need him to be in arms with me…[to have] the confidence to speak freely...I think [it's] necessary, to be aware of the difference, 'cause we're not the same. But I don't want that to affect your behaviors in terms of…how much you're involved in activism...He says, "I'm an ally," but he's very hesitant of overstepping his boundaries...but I need you ... 'Cause there's not anybody like you doing this, and I need more people like you…

The disconnect between Edwin and Samira's understandings of what men should and should not

be doing in feminism speaks to the precarious and contested nature of men's insider-outsider

status in feminism.


*When Some Men Are More Inside Than Others*

 While the displacement of identity by ideology within feminist politics created new

pathways for men into the movement, access to this precarious insider status was not equally

distributed across demographics of men. Much as not all feminist women felt equally seen and

served by the movement, not all men were able to carve out a stake therein. Who could be a male

insider and who was pushed outside was not random. Possessing another stigmatized

marginalized identity could serve as an inroad into feminism. For example, some marginalized

men in my sample could use the more nuanced language of intersectional feminism to assert a

stake for themselves within the movement. Myles, a white Muslim immigrant from Eastern Europe who attended Masculinity Talks, for example, used his experiences with Islamophobia growing up to empathize with women's struggles with sexism:

> My family was Muslim, and I had a lot of discrimination towards me as I was growing up—people asking me when I was in high school if [I was] gonna blow up the building…I had changed my name when I was 19—my first name was Ishim when I was growing up…I was working in a building, one of my coworkers who operated the elevator to take…the tenants up, he came back… [and said] the lady in the elevator asked him if I was going to blow up the building because she found out my name was Ishim…[And] when I was a freshman, I couldn't get an internship…I was really knocking myself out. I was taking extra classes. I was really getting good grades…There was never a time where I had anything that I was entitled to when I was growing up—struggled all the time. So, I sent these resumes out and didn't get any replies. Nothing! Zilch! And then I got my citizenship. I got my citizenship. I changed my first name to Myles. And out of the blue…in the back of my head I've always wondered whether maybe it's discrimination beforehand…like I'm on the other side of that now a little bit… I see that glass ceiling for a lot of people.

Thus, Myles' own experiences with marginalization, coupled with his recent ability to be fully recognized as a white man due to his name change, made him aware of both the discrimination women face and the privileges many men have, which contributed to his feminist awakening.

Alonzo, a college-educated Black man involved with Masculinity Talks and Male Profeminists United, also felt his marginalized racial identity gave him unique insight into patriarchal domination. During our interview, he observed, "I think this is a point that a lot of feminists miss—[patriarchy is] really a system on a societal level that's run by a handful of people. Now that doesn't mean that all men do not share a common privilege. But there's certain men that have a lot more privilege than the rest of the male population." Alonzo felt his position as a Black man not only gave him a stake in feminism, but perhaps even a better vantage point within it than other feminists possessed because he was able to see how some men benefit more from systems of inequality than others.

But what happens when these marginalized men engaged in behaviors that respondents widely agreed were disruptive? Did the marginality of these men make them more disposable within groups that remained heavily white and affluent, or did the fact that they are marginalized on other dimensions absolve them of the privileged ways they sometimes used these spaces? For example, as was mentioned in the introduction to Part II, Myles had a habit of verbally taking up a lot of space and being unfamiliar with feminist theory. In his interview, Myles made it clear that he embraced more essentialist understandings of gender that typically exceeded the comfort level of contemporary post-identity feminists:

> There's physical differences that are undeniable and that have to be acknowledged for us to truly be able to have our ideal… If we're going after some…pie in the sky definition…that's gonna be very difficult…For me I'm looking at it from a more practical point of view…because I think that there is huuuuge implications on the practical side with the differences. That's one of my fears a little bit…I wanna make sure…that the approach that I have is something that is realistic in our lifetime…It may be a little bit honestly cis-biased…I'm kind of…a little bit away from the kind of gender fluid side of the argument.

Despite identifying as a feminist and recognizing his attitudes were at odds with the orthodoxy of the feminist groups he was embedded within, Myles was committed to a belief that there were meaningful differences between men and women that feminism had to negotiate if it wants to succeed. This propensity for deploying essentialist frameworks combined with Myles' tendency to take up space and adopt a paternalistic tone sometimes created tension within the group.

Myles' essentialism and tangents came up explicitly or implicitly in many interviews with Masculinity Talks participants as examples of disruptive male behavior, and the tensions generated within the group were understood as deeply gendered rather than as individual failures. In Felix's interview, for example, when asked if there were downsides to having men in feminism, they outlined a moment when Myles' lack of knowledge of gender issues was particularly disruptive, compromising the safety of the space for a non-binary participant:

There have been… instances in Masculinity Talks where…this person [i.e., Myles] is like talking about like "Oh like feminism makes sense on paper, but like you can't [do] feminism if you're trying to pick up a girl from the bar." And then they went over to this non-binary person...like "Would you go for this, if like I came up to [you] in a bar?" And [they] like [did] not identify as woman, and he made a lot of assumptions. He's like "Why don't you identify as a woman?"…"You need to shut up…and get out!"…And I understand the level of understanding that he is coming from, but…you need to…understand…to be here. Otherwise, you're dangerous to other people… I had to intervene…sort of shut him up…then afterwards I had to speak to him, and I had to apologize to the person that was affected…But we like talked about it, and they were fine…They've been coming back, so it's like things are fine now… This is the second or third meeting, and he's learned since then, but that was kind of a disaster.

The missteps of Myles were framed, not as a degendered failure that any feminist could make, but rather as a common example of a man importing patriarchy, heteronormativity, and cisnormnativity into the space. His ability to continue to occupy the space was thus contingent on Felix's ability to make things right with the offended non-binary person. Thus, Myles, despite possessing marginalized identities, including a minority religious affiliation and immigrant status, was not always able to use those identities as a shield to buffer him from criticisms of his privilege. Though post-identity politics should have made it hard to police this behavior, Myles' whiteness and maleness, coupled with the depth of his disruptiveness, compromised his ability to be a true insider in Masculinity Talks.

To understand why Myles' marginalized identity did not provide a pathway into feminism and why his manhood was marked in a way that was atypical for post-identity feminist spaces, it is useful to compare his reception to that of Alonzo, a highly educated heterosexual Black man who was a regular fixture at Masculinity Talks and Male Profeminists United Meetings. Like Myles, Alonzo occasionally dominated the space and was critical of women therein, talking down to women who disagreed with him. This somewhat condescending attitude came across in a post-Masculinity Talks meeting of the Male Profeminists United group where

he disagreed with Trinity, another member, about whether the previous discussion group gave up

too easily on non-violent solutions to violent altercations:

> Alonzo asked, "You say there are other options than violence. Like what?" Trinity replied, "It was something I didn't really want to bring up in the group before, but…I feel that there must be better strategies." Edwin said, "It's something to put in our consciousness…if you are not gonna fight it might be possible to distract." Alonzo was cynical, saying, "It's hard to distract if things are already out of control." Trinity insisted, "It can offer them an out. They might want to stop, but their ego feels like they need to follow through…it helps if something gives them a chance to stop the experience. Jaime gave an example like spilling a drink…if they persist, I suppose you have to engage." Alonzo said a bit scornfully, "I'm sorry, but how is 'spilling a drink' supposed to do anything?...If someone is in the middle of assaulting someone, how is spilling a drink going to help?" "Forget the drink, the point is the distraction," Trinity said. Alonzo replied, "I still don't think it would be that useful in some cases…maybe it's because I've seen more violence where I come from…I think sometimes perpetrators will respond to nothing but a show of strength."

Alonzo, rather than try to understand Trinity's point of view, immediately mocked it as absurd,

using an oblique reference to his upbringing in the inner city to imply that his marginalized

identities gave him a better vantage point for evaluating the best solution to violent interactions.

However, it was arguably not Alonzo's disadvantages that protected him from being

perceived as privileged male outsider—instead, it was his class commonality with Masculinity

Talks participants and his extensive reading of feminist theory that gave him an in. This ability to

'talk the talk' of middle-class feminist discourse allowed him to claim an insider status that

Myles could not attain, speaking about feminist issues in an authoritative way and occasionally

even elevating his theoretical interpretations of issues over the perspectives of women who had

more closely lived those experiences. For example, when Samira, the Moroccan-American

feminist who co-founded Male Profeminists United, raised the question about why Morocco was

so homo-negative, he swiftly positioned himself as an expert on the subject:

> Samira noted, "I'm from Morocco, and I want to talk about homosexuality in Morocco. It's illegal there to be homosexual—well, to engage in homosexual acts…I'm interested in how someone's lifestyle can be seen as a threat to a culture …so we can have a

conversation here about why it is that men who are feminine are seen as a threat to patriarchal culture." Alonzo immediately interjected, "I'm going to use this opportunity to plug Pierre Bourdieu again. He is a sociologist who studied the region…After studying the culture he found that a lot of it resembled France…he coined the term 'masculine domination'…As to why we have this vitriolic reaction of masculinity…men who show signs of femininity undermine the system…we need to change the way we approach male domination."

In this moment, Alonzo deployed abstract social theory as a means of staking his claim as a feminist authority. Despite relying on non-feminists like Pierre Bourdieu who have been critiqued for failing to engage with feminist theory (e.g., Adkins & Skeggs 2004), Alonzo embodied an intellectual role that resonated with the highly-educated members of Masculinity Talks who were well-versed in gender theory—a strategy that was not available to Myles, whose practical education in a more tech-oriented STEM field meant he was underexposed to such theoretical frameworks.

In addition to such theoretical claims to feminist authority, Alonzo used empirical data to 'correct' and 'educate' women in the group on various feminist issues. Later in that same meeting, when Grace noted, "The family is an important institution where we learn about patriarchy," Alonzo challenged her, saying, "I hate to take away from your point, but empirical evidence on the family shows that by age 14 children are influenced almost exclusively by their peers…There's a great book you should read called *Dude, You're a Fag*[6]…She observed a high school, [and] when she personally interviewed the young ladies…lots of tomboys found that their actions were excused until puberty…then sexual objectification kicked in." While his embodied masculinity meant that he did not have the experience of being a woman in society, Alonzo used abstract 'facts' about gender to prove his right to weigh in on feminist issues.

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[6] This book was written by sociologist C.J. Pascoe (2007).

Alonzo's gender studies credentials hence gave him a credibility amongst group members who might otherwise have been annoyed at his attempts at 'mansplaining.' Despite his tendency to use his academic background to speak about the lived experiences of women, Alonzo was never critiqued explicitly in interviews. In fact, when he was mentioned, it was in a positive light. For example, when Edwin, the other cofounder of Male Profeminists United, discussed his decision to put the group on hiatus, one of his greatest concerns was losing Alonzo:

> I'm really excited to have Alonzo in the group. He contributes a lot and, similarly, is really, really well-educated…He says he's not [a feminist] anymore, but he was ten or twenty years ago…He has feminist values, but…he has some disagreements with the feminist movement specifically. It's like on a totally, totally higher level than I'm at. I don't even know enough about the movement specifically to have agreements/ disagreements with it…[Samira and I] are talking about working really, really hard and her contributing remotely from Morocco …in order to keep...Alonzo in the group. [We] definitely [do] not want to lose him. But I think that maybe I can contact him directly and tell him that it's going on hiatus for a couple of months…I think just pushing ourselves beyond the limit just to keep one person, as wonderful as Alonzo is, is not worth it.

Even though Alonzo had an ambivalent relationship to feminism and felt empowered to critique the merits of feminist theory, he was not understood as encroaching or undermining the movement. Instead, he was appreciated for his critical lens and what it offered to the intellectual culture of Male Profeminists United and Masculinity Talks.

Comparing the group's reactions to Myles and Alonzo hence highlights the complexities of the pathways into allyship that intersecting identities create in an organizational context shaped by post-identity feminism. Myles and Alonzo each possessed a mixture of advantaged and disadvantaged social identities that mediated how their maleness was perceived and how their credentials were vetted. Because Myles' advantages (i.e., his whiteness and masculinity) were highly visible compared to his disadvantages (i.e., an immigrant status and a minority religious identity), his missteps were largely attributed to his privilege; the fact that he was unfamiliar with the norms and rhetoric of the group due to his tech background exacerbated the

negative outcomes of these vetting processes. Alonzo, on the other hand, as a Black man, possessed a more highly visible marginalized identity that masked the educational advantages he possessed, allowing him to integrate more deeply with the group in question. Thus, marginalized identities could give men a voice in a post-identity feminist movement—but only if these disadvantages were not outshone by more noticeable privileges…and only if the marginalized person in question possessed the cultural knowledge necessary for inclusion. If these conditions were not met, the gender-blindness of these organizations could disappear, leading to harsher vetting processes that were more common in identity-based activism.

*Conclusion*

Collectively, these experiences show both how deeply feminism has been gendered and the limits of that gendering. For most of my respondents, men were, at least in theory, no longer privileged outsider allies. Instead, they had become insiders, seeing themselves (and being seen) as beneficiaries of the feminist movement. However, their insider status was not unquestionable. When their actions were particularly disruptive and clearly antifeminist, men could lose their insider status, finding themselves outside the bounds of the movement once again. This suggests that gender-based identity politics remain the ghost in the machine of ideology-based feminism. The frequently embodied quality of masculinity renders it visible in a way that cannot be completely erased by identity-leveling rhetorical shifts. As a result, men today may be able to be 'inside' feminism in a way their forebears could not imagine, but they often remain outsider-insiders who are in practice expected to allow women to take the lead in the movement. Women, as a consequence, remain very much at the center of feminism, despite ideological shifts that mean they no longer having an exclusive claim on the movement.

# CONCLUSION

At the Metro City Pride Office, Damon, the gay man who organized the city's large Pride march, was attempting to get the March Review meeting started. The table was packed to capacity as I arrived, forcing me to sit in one of the high chairs behind the cement beam in the office. Damon strode to the head of the table and warmly declared, beaming, "I wanna start by saying 'Thank You!' All of you made the MC Pride March it's most successful yet. It was bigger than ever...I know there were problems…but we overcame them!" He turned the floor over to Becca, the straight ally hired to manage the March, to give an overview of the event. After briefly going over how much revenue was generated by March sponsors, Becca stated seriously, "There was talk that the March is too corporate. That's not true…65% of our organizations are still nonprofit. It hasn't been corporatized. All of our major contributors are really nonprofit…13% of our sales are non-profit. So, this thinking that goes 'Pride is more corporate'…it's bullshit! I have data! 15% are sponsors—the big ones were T-Mobile…Delta…We are still non-profit focused…it's just part of our evolution."

After Becca's overview of the March the volunteers in attendance begin to energetically interject suggestions for how the March might be improved next year. Most of these suggestions were logistical in nature, such as how to best "close gaps" in the march and how to ensure the volunteers knew what their jobs entailed. However, others were more substantive. For example, a South Asian gay male volunteer argued that the festival could be more inclusive to diverse body types, observing, "One glaring issue…is that we only had a few 3X tees to start. As you probably know, in the gay environment, size matters." The group broke out into clapping and laughter. He continued, "Some chose the big shirts that did not ask for them—though some guys like tees tight, not all do."

After the volunteers cycled their list of concerns, the meeting ended. Damon introduced me to two women who expressed interest in the study and proceeded to excitedly tell me more about the dynamics of straight allyship in the group. Riley said, "There's like three of us…" Cordy corrected, "Just in the March group! And there are lots of volunteers…I got several of my friends to do it." Riley confessed, "I'm the first ally on the Exec Board, and I've had some resistance—people being like 'Why are you here?' Because this is not our fight." Cordy replied, "But we feel like it is our fight!" Riley agreed, "Definitely…Like there was a co-chair, who is no longer here, she looked at me like [*scoffs*] 'What are you doing here? Are you like obsessed with gay people or something?' I feel like it's a straight female thing. I mean, we spend so much time learning to be sensitive in the real world—use the right pronouns, say the right things. But here, it's almost like it's turned around on us." Cordy nodded responding affirmatively, "Because this is a gay male dominated space."

Social justice oriented events like, the MC Pride March, aimed to be inclusive spaces where marginalized members of society could come together and agitate for their rights.

However, as we see above, the question of how to best create such inclusive spaces was highly

complex and contested. Does the funding that corporations provide enrich Pride, as Becca believed, or does the presence of large corporate sponsors like T-Mobile decenter queer people in their own festival? Is everyone welcome to participate and volunteer within nominally-free events like MC Pride, or are certain constituencies within the LGBTQ community underserved, such as non-thin people or (more worryingly) underrepresented groups like queer people of color and trans people? And, most importantly for the purposes of this project, how important is it that straight allies, like Becca, Cordy, and Riley, feel seen in a movement designed to empower LGBTQ people?

These were questions about which respondents in my study frequently disagreed. The politics of negotiating power and privilege in social movements cannot be reduced to the individual preferences and boundary-drawing actions of individual activists, however. Instead, how allyship and privilege were understood was mediated by the larger scale conversations about identity politics that permeated these movements, as well as the goals of the organizations activists were embedded within. Identity and post-identity models of political mobilization thus created distinct barriers and pathways for straight allies in LGBTQ activism and men within feminism.

This project shows that existing social movements research has underestimated the complexity of movement privilege dynamics. The ally has often been treated by such scholarship as a static resource to be mobilized (McAdam 1999; McCarthy & Zald [1977] 1987) and understood primarily as a non-beneficiary who is drawn to a movement due to personal ties to the group or a general desire to do good at the cost of their own societal advantages (Myers 2008). In such literature, the ally is a quintessential outsider—whether their actions are 'sanctified' (Mathers, Sumerau, & Ueno 2015) due to the minimal expectations insiders often

have of allies or whether they are being highly scrutinized and held 'accountable' for their mistakes (Messner, Peretz, & Greenberg 2015). The conviction that allies are different from the marginalized groups they seek to support goes largely unquestioned.

A comparative look at how ally politics develop in two distinct social movements shows that who counts as an ally and who is treated as a stakeholder cannot be taken for granted. Whether a powerful collaborator is understood as a privileged outsider (i.e., an ally) or a provisional insider impacts the permeability of the symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002) that define a movement's borders; this, in turn, impacts how deeply 'allies' can engage in activism and how vigorously they are vetted when they do. We've seen that LGBTQ activists understand and engage with straight and cisgender allies in a very different way than how feminist women approach men. On the one hand, the institutional context that LGBTQ activism is embedded within has led many activists to cultivate a deep commitment to essentialist identity politics that keeps allies at arm's length (at least so far as the invisibility and fragmented quality of the community will allow).  On the other hand, such essentialist politics have been decentered within feminism, as the centrality of intersectionality talk, the fear that gender-based mobilization is trans-exclusive, and the concern that feminism is insufficiently attentive to how men have been harmed by patriarchy have created pathways for men to establish a tentative stake in the movement—despite their visible otherness and rarity in feminist spaces. Understanding allyship as a fluid and movement-specific process thus gives social movement theory a more dynamic explanation for how allies are utilized within activism.

In addition to these contributions to social movement theory, this project pushes the specific conversations about allyship within movement-specific literatures in important directions. For example, most of the work on straight allies has been generated by psychologists,

who have focused on largely individual-level explanations for what motivates certain people to become allies (Fingerhut 2011; Stotzer 2009) and what benefits they have to queer people (Perez-Brumer et al. 2015; Porta et. al 2017; Poteat et. al 2017); as a result, the structural and interactional dynamics of ally integration and the possible costs of straight presence within LGBTQ activism remain undertheorized. Existing sociological literature raises important points about how the straight privilege of allies can serve or work against movement interests (Cortese 2006; Mathers, Sumerau, Cragen 2015; Miceli 2013), but even this literature leaves the category of 'ally' largely unexamined, taking their existence and outsider status for granted.

This study shows that the 'ally' should not be treated as a discrete actor whose impact on an organization can be explicitly quantified. While more process-oriented approaches to allyship that treat privileged people engaging in activism as constantly growing and backsliding as supporters (Reynolds 2010) move us in a positive direction, even those models treat allies as external to mobilization. I argue that allyship should be viewed, not as a state of being or process of becoming a movement supporter, but rather as a cultural framework that individuals can deploy to understand and make sense of their position (or the position of others) in a movement. In my data, it was clear that the term 'ally' was not merely descriptive; it served the function of simultaneously bridging (Pugh 2011) ties with sympathetic straight people who could bring much needed numbers to the movement while distancing them as privileged outsiders. By understanding allyship rhetoric as a tool for symbolic boundary-making, we can better understand what allyship rhetoric is doing for the LGBTQ movement.

Scholars who study the role of men in feminism would also benefit from these findings. It is true that masculinities researchers have done important work demarcating men's historical involvement in supporting feminism (Kimmel & Mosmiller 1992; Messner 1998), as well as

outlining ways these men have undermined the movement's mission, such as how men's rights activists like Warren Farrell used the lessons they learned in feminist consciousness-raising about gender role constraints to frame themselves as the new victims of sexism (Messner 1997; 2016). However, existing literature has frequently interpreted this positive and negative engagement as synonymous with the incorporation of straight people into LGBTQ activism, importing the ally concept and applying it to their data about men in feminism (e.g., Macomber 2018). Leaning on the ally label in this way masks the complexity of men's contested position within feminism and erases their claims to insider status.

As such, much of the work being done on men in feminism is caught between two extremes—man-centered masculinity scholarship and woman-focused research on the dangers of men in feminist spaces. Both traditions have arguably focused so extensively on the voices and experiences of men that women activists and scholars have become marginalized within the discipline (Bridges 2019). This marginalization has occurred as woman-focused spaces, such as Women's Centers and Women's Studies Programs increasingly slip away or become de-gendered (Bethman, Cottledge, & Bickford 2018; Stanley 2013). Understanding men as outsider-insiders rather than simply allies frees scholars from this binary, allowing them to conceptualize men as potential stakeholders without ignoring women's centrality within the movement.

### *So Whose Fight Is It Really?: Central Takeaways From My Findings*

When activists talk about 'allies,' they often operate under the assumption that what allyship is and who counts as an ally are relatively straightforward questions. However, comparing the process of privilege negotiation within LGBTQ and feminist activism exposes how misleading that assumption is. While the term 'ally' is ubiquitous in LGBTQ movement

discourse, the feminists in my field sites were extremely uncomfortable applying it to men supporters of the movement. To understand why a term so commonly applied to straight people involved with LGBTQ activism was seen as so incompatible with male efforts to become involved with feminism, it is necessary to look to fundamental differences in how activists in these two movements negotiate who are its primary stakeholders. Specifically, one must explore how the boundaries of the movement are maintained and how permeable they are.

The LGBTQ activists in my field sites largely engaged in identity-based mobilization. Most wanted to have more straight people involved in LGBTQ activism, and many were even happy to honor their contributions and see them in positions of leadership. However, this appreciation for them as 'allies' did not typically translate into granting them insider status. Instead, their ally credentials were heavily vetted by LGBTQ insiders, especially if the allies in question were highly visible or presumed to be gaining status or financial benefits for their participation. Even when these allies' credentials were successfully vetted, straight allies were reminded of their outsider status through both positive affirmations of their allyship that treated their level of involvement as exceptional and more negative skepticism of their qualifications to advocate for LGBTQ people. The label 'ally' thus became a boundary-drawing mechanism, allowing straight people to express an affinity for the movement, but keeping them outside of it.

One reason the 'ally' construct is so useful for LGBTQ activism is because it renders visible an outsider identity that might otherwise go unrecognized since sexual identity is a particularly nebulous and obscured identity. Much as LGBTQ individuals can disappear in 'mainstream' society unless they announce their identity through 'coming out,' straight allies are often presumed gay in LGBTQ spaces unless they signal they are not through words or actions (e.g., branding themselves as allies through clothing choices or references to opposite sex

partners). Such ally signaling is not completely unproblematic, of course. The harsh binary between 'gay' and 'straight' that allyship rhetoric and ally-signaling strategies create can erase bisexual people who already struggle to find a foothold in the movement due to community biphobia. This insider/ally binary is further complicated by the proliferation of intersecting identities under the LGBTQ umbrella, which create opportunities for within-community allyship as more privileged group members (e.g., cisgender white gay men and lesbian) learn to support comparatively marginalized ones (e.g., queer people of color and trans individuals). Yet, despite this complexity, the 'ally' concept continues to be used to draw the lines of the community and determine who is inside and outside of it.

In feminism, however, 'ally' was less commonly used to draw such boundaries—in fact, many younger feminists reacted viscerally to the idea that men could be understood as 'allies' to feminism, preferring to frame them as 'male feminists' or feminists in their own right. These young men and women largely rejected the woman-centered feminism of previous generations, preferring a less identity-based form of feminist solidarity that was oriented around the adoption of a feminist ideology. These women had read about the dangers of 'white feminism' and trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) in their social justice blogs and women's studies courses. As such, they were skeptical that women with diverse experiences with patriarchy and other systems of inequality could ever share true solidarity. Instead, they committed to building community by acknowledging the different experiences of women due to the intersectionality of their social identities. Despite originating in writings by women of color, such *intersectionality talk* bolstered a post-identity feminism that allowed men to have a stake in the movement. Rather than treating men as privileged outsiders whose ally credentials needed to be vetted by women, young women in my field sites treated them as collaborators—as fellow victims of the patriarchy

who would directly benefit from less rigid gender roles. The salient divide within their version of feminism was thus between feminists of all genders and antifeminists, including women, who worked against the movement.

This **post-identity feminism** helped ameliorate some problems, enabling activists to better critique women who perpetuated non-intersectional or antifeminist attitudes and to improve trans inclusion. However, it created new challenges for young feminists and was limited in its scope. By decentering identity within feminism, power was decentered as well, making it hard for feminist women to deal with masculine domination in spaces that were meant to be safe from sexism. Perhaps even more concerning, this **gender-blind feminism** had the paradoxical consequence of centering men so thoroughly that it became possible for them to see themselves as the true victims of sexism—much as early men's right activism used feminist male consciousness-raising groups meant to address the limitation of gender norms to subvert the movement (Messner 1997; 1998). If women want to escape such masculine domination, there may be fewer places for them to do so as ally-exclusive spaces are threatened by such post-identity politics.

However, there are two key limits to such **gender-blind feminism**. First, the inability of some predominantly white feminist field sites to implement intersectional mobilizing meant that white women often remained centered in the movement, undermining the ideology-based, inclusive feminism the movement was trying to cultivate. Second, the often-visible quality of gender identity and the underrepresentation of men in feminist spaces ensured that some men struggled to have their insider status recognized. This was particularly true of deeply disruptive men who did not share race or class positions with the feminist group members they were trying to build community with. Thus, even without having a reliable **ally credential vetting** system at

their disposable, it was possible for women to challenge the general feminist credentials of some men, especially if they were marginalized to begin with.

Cumulatively, the comparison of these two movements shows that allyship rhetoric is most potent in identity-based movements with less permeable boundaries than it is in ideology-based ones with more fluidity. Rather than thinking of allyship as a state of being or a linear pathway towards greater acceptance of marginalized people, this study suggests we should understand it as a tool for designating insiders and distinguishing them from outsiders. While identity-based movements like LGBTQ activism may find ally rhetoric a useful tool for separating movement beneficiaries from casual supporters, post-identity movements may reject it because it "others" men, keeping them from recognizing their own connection to the movement.

### *Practical Lessons for Activists*

This more fluid, dynamic model of allyship politics has important implications for activists on the ground. The social justice arena is rife with conversations about allies, from tips on how to be a better ally (e.g., Coles 2018; Utt 2018) and how not to engage in allyship (e.g., Schemmer 2016) to conversations about how to handle bad ally behavior and whether 'call out' culture in movements is undermining solidarity by catastrophizing minor missteps and mistaking them for major oppression (e.g., Flores 2013; Schulman 2016). Not only do activists disagree about how much it takes to be considered an ally and how involved is too involved, these expectations are often movement- and even-group specific. For example, the specific goals of an organization may impact the tolerance for ally mistakes. While more woman/LGBTQ-centered or ***ally exclusive groups***, like the Feminist Circle, may be strongly critical of men and straight people, there may be a larger learning curve in ***ally-bridging groups***, like Together with LGBTQ

Friends, which was designed to cultivate new supporters for the community. As such, context is key for allies looking to contribute to social justice work in a positive way; being a 'good' ally means reading that context and adapting your behavior accordingly.

There are lessons for insiders as well in this project. Activists should be aware that their decision to mobilize around essentialized models of identity that keep allies at arm's length or to reject identity-based politics for more fluid boundaries between insiders and outsiders comes with certain trade-offs. My observations of the ***woman-centered feminism*** of Women for Community Change (WComm), for example, show that these women were often unaware of how their internal identity politics and non-intersectional understanding of feminism were unappealing to comparatively marginalized women. The decision to use identity-based mobilization also has repercussions for how bridges are built with the powerful. When you label a straight person or a man as an 'ally' to a movement, you are placing them outside its bounds. This can have some advantages, encouraging more privileged folks to be self-aware when they enter social justice spaces meant to empower oppressed people and providing tools for excluding disruptive voices from those spaces. However, such distancing moves may discourage allies from involving themselves with the movement. Clearly, identity-based and post-identity politics each have benefits and pitfalls—a complex calculus any activist must navigate if they want to effectively build solidarity and pursue social justice.

But perhaps there is a third way to do activism—one that allows activists to mobilize around identity and acknowledge difference without reifying it. But what would this ***fluid identity politics*** look like on the ground? One way to implement this at the macro and meso levels of social movement fields would be through the ***diversification of mobilization strategies*** in a movement (i.e., ensuring there is a mix of identity-based and non-identity based

organizations in any given field). This would meet the needs of those desiring protected, ally-exclusive spaces, such as women victims of sexual assault looking for spaces to heal without cisgender men; so long as these male-exclusionary spaces clearly convey that they are for all women and state that they are open to non-binary individuals as well, this should avoid the well-documented pitfalls of trans-exclusionary woman-centered spaces. Furthermore, so long as there are also male-focused and straight-friendly ***ally-bridging organizations*** in the field and alternate groups and resources specifically earmarked for these demographics, these groups need not be distanced from the movement.

Such macro-level changes may be difficult for activists looking for more immediate solutions to ally-insider tensions, however. If these activists lack the time or resources to build entirely new organizations that are absent in a social movement field, they may wish to adopt a modified ***internal diversification strategy***—carving out spaces within existing organizations where a specific interest group's needs can be addressed. The Together with our LGBTQ Friends (TLF) group in Metro City did this when it separated out its support groups for straight allies and folks looking to empower transgender people in their lives. This strategy could also be used to address the internal issues within a post-identity organization like University Feminism. Were this group to create special caucuses where people of color, women, and men could come together to discuss their needs and struggles within the organization, it might create safe spaces for more marginalized members to process their dissatisfaction while allowing more advantaged members to grow without making others feel unsafe. If these caucuses could then generate meaningful dialogue within the groups, overall solidarity could be improved.

***Pathways for Future Research***

In addition to these practical benefits, this project's finding that allyship is more dynamic, fluid and varied that previous research imagined suggests several pathways for future research that have important implications for social movement theory, contemporary understandings of identity, and scholarship on social inequality. I will first examine the implications of my study for social theory, outlining what my research says about the future of post-gay identity politics and the LGBTQ movement's ability to neutralize inequality both within its organizations and the mainstream. I will then explore some empirical questions about the future of allyship in the wake of recent political events (i.e., the election of Donald Trump and the rise of the #MeToo movement). Finally, I will end with an overview of the next stage of my research project, showing how I plan to further advance scholarship on identity politics within social movements.

*Post-Gay Identity Politics, New Threats to Movements, and the Possibility of Queerer Futures*

My research shows that essentialist politics are deeply central to contemporary LGBTQ activism; most activists in the groups that I studied understood their sexual identities as an intrinsic aspect of their being that straight identified people could not hope to identify with no matter how supportive they were. However, identity politics shift over time; it is the task of future research to examine how such identity-based political models help activists negotiate changes in the political context—are identity-based politics a good match with this climate? Are there changes on the horizon of LGBTQ community life that might have implications for how identity is understood and how community members relate to straight allies?

In many ways, 'what becomes of LGBTQ activism now?" is one of the central animating questions for scholars of contemporary LGBTQ movements—with whole edited volumes being

devoted to the question of what happens to the movement *After Marriage* (Jones, DeFillipis, & Yarbrough 2018; Yarbrough, Jones, & DeFillipis 2018). The Supreme Court ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges in 2015 made marriage equality the law of the land, overturning all state-level Constitutional amendments prohibiting same-sex marriage and giving LGBTQ folks unprecedented access to civil rights long denied (BBC 2015). What does the future of queer politics look like in a world where marriage equality exists and Americans are increasingly tolerant of LGBTQ people (Baunach 2012)? Are theorists like Steven Seidman (2002) correct when they argue that is increasingly plausible for LGBTQ people to live lives 'beyond the closet,' treating their sexuality as a neutral facet of themselves rather than a central aspect of their being? What does the future of allyship look like in such a world?

These developments have led some theorists to conclude that the least marginalized members of the community (e.g., cisgender, white gay men and lesbians) may be coming to see themselves as post-gay (Ghaziani 2014) or post-mo (Nash 2013). These cultural shifts have reinforced and been reinforced by spatial shifts in queer life. Though queer people continue to carve out increasingly fluid spaces in urban areas (Ghaziani 2019), some scholars have suggested that the mandate 'get thee to a big city' (Weston 1995) may resonate less with younger generations who are foregoing the residential enclaves and institutions of the gayborhood in favor of isolated hook-ups on gay-oriented apps (Collins & Drinkwater 2017; Usher & Morrison 2010; Wu & Ward 2018) or settling down in suburban neighborhoods (Brekhus 2003; Gorman-Murray 2006) and regions that have not been historically associated with queerness and trans-identity  (Abelson 2019; Cooke & Rapiro 2007; Gray 2009; Kazyak 2012), such as rural areas and neighborhoods in the Midwest and American South.

For those who can integrate in such a way, will the concept of allyship become more superfluous as the boundary between community insider and outsider becomes more fluid? And what implications will this have for LGBTQ political organizations? Social movement theory has long noted that activist organizations whose core constituencies feel accepted must look for new resources and specialize or face decline (Edwards & Marullo 1995; Messinger 1955; Soule and King 2008). There is some evidence of a post-marriage complacency in the movement (e.g., Stafford 2016), as some prominent LGBTQ lobbying groups, such as Freedom to Marry, closed their doors because they felt they had attained their goals (Johnson 2015). If these activists feel there is no longer oppression, it is possible that they will no longer see a need for allies. In many ways, the goal of a reform-oriented, identity-based movement like contemporary LGBTQ activism is possibly the destruction of the ally—for the straight, cis ally to no longer be privileged compared to the LGBTQ insider and for the latter to consequently no longer need the former's support.

The euphoric high of this win initially drowned out cautionary voices saying that LGBTQ folks still lacked basic federal employment protections (e.g., Baldwin and Tanden 2015) and that trans Americans, whose interests have often been sacrificed to advance marriage rights and other pro-gay initiatives (Gallager 2017; Stone 2012; Vitulli 2010), remain highly persecuted (Willis 2015). To many, it felt love had finally 'won.' However, the optimistic bubble that some of the more advantaged LGBTQ Americans were living in ruptured in 2016 when Donald Trump and his antigay running mate, Mike Pence, were elected to the nation's highest office (Stack 2016). Since then the Trump Administration has refused to acknowledge Pride every year, repealed Obama-era protections of gay and lesbian federal employees, appointed countless antigay officials to important positions as high as the Supreme Court, and pushed for a ban against trans

people in the military (Lopez 2018; Ritschel 2019). There has also been an upsurge in controversial 'religious freedom' laws (Kazyak, Burke, & Stange 2018), as conservative interpretations of the U.S. constitution have been used to prohibit LGBTQ folks from accessing a variety of amenities; some of these services, like wedding cakes (Wolf 2018) may seem superficial, but others, like protections for religious adoption agencies that want to exclude queer people (Allison 2019), may be more devastating in their consequences. These changes have called into question the notion that 'love won.'

Perhaps no member of the LGBTQ umbrella is feeling this crunch more than transgender Americans. 'Gender panics' (Schilt & Westbrook 2015; Westbrook and Schilt 2014) have led to litigation in states like Virginia over trans students' right to use bathrooms matching their gender identity (Finley 2019) and legal attempts to constrain those rights in places like North Carolina (Kopan & Scott 2016)—conservative initiatives that Trump's rollbacks of Obama's trans-affirming interpretation of Title IX (Steinmetz 2017) made more feasible. While affluent white gay men and lesbians may be able to buffer themselves from the worst of this political turn, trans people, racial minorities, and poorer segments of the LGB community may be less able to do so (Hollibaugh & Weiss 2016; Kattari et al. 2016; Whitfield et al. 2014). Furthermore, public attitudes are significantly more negative towards trans and non-binary people than LGBTQ folks (Lewis et al. 2017), with many people who 'support' LGBQ rights being willing to engage in 'cisgendering interactions' (Mathers 2017) that erase or demean trans people (Mathers, Sumerau, & Cragun 2018) while many LGB people are all too willing to sacrifice those communities at the 'ballot box' (Stone 2009) in the name of political expediency.

Due to the precariousness of their social position, trans people remain intensely vulnerable to physical and sexual violence (McKay, Lindquist, & Misra 2017; Schilt &

Westbrook 2009), with one study finding that 38% had experienced physical violence in their lives and 27% had been victimized by sexual violence (Testa et al. 2012). These experiences can lead to poor mental health outcomes, with community members experiencing high rates of depression (Borgogna et al. 2018; Witcomb et al. 2018) and almost 40% of the trans population attempting suicide in the life course according to one national survey (James et al. 2016). These troubling outcomes coupled with the rise of new initiatives to further curtail trans rights means that it is perhaps less straight allies that are needed, but rather cis allies of all sexual identities. In such a context, understanding the success and failures of within-community allyship that I identified in my study will likely be of increasing importance.

But what might this sense of embattledness mean for broader allyship politics? As a small group representing 4.5% of the population (Williams Institute 2019), the LGBTQ community arguably needs sympathetic straight people to vote against anti-LGBTQ referendums and help them put pressure on politicians to vote down homophobic and transphobic legislation. While this sort of solidarity could be theoretically generated without drawing a firm boundary between LGBTQ insiders and outsider allies, the severity of marginalization directed towards LGBTQ individuals and the obviousness of straight people's relative privilege makes this sort of leveling unlikely.

However, other social changes in identity politics might discourage the adoption of ally rhetoric. For example, there is some evidence suggesting that younger members of the LGBTQ community may be growing disillusioned with the binary nature of essentialist identity frameworks (e.g., Savin-Williams 2005) and the persistence of biphobia that results from it (Weiss 2004; Yoshino 1999). Millennials and members of Generation Z are increasingly critical of gender structures, rejecting traditional gender norms in favor of 'innovating' or 'rebelling'

through the adoption of more fluid gender expressions and identities (Risman 2018). Even as essentialist understandings of the innateness and invariability of trans identity come to define the medical treatment of trans people (Meadow 2018; Rubin 2003), people who identity as non-binary have rejected these overly simplistic narratives, opting to "do nonbinary gender" (Darwin 2017) instead. This has occurred as sexual fluidity has been increasingly embraced, at least amongst young women (Diamond 2008) who show a greater willingness to embrace non-monosexual identities like bisexual (England, Mishel, & Caudillo 2016); though men have been less fluid in their identities, as there is qualitative evidence (e.g., Ward 2015; Silva 2017) that suggests straight-identified men may also be increasingly willing to engage in same-sex erotic encounters.

These changes will likely only accelerate over time; a recent poll by GLAAD found that not only did 20% of young Americans identity as LGBTQ (compared to 12% of Gen X respondents and 7% of Baby Boomers), but that they may be moving away from traditional binary labels like gay/lesbian (Gonella 2017). In time, the sheer proliferation of identities under the umbrella may ultimately rupture the gay/straight binary that undergirds the insider/ally dichotomy. If queerness becomes less fixed and more widely dispersed, the impulse to mark straight people as allies may fall by the wayside. A task of future ally research is to explore how this proliferation of identities impacts the mobilization strategies of LGBTQ movement organizations, as they mobilize to fight anti-queer and transphobic legislation.

As it stands, however, the future of allyship in LGBTQ politics seems uncertain. So long as explicit attacks against queer and trans people continue, the gap between straight and LGBTQ experiences may continue to be quite wide and the straight ally will likely remain a key resource to be mobilized (McCarthy & Zald [1977] 1987) in political activism. That said, as more people

are coming to identify with the LGBTQ community and questioning the merits of presuming that sexual identity is stagnant and invariable, this rhetoric may lose its political usefulness and fall out of favor. Which pathway LGBTQ activism follows will likely be contingent on the duration of the current anti-LGBTQ backlash we are embedded in and which political tools are ultimately most useful in resisting it.

*Men in Feminism in a Post-Trump, #MeToo Moment*

It is possible that feminism may be a movement in transition as well. When I conducted my interviews and fieldwork, most of the women and men I encountered were embedded in a feminist context that encouraged collaboration with men. Many of my younger respondents were children of the feminist backlash who came of age during a time when conservative campaigns to frame feminists as a threat to family values had merged with pop culture representations of such feminists as vicious man-haters or loveless career-women (Douglas 2010; Faludi 1991). These young feminists were likely an anomaly amongst their peers, many of whom rejected feminist ideologies (Aronson 2003) in favor of a postfeminist sensibility (Gill and Scharff 2011) that treated the feminist movement as laudable but passé.

Feminist critics have often accused the feminist ideology that developed in this post-backlash period of being highly defensive and mostly superficial, struggling to engage with substantive gender inequities, such as a pay gap persisting at multiple levels of the income structure and life course (e.g., Atkinson, Casarico, & Voitschovsky 2018; Besen-Cassino 2017; Janssen, Sartore, and Backes-Gellner 2016), women's underrepresentation in positions of economic and political power (Rhode 2017; Teele, Kalla, & Rosenbluth 2018), and their higher vulnerability to sexual violence (Hines et al. 2012). Instead, this feminism was highly

corporatized and individualistic, encouraging young women to buy goods and consume cultural products branded with 'girl power' (McRobbie 2004, 2007; Zeisler 2016) without engaging with such serious issues. The young feminists in my study had thus come of age in a very embattled time where an affiliation with the feminist movement was something that many felt defensive about.

It is easy to see how collaborations with men might feel desirable in such a context. Being willing to build bridges with men and bring them into a movement that has historically been driven by women is in many ways a direct rebuttal to accusations that feminists hate men and are actively working against their interests. Furthermore, the increased individualism of recent waves of feminism makes such male integration easier. When movement adherents are primarily focused on the personal feminist choices of themselves and their peers rather than on how society is systemically structured to privilege men, the advantages male feminists hold may seem less incompatible with activism. In fact, men's willingness to embrace feminism as a label may be interpreted as a rejection of their male privilege and a success for feminism. If the goal of feminism is the adoption of egalitarian values rather than the empowerment of women, it is easy to see how bringing men into feminism might seem like an unequivocal good.

However, when Trump was elected in 2016, the political context of feminism shifted as well, creating new questions for future research on feminism and the position of gender politics within it. While many young feminists were not passionate about Hillary Clinton's candidacy (Bordo 2018), believing her feminism was insufficiently intersectional and preferring the economic redistribution promised by Bernie Sanders (Hartless 2018), her defeat at the hands of Donald Trump was a blow to the movement. Many were outraged at seeing a man ascend to the nation's highest office who had a history of misogynist statements towards women (Cohen 2017;

Filipovic 2017), had bragged about grabbing women "by the pussy" (Katz 2016), had been accused of sexual assault by multiple women (Ford 2017), and had run against a highly-qualified woman despite having no experience in public office (Glanton 2016). This outrage fueled the Women's March (Wallace and Parlapiano 2017), a protest where women (and men) flooded the streets of DC the day after Trump's election, joining affinity marches held in other cities across the globe to create what was possibly the largest global feminist demonstration in history (Beyerlein et al. 2018; Broomfeld 2017). Although subsequent marches have not generated quite as much momentum, the Women's March has since become an annual event (Czajka 2019) with similar marches being held in 2018 and 2019.

The framing and execution of the Women's March poses some interesting questions for gender and movement scholars. The foregrounding of 'women' in the naming and branding of the event, along with the decision of many participants to wear the pink pussyhats, centers the experiences of women and embodies womanhood through explicitly vaginal imagery (Gentile 2018; Weber, Dejmanee, & Rhode 2018)—a move that feels far removed from the ***gender-blind*** and ideology-based feminism that many of my respondents championed prior to the election. This begs the question of whether the open misogyny of Trump and the specific threat posed to women's reproductive freedom by the anti-choice views of his Vice President, Mike Pence (Crockett 2017) have reinvigorated a sense of shared grievance amongst women. And if ***woman-centered*** rhetoric is again gaining ground, what does this mean for men's ability to integrate into the movement?

There are reasons to suspect that this divergence from ***post-identity politics*** may not be as stark as the March's gendered branding suggests. A closer look at the current homepage for the Women's March (2019), for instance, shows that its organizers are hardly seeking to revive the

exclusionary single-issue feminism white women in early waves were prone to perpetuating (Davis 1981; hooks 1984). Although they describe themselves as a "women-led movement," they also seek to "harness the political power of diverse women and their communities to create transformative social change." In addition to working towards women's rights, their mission explicitly pledges to fight for the civil liberties of other constituencies, including LGBTQIA people, immigrants, workers, and the disabled. The Women's March hence seems to be attempting *woman-centered feminism*, but in a more *fluid* way that avoids the exclusionary dynamics that often afflict such initiatives, building intersectional coalitions to pursue multi-faceted social change (Fisher, Dow, & Ray 2017). Of course, there is some evidence that this effort may not be completely effective (Brewer & Dundes 2018). For example, critics of the March have noted its whiteness (Silva 2018), pointed out that people of color have been marginalized therein (Holloway 2018), and accused the proponents of pink pussyhats of excluding trans women by implying all women have vaginas (Devin-Norelle 2018). However, the way men are being decentered from this campaign and the implications that has for their pathways into feminism is noteworthy.

This possible decentering of men may be further exacerbated by another major event in the feminist social movement field—the recent explosion of media and activist attention towards sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in the wake of the #MeToo movement. This campaign gained steam when powerful Hollywood executive, Harvey Weinstein, was accused by multiple actresses of sexual abuse, which inspired actress and activist, Alyssa Milano to borrow a term coined by activist, Tarana Burke, and post the following message on social media: "Me too…Suggested by a friend: If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the

problem. If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted, write 'Me too' as a reply to this tweet" (Gilbert 2017). As social media flooded with responses to this call, more figures in Hollywood fell from grace after being accused of sexual harassment or abuse (Cooney 2018), including Kevin Spacey, Louis C.K., and Matt Lauer. This campaign spilled over into awards season, inspiring a #TimesUp action at the 2018 Golden Globes where prominent figures in the entrainment industry wore black in solidarity and actively disrupted the award show by explicitly calling out sexism (Tamblyn 2018). The hashtag was so influential that Time magazine made "The Silence Breakers" (Zacharek, Dockterman, and Edwards 2017) who spoke out against sexual harassment in multiple industries its 'Person of the Year.'

But what does this #MeToo moment mean for men and the possibility of *gender-blind* and *men-focused feminism*? On the one hand, men like Anthony Rapp and Terry Crews have been highly visible as survivors of sexual abuse. The former raised awarness about sexual predators in Hollywood by speaking publically about how he was groped by Kevin Spacey at age 14 (Vary 2017); the latter became a visible figurehead in the movement after he disclosed that he suffered had suffered a similar assault at the hands of another Hollywood executive (Martin 2017). Crews has been particularly influential in the movement, helping male victims of sexual violence feel seen and identify a stake in the #MeToo conversation. This raises important questions about the future of men in feminism—Will the #MeToo moment pave more routes for men into feminism? Or will it create new barriers that prevent their integration?

There is some evidence suggesting the latter option may be true. Some of the accused predators exposed by this wave of #MeToo disclosures were men who had either identified as feminists or had raised awareness about gender inequity in the past. For example, Louis C.K., who admitted to exposing himself to female comedians without their consent (Schwartz 2017),

had previously been applauded by feminists for tackling gendered violence and objectification in his comedy routines (Haglund 2013; Leisman 2013). In another highly visible scandal, *Babe* magazine published a piece about women who went on a date with Aziz Ansari—a self-identified feminist comedian who co-wrote a book on *Modern Love* (Klinenberg & Ansari 2015)—where she alleged that he ignored her boundaries and pressured her to have sex (Framke 2018). Could this exposure of powerful feminist men have repercussions for others in the movement, prompting women to more deeply question their intentions? The numerous Op-Eds debating whether male feminists can be trusted (e.g., Filipovic 2018; Hu 2017; Rouner 2017) that were prompted by these scandals suggest this shift may already be happening. As the #MeToo moment continues to unfold, future research must empirically examine whether such cynicism is eroding men's already tentative insider status within feminism and determine what this might mean for the future of post-identity politics in feminism.

*Expanding Research on Allyship: Antiracist Activism and Allyship in Other Movements*

This project has shown the merits of developing more nuanced and comparative models of allyship that acknowledge that the form of identity politics a given movement organization prefers shape how said organization navigates and negotiates within-movement tensions regarding allyship. However, it is also important to recognize that this study has limitations that constrain what it can say about activism, which suggest paths for future research. Most notably, the field sites I observed were dominated by affluent and highly educated activists. This is perhaps unsurprising since financially secure activists who can afford to take time off for actions have often been at the forefront of identity-based movements (Bagguley 1992; Rose 1997); however, it does mean that my data cannot speak to the mobilization efforts of more

marginalized people in the community. Furthermore, white activists were overrepresented in my sites. Though some of my organizations, like the LGBTQ Fraternity in University Town and the Masculinity Talks and Pride groups in Metro City, were more diverse and had people of color in positions of authority, other organizations were very white. While this allowed me to directly interrogate white privilege in these movements, rather than allowing it to fade into the background as it does in many studies using intersectionality theory (Carbado 2013; Levine-Rasky 2011), I was unable to capture how more diverse organizations, including those exclusively dominated by women or queer people of color, negotiated allyship and conflicts over privilege.

Future research would benefit from exploring how the relationship between identity, privilege, and allyship manifests in LGBTQ and feminist movement organizations sand efforts that are mostly or exclusively run by people of color. There are reasons to expect that these dynamics may play out differently in such organizations. For example, black feminists and queer people may be even more reluctant to engage in identity-based mobilization because they have experience collaborating with men in antiracist activism (e.g., Crenshaw 1989) and are reluctant to burn those bridges in the name of cultivating women-only or straight-exclusive spaces. Furthermore, when these women and LGBTQ individuals are drawn to identity-based activism, their attempts may be more intersectional, mobilizing around multiple marginalized identities as the Black lesbian women of the Combahee River Collective (1983) did rather than building solidarity with white women.

The study is also limited in that it only addresses allyship politics within two social movements. Other movements may have divergent struggles with identity and boundary-making. For example, tentative evidence from my study suggests that these tensions may develop quite

differently in antiracist activism. In Chapter 4, we met Brian, a white male feminist who

disrupted a University Feminism trivia night to chastise the group for not doing enough to fight

sexism on campus. We also saw how reluctant feminist women were to interpret his actions

through the lens of his gender and male privilege, individualizing his failures and reducing them

to his unpleasant personality. However, Brian's attempts to dominate antiracist activism were not

given the same degree of leeway. Consider how Mindy, a young Asian-American feminist

affiliated with UFem, described her interactions with Brian during a series of protests about

racial profiling following the violent and unjustified arrest of Quintin, a young Black man at Uni:

> I received an e-mail from [Brian], and he was like "…A lot of our student leaders from different groups…we're going to decide what to do about this Quintin situation." I'm like, "Who are you? You are like some random white man. I don't understand why you and your peers who are not involved at all with the Black student group…feel like you can take a central role in the activism…Why do you feel like you have a right to be the center of the conversation?"… It was just the way he talked to me. It was like extremely condescending, pretentious… "I'm in a leadership role, a position of power…you're rejecting my offer"…like "How dare you!?"…It was like a very uncomfortable kind of conversation… It was pretty frustrating.

Here Mindy, a woman who in Chapter 4 had strongly defended the right of marginalized men to

occupy feminist spaces, was far less willing to see a white man center himself within an

antiracist action. Brian's tendency to say "white savior-y sort of things" [Tim, White Male

Feminist in UFem] and appropriate movements by people of color was thus significantly less

forgivable than his exploitation of feminist spaces.

It is possible to interpret this disjuncture between how Brian's male feminism is

perceived and how his attempts at white allyship as a result of identity being more central to

antiracist projects than contemporary feminism. There is likely some truth to this, but there are

reasons to suspect that the ally vetting white 'allies' like Brian are subjected to is more extensive

than that experienced by straight allies within LGBTQ activism. For instance, although race is a

social construction (Omi & Winant 2014) and there is a long history of people of color 'passing' as white (Dawkins 2012; Pease 1996) and vice versa (Brubaker 2016), it is typically a much more visible identity, making ally identification—a prerequisite for vetting—more reliable. Furthermore, despite the long history of white ally involvement in antiracist movements from abolition (Harrold 2014) to civil rights (Chappell 1996; Greene 2005) to Black Lives Matter (e.g., Boyd 2015; Brown 2002; Russo 2014), activists of color may be more skeptical of white ally intentions due to the social distance of racial groups in the U.S. (Smith, McPherson, and Smith-Lovin 2014), the severity of the abuse weathered by people of color in white-dominated institutions like the prison industrial complex (Alexander 2012; Smiley and Fakunle 2016), and a history of tension with progressive whites in antiracist initiatives (Hughey 2012). If this theory is true, it would suggest that identity visibility and movement history intersect in significant ways, mediating the relationship between identity and privilege negotiation.

Other movements may add new complications to this process. For instance, the complex dimensions of visibility in the disability movement, another movement where ally language is intensely common (e.g., Evans, Assadi, & Herriott 2005; Myers, Lindburg, & Nied 2014), may create new challenges for allyship. For example, there is a fragmentation in this movement between disabilities that are visible, such as physical handicaps requiring wheelchairs or canes to facilitate mobility, and others that are less visible, including various chronic illnesses (Brueggemann et al 2001; Kaschak & Banks 2014). Do able-bodied allies approach these two segments of the community differently? Are allies to visibly disabled people vetted more extensively than those with less visible disabilities? Does the presence of able-bodied allies make it harder for those with less visible disabilities to be seen—are they mistaken for allies as bisexuals are in LGBTQ activism? These are important questions for future research.

Clearly, the concept of 'allyship' is doing something for social movements like these. No movement interacts exclusively with beneficiaries—they make friends with activists in other movements and work to convince more privileged outsiders to care about their cause. Movements that cannot nurture these ties and build coalitions amongst beneficiaries who have divergent experiences with inequalities will struggle to reach their goals. As such, understanding how allyship functions in different kinds of identity movements and appreciating how the choice to draw boundaries around or against powerful advocates impacts movement success is crucial. Whether straight people and men are ultimately going to be treated as friends to LGBTQ activism and feminism in the future or seen ax stakeholders with their own investment in the cause remains to be seen. In either case, figuring out how to navigate the complex dynamics of privilege in social movement spaces is utterly essential for creating inclusive activist spaces that do not only seek change in the world, but embody it in their daily practice.

# METHODS APPENDIX

To explore how allyship politics were negotiated on the ground, I observed 11 social justice organizations (See Table 1), noting how power and privilege were navigated by activists and allies as they went about the daily business of supporting marginalized communities and advocating for change. I spent approximately one year in a midsized Southeastern city that I call University Town, participating in the meetings, events, and activism of 5 social justice groups. Three of these groups were LGBTQ-oriented (e.g., the LGBTQ Services Center, a Fraternity for queer people and their allies, and a Community Pride organization), and two were feminist groups (e.g., Women for Community Change and University Feminism). I supplemented these observations with six months of fieldwork in a larger urban area in the Northeast, which I call Metro City. In Metro City, I studied six additional groups—three LGBTQ-oriented groups (i.e., Together with LGBTQ Friends, Radical AIDS Activism, and Metro City Pride) and three feminist groups (e.g., Masculinity Talks, Male Profeminists United, and the Feminist Circle).

| Table 1: Field Sites | LGBTQ | Feminist |
|---|---|---|
| **University Town (UT)**<br>• **Small Southeastern College Town**<br>❖ **1 year** | • LGBTQ Services Center<br>• Fraternity<br>• Community Pride | • Women for Community Change<br>• University Feminism |
| **Metro City (MC)**<br>• **Large metropolitan area in the Northeast**<br>❖ **6 months** | • Together with LGBTQ Friends<br>• Radical AIDS Activism<br>• Metro City Pride | • Masculinity Talks<br>• Male Profeminists United<br>• Feminist Circle |

*University Town*

I began my ethnography in the small Southeastern city of University Town (UT), which has a population of around 50,000.[7] Oriented around a midsized public University with approximately 15,000 students, UT is a quintessential college town. The University forms the nexus of the city, ringed by a parade of shops, bars, and fraternity/sorority houses that ground student social life. Surrounding campus and the transient student-housing at the center of the city are more permanent neighborhoods that students were largely absent from. Apart from the University and its historic architecture, the most prominent parts of the city are a downtown pedestrian shopping street—known for its upscale cuisine, cocktail bars, and art/theater offerings—and a more commercialized district full of big box stores and chain-style restaurants near the major highways connecting UT to the rest of the state. Beyond the city limits, the greater UT area is largely rural, surrounded by large farms and vineyards.

Compared to the surrounding counties, UT is very well off— though the average income of the city of $55,000 is similar to the national average of $57, 652, its population is highly educated with around 50% of residents possessing a college degree,[8] which is significantly higher than the national average of 30.9%. In addition to being highly educated and wealthy for the underdeveloped plantation-based South (Aiken 2003; Hornbeck & Naidu 2014), the area is also around 70% white—atypical for the Southeast, which historically has had a prominent number of Black residents, despite the region's deep history of racism (Pendergrass 2013a; 2013b). Much of this relative affluence and heavy whiteness can be attributed to the prominence of the University in the city. Despite being a public institution, Uni is highly selective, only

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[7] Figures are kept intentionally vague to protect the location of the study. All names of places and people were changed to ensure confidentiality.

[8] Statistics about demographics are rounded and approximated to protect city confidentiality as well.

admitting 27% of its applicants. As a result, it attracts a largely privileged student body; around

57% of whom are white and only 7% of whom are African-American, most hailing from the

most economically developed parts of the state.

The affluence of the student body and the faculty at Uni have driven up the property

values in the surrounding city. This has created a significant gap between the largely affluent

young professionals in the community and the city's service workers and its highly visible

homeless population—with the poorer segments of the community being disproportionately

people of color. As the Uni student population expands and new neighborhoods of UT are

developed, housing values have risen, pushing low-income residents, especially low-income

residents of color to the margins of the city. Much like other racialized processes of

gentrification (e.g., Hohle 2017; Prince 2016), this displacement has exacerbated social

inequality in UT and created tensions between the majority white residents and people of color in

the community. Tim, a white male University student, describes this racialized class tension

eloquently:

> [UT is] maybe liberal, but in the same time, there's always like this classicism and this racism that still persists...Rich, white liberal is how I perceive it….I live in Layden, which is the poor white neighborhood …When they cut trees for power lines, they always just cut down half the tree, but if it's in a rich neighborhood, they'll take extra-long and do like a very nice job on the tree…And parks in like the rich neighborhoods are always getting renovated, but in the poor neighborhoods, they're not, and they're sort of rundown…Even though it does vote very much Democratic, there's still that undertone of racism… Also, college students are very noticeable, and they stick off to their own end... And like there's like the [Layden Block Party] and that's…just like the image of gentrification really…The out-of-town-y college kids coming in and spending their money on crafts and stuff like that…You can see that in like some parts of the city where they have gentrified neighborhoods, where they're displacing Black [residents].

There, thus, was a gap between, not only the town and the University, but between the most

privileged members of both groups and the more marginalized residents they are increasingly

displacing.

This sociopolitical context shaped the environment LGBTQ activism and feminism were embedded within. There was a broad sense amongst my respondents that the University and UT were liberal compared to the rest of the state. And University Town was indeed a Blue city, reliably voting for Democratic candidates at every level of government; for example, in the recent midterm elections, around 15,000 votes were cast for the Democratic candidate compared to less than 3,000 for their Republican opponent. Yet this progressivism could not compare to more progressive areas in the West Coast or Northeast. While respondents like Donna, a young lesbian affiliated with the Center, saw UT as liberal "compared to where I'm coming from," the liberalness of the community was limited, particularly regarding feminism and LGBTQ activism. For example, the LGBTQ Fraternity complained one afternoon about how behind on trans inclusion Uni remained:

> Eric, a trans man in the group noted over lunch, "Uni asks you your preferred name, but they never use it…why are you asking for my preferred name if you are not going to use it!" His friend Cat agreed, "Uni is a very conservative place"…This theme came up again at another group meeting where Serena announced, "Eric was able to meet with a lawyer about his name change." Cat joked, "So maybe Uni won't fuck up his name so much." Avery cautioned, "They still might fuck it up… [A recently graduated student] changed their name, and it took a while to clear."

University Town was thus liberal, but not particularly on the cutting edge of progressive movements.

### *LGBTQ and Feminist Activism in University Town*

It was within this largely white and moderately liberal sociopolitical context that my five University Town field sites were embedded. Three of these organizations, the Uni LGBTQ Services Center, the Fraternity, and Community Pride, served the LGBTQ community; two additional organizations, Women for Community Change and University Feminism, were identified with women and feminism. These groups were largely bifurcated between the

University (i.e., LGBTQ Services Center, the Fraternity, and University Feminism) and the broader UT community (i.e., Community Pride and Women for Community Change). Though the University was the largest employer in city and defined much of its social and political life, the community built its own activist and service networks. This town-gown divide, common in college towns (Cann & McCloskey 2017; Mapes et. al 2017), resulted in a fractured, if not necessarily conflict-heavy, relationship between the Uni campus and the rest of the city.

*LGBTQ Organizations in University Town*

Much of LGBTQ community and political life at the University was oriented around the LGBTQ Services Center. The Center was established by the University in 2001, as a locus for resources and support for the University LGBTQ community. The Center had one full-time employee—the LGBTQ Services Director—who reported to the Dean of Students. It was the Director's responsibility to maintain the Center, supervise all University LGBTQ groups, serve as point person for LGBTQ-related concerns on campus, and develop LGBTQ-related programming for the community. The Director during my observation, was a 30-year-old white gay man named Martin. Though Martin did not directly supervise other staff, he did select a few interns every year to run aspects of the Center, including a graduate student intern, a health intern, a multicultural intern, a programming intern, and a student who organized the LGBTQ Speakers' Consortium—a program that brought LGBTQ people (and occasionally their allies) to classrooms, student groups, and community organizations to speak about the LGBTQ experience. In addition to providing a physical space where students could build community, Martin and his interns developed a campus-wide Safe Space training program (where attendees

received stickers to signal their LGBTQ positivity), organized University Pride week, and ran miscellaneous LGBTQ-related programs and workshops throughout the year,

Both Martin's office and the Center were located in a well-trafficked building, Mahon Hall, which served a variety of institutional purposes; in addition to the Center, there was a student food court, ballrooms, and conference rooms for public events, an auditorium, the headquarters of the student newspaper, the honor board, and various student affairs offices. The Center's first home was in small room in the uppermost floor of this building, but it expanded and relocated a couple years before my observations began. The new Center was located in a larger space in the basement of the building—a floor down from Martin's office—that was separated from the main part of the building, accessible only by stairs or a side elevator near the food court. The Center was open to all students and community members from 9-5PM Mondays through Fridays—though student interns and employees had 24/7 keycard access.

Users entered the Center through a glass door, through which they could see the volunteer desk. To the right of the door was a small, shared intern office and a large table where students often congregated to do homework, eat lunch from the food court, or chat with their friends. Behind this table was a small seating area with chairs and a sofa where undergrads were frequently found napping under a rainbow blanket donated to the Center. Behind the sofa was a TV and collection of battered board games. Across from this informal seating area and behind the volunteer desk was a line of tables that housed computers and, very occasionally, a functioning printer that students could use free of charge.

Whenever the Center was open, one to two volunteers were expected to be 'on call.' These volunteers, who wore tee shirts with the LGBTQ Services Center logo, sat at the front desk and greeted people as they entered. In addition to being a welcoming face, these volunteers

were meant to be a source of information, answering the Center phone on the rare instances it rung and directing visitors to the staff or interns who could best answer their questions. All volunteers were required to go through a modified Safe Space training that familiarized them, not only with the Center and its resources, but with the needs and interests of various segments of the LGBTQ community:

> Clarey, the graduate intern, asked trainee volunteers "Think of actions that can help…what it means to be an ally. What can you do as a volunteer at the Center?" Marcel, the programming intern, answered, "Listen to the person and repeat back so they know you are supportive." Clarey affirmed, "Good choice. It shows I'm really hearing what you have to say." Constance, a long-time volunteer, cautioned, "You also have to recognize your own limitations…even if you have the perspective of a gay man, that does not necessarily mean you'll understand what it's like to be a bisexual woman…or a trans person…you have to understand your own limitations." Keith, another volunteer agreed, "Because it's listed together, we tend to assume that we have the same experiences…and we do have some of the same experiences…but then…like with gay marriage people are more OK with that…but those same people might think being trans is weird."

The goal was for volunteers to be the front face of the Center and point persons for LGBTQ people and allies seeking information and support.

I began my affiliation with the Center not as a researcher, but rather as a volunteer and participant in the Center's Speaker Consortium. I had become involved with this organization during data collection for a previous research project (Hartless 2019; Forthcoming) wherein I was interviewing community members about their experiences with straight people in LGBTQ social spaces. Although I did not use the Center as a site of observation or for interview recruitment, I joined to integrate with and give back to the community, maintaining my involvement with the Center and Consortium after the termination of that project and past the duration of this one. Being already embedded with the University LGBTQ community network, I already possessed 'weak ties' (Granovetter 1973) to Martin, having worked with him in the Center and spoken alongside him at Consortium panels. I reached out to Martin requesting a

meeting about the possibility of using the Center as a field site for this project. In our meeting, we discussed how to best implement informed consent. We agreed that the most effective way to do this would be by taking two steps: 1) by emailing my ethnographic consent form and details about my project to the LGBTQ Services listserv—a massive mailing list that the Center pressed interested community members to join at every Center-oriented event; 2) by placing a concrete copy of my consent form in the Center for users to engage with. There were no objections raised at any point to my presence in the Center.

As part of my observations, I continued my volunteering with the LGBTQ Services Center and the Speaker's Consortium, volunteering two hours per week in the Fall of 2015 and the Spring of 2015 while documenting conversations and interactions that occurred between members. I also attended events and programs organized by the Center, including campus Safe Space Trainings, bi-weekly brunches for the community, LGBTQ Health workshops, their Love Wins campaign, and events for the University's Pride Week (e.g., the Ally Reception). At these events, I was mostly a background observer, documenting interactions from a distance and not impacting the conversations about allyship and privilege.

However, because my presence as a researcher was known, community members did approach me to ask me about my research and talk about allies. While I did not discourage these conversations, I strove to keep my personal feelings and academic findings out of the conversation. The one exception to this rule was when I was a participant in LGBTQ Speaker's Consortium panels where my beliefs and research findings were directly solicited by audience members. However, these situations were a small portion of my fieldwork. The only time usable data emerged from a panel was when I questioned the merits of essentialism during a question-answer session, generating a 'magnified moment' (Hochschild 1994) wherein a student named

Sandra, pushed back by strengthening the 'born this way' rhetoric she had used earlier; in this instance, my presence amplified, but did not distort the feelings and attitudes of respondents.

My observations of the LGBTQ Services grounded my campus-based LGBTQ research because it was a physical space where members of other student organizations met formally and socialized informally. For example, though they physically met elsewhere on campus, members of the University's oldest and largest LGBTQ group on campus, Queer Social Central (which was informally established in the 1970s), were regular fixtures. Members of the now defunct queer activist group (i.e., Queer Activists at Uni) and an LGBTQ athlete support group also used the Center. Furthermore, the campus's only fraternity for LGBTQ people held all their meetings and many of their events in the Center since they lacked a physical space of their own. I emailed the heads of these organizations about whether they would be open to serving as ethnographic field sites. Queer Activists declined because they were on the cusp of becoming defunct. I had a meeting Queer Social Central about the project, but they ultimately decided my presence at their meetings and the ally-centered nature of my project would compromise their confidentiality policy, which promised members that no assumptions would be made about their sexuality; despite this, much of the Exec Board agreed to participate as interview respondents.

The Fraternity, however, was much more amenable to hosting my study. This was a relatively new group on grounds, established in 2008-2009 by students looking for an LGBTQ alternative to Greek life. At the time of my observation (i.e., Spring 2015-Fall 2015), a young Asian-American LGBTQ Services Center intern named Serena was the President of the Frat. The Frat's other officers included Cat, a bisexual Asian-American student, as treasurer, and Avery, a white non-binary person, as Vice President. Other focal members were Kristin, a young white bisexual woman who was formerly the President, and Amara, a South Asian ally who managed

social events. I initially reached out to Kristin, the past President about observing the group, and she put me in contact with Serena. I first met one-on-one with Serena, who I knew through the Speaker's Consortium she managed, and then presented my project to the Exec Board. Afterwards the board voted and agreed to participate in my study. Since the group was small, informing members of my study was done informally—except for when new members were rushing, which required a more formal announcing of my presence. The group added me to their private Facebook group and allowed me to observe all official weekly meetings and every event apart from a couple closed rush sessions. I elected to not observe or participate in parties outside campus with alcohol or their trip during beach week. However, those activities were rare, which meant I largely had complete access to the workings of the group.

The group's founders had attached themselves to a small fraternity charter, initially petitioned the University to establish itself as campus club before formally seeking recognition from the multicultural Greek collective on campus. In their petition to join the official Greek system at Uni, the members of the group nicely described the dynamics of the group, noting its dual status as a social and political entity:

> Serena confidently began their presentation, saying "We're an LGBTQ, Allied, and Gender-Inclusive fraternity…We were established in 2009 and have been functioning as a club…we've had 10 pledge classes and 75 members." Cat, another board member, continued, "Our mission is to provide a safe space for LGBTQ students and raise awareness of LGBTQ and intersectional issues." After discussing pledging logistics Avery noted, "Every member is required to take mandatory safe space training, as well as supplementary LGBTQ and multicultural modules." Cat also added, "We want to continue hosting intersectional events." Serena concluded the presentation by saying "We're a good fit for [you] because we are already multiculturally diverse—not just LGBTQ, but gender, race, class." She notes, "This also would be important symbolic recognition as we would be the first LGBTQ and the first gender-inclusive fraternity at Uni…maybe even one of the first in American South…so it's a big deal."

This group tried to wed the community-building of Greek life with service, requiring all its members to engage in at least three service acts a semester—at least one of which needed to explicitly serve the LGBTQ community.

During the time of my observation, the group was significantly more diverse in terms of race and gender identity than other LGBTQ groups I observed; it was also smaller (i.e., having fewer than 20 members and closer to 10 actively involved) and more ally-inclusive. Most of its members were LGBTQ, but two straight allies (i.e., Putul and Amara) were central members. Of the LGBTQ members, most did not identify as cis gay men or lesbians, with many Exec Board members adopting more marginalized sexual and gender identities like bisexual (e.g., Kristin and Cat), trans man (i.e., Eric), genderqueer (i.e., Serena), and gender non-binary (i.e., Avery). The core leadership team was also majority people of color, mostly East Asians (Serena, Eric and Johnny) and South Asians (i.e., Amara and Putul); Black students were less well-represented in both this group and broader UT LGBTQ community. White LGBTQ people certainly were involved, but they tended to be more casual members, with notable exceptions like the former President Kristin and President-elect Avery.

Thus, the LGBTQ Services Center and the adjacent student groups it connected, such as the Fraternity, were the center of LGBTQ community on campus. However, the strong divide between the University and the rest of UT meant that the community had its own LGBTQ organizations. Although community members could theoretically use community resources and University groups sometimes collaborated with community groups, in practice these organizations seldom overlapped with one another. The most central LGBTQ organization outside the university was the recently formed UT Community Pride Group, a non-profit organization that began running the city's now annual Pride festival beginning in 2012. The

group was the brainchild of a local lesbian woman named Claudia and has been largely operated by her and her partner P.J. with the help of a Board composed of rotating members; many of these members were cisgender gay men or lesbians (e.g., Bette, Jim, and Nicolette), but there were other groups represented, including a trans woman named Maisie and three allies (a young white women named Clara who worked with entertainment, an older white woman named Chandra who balanced the books, and a Black woman named Rhoda who managed the children's area). In addition to organizing the yearly festival, Community Pride developed a series of Pride-related events, including fundraisers, a film screening at the senior center, and a youth picnic.

I selected Community Pride as a field site because it was the closest resource University Town had to an LGBTQ Services Center; like the Center, the group worked to connect LGBTQ community members to resources year-round and helped identify LGBTQ-owned and friendly businesses in the region. Some of the LGBTQ resources they amplified included a support group for LGBTQ youth, a chapter of PFLAG, an AIDS treatment and prevention service, and two local LGBTQ-oriented bars—including one called Ambience that I explored in a prior research project (Hartless 2019; Forthcoming). My connections were less substantial in the town than they were in the University, but I reached out to the President, Claudia, via email, and she invited me to attend the next Board meeting where the group agreed to support my study. I was permitted to attend the Board's bimonthly meetings from late June to September 2015 when they had their festival, as well as their fundraising events and the festival itself. All Board members were aware of my study, and I announced my researcher status in informal conversations at more public gatherings. Much as in the LGBTQ Services Center and Fraternity, my role was as background

observer; however, I did offer my services to the festival, helping with both set-up and take-down, as well manning the merchandise tent and picking up rubbish throughout the day.

Cumulatively, these observations allowed me to observe a large portion of LGBTQ social and political life in University Town—both within the University and outside its bounds. I emulated this strategy with feminist organizations in University Town, selecting one highly visible organization in the University and another in the broader UT community. In the next section, I will discuss these two organizations, how I accessed them and the depth of my involvement.

*Feminist Organizations in University Town*

The two feminist organizations I observed in University Town were a community feminist organization called Women for Community Change and a campus group called University Feminism. I will begin my discussion of feminism in UT with community organizations because they predated and inspired the feminist groups on campus. Women for Community Change (WComm) was one of the oldest feminist organizations in UT. It was established in 1975 as a chapter of a national feminist organization that gained notoriety in the second wave of feminist activism. The organization had multiple feminist goals, including passing the Equal Rights Amendment that had stalled by the 1980s due to a rise in antifeminist campaigning (Davis 2008; Young 2007), working for pay parity, addressing sexual violence, and empowering women politicians. However, the central task of the group was to fight for reproductive justice. To this effect, the group had developed an ancillary non-profit to raise funds that could be allocated for low-income women seeking abortions, helping them navigate a state with extensive TRAP laws (Gold & Nash 2013; Medoff 2012) designed to make abortion as

inaccessible as possible by establishing burdensome regulations for clinics and their clientele. Women for Community Change worked alongside other feminist-oriented groups like a branch of Planned Parenthood, a women's mental health initiative, a domestic violence shelter, and a resource for survivors of sexual assault to serve and empower women in the University Town Community.

At the time, WComm was headed by a 61-year-old white woman named Amelia, who shared governance of the organization with a handful of similarly aged white women between the ages of 40 (i.e., Carmen) and 75 (i.e., Elmira). Although Carmen's husband agreed to help the treasurer, Gina, with the books near the end of my observation, the core of the group was exclusively white and female. I had previously met many of these women when I attended a couple of the group's meetings prior to my field work. I followed up with Amelia about the possibility of using the group as a field site. When she invited me to present my proposal to their Board, the group was amenable to my involvement, if somewhat concerned that I would not find what I was looking for due to the underrepresentation of men in their group. Still, they approved my petition on the condition that I become a dues-paying member of their organization and lend my expertise by running two workshops—one on social media usage and another concerning how to make their organization more inclusive.

It was this second workshop that most directly impacted my data collection. I offered to run this workshop as either a discussion on the merits of bringing men into feminism or as a conversation about how to make feminism more intersectional. The Board was more enthusiastic about the idea of discussing how to improve racial diversity, marketing my talk as "How Feminism Has Failed." This workshop was where I most actively shaped my data, assigning feminist think pieces on 'intersectionality' and 'white feminism' that were not in some attendees'

lexicons and facilitating dialogue on these points (For more on how this workshop unfolded, see Chapter 3.) However, despite my initial introduction of these concepts, most of the dialogue about their utility was generated by the group members themselves. My interventions thus served as a 'breaching experiment' (Brinkman 2016; Garfinkel 1967) of sorts, introducing new stimuli into the group and watching how community members negotiated new ways of thinking about feminism.

However, most of my data from Women for Community Change did not involve such active intervention. From February 2015 to January 2016, I attended their monthly business meetings at a local Indian restaurant where they discussed business for the abortion fund and planned their monthly community events. These events varied in form, including film screenings about topics like incarcerated women and global reproductive rights issues, workshops on topics like long-acting reversible contraception (LARC's), and discussion groups on issues like state TRAP laws. I also attended other events, such as their protest in support of Planned Parenthood when it was under threat of defunding (Walsh 2015) and fundraising efforts for their abortion fund. Together these observations allowed me to glimpse the inner workings of the organization and how they understood the position of men and diverse constituencies of women within feminism.

Women for Community Change had long been connected to the second feminist group I observed in University Town, University Feminism. In the late 1980s, WComm helped found a second chapter of their group within the University. Though the formal affiliation between the two organizations had long since lapsed, WComm's role in founding that chapter was a source of both pride and resentment for older women who felt the student group had rejected its roots:

> Gina noted, "They used to be a Uni chapter of WComm…now it stands for University Feminism." Bertha interjected, "What exactly is UFem?" I explain, "It's the Uni feminist

group." Carmen interjected, "They have great meetings—dialogues, discussion meetings. The timing is just so bad I can't come to them." I mentioned, "They are pretty well attended for a Uni feminist group." Carmen agreed, "Yeah, they get like 15 to 20 people. It cycles." Gina said again, "It was once a chapter of WComm…" Carmen visibly rolled her eyes, obviously familiar with this 'they-once-were-one-of-us' narrative. Amelia argued, "It was the abortion issue that did it. There. I said it. It was too controversial." Carmen said, "Well, this is UT." Amelia added, "Every year, they voted on a platform and kept WComm's platform. One year I forgot to go, and they became University Feminism instead."

Despite this tension, which is not uncommon in cross-generational feminist collaborations (e.g., Eddell, Brown, & Montano 2016), the groups continued to co-sponsor events. For example, Amelia and Gina were invited by UFem to facilitate a discussion about Reproductive Justice one week. However, they were clearly separate groups, having distinct leadership structures and membership bases. In fact, most students seemed completely unaware of this historical affiliation.

University Feminism, when I observed it from February 2015 to November 2015, was a University-sponsored club that sought to raise awareness of feminism at the University. It was run by an Exec Board that met every week to develop weekly feminist programming. This programming included film screenings, social events like Feminist Trivia and Game Night as well as more political discussions and workshops about serious topics such as Gender and Politics, Gender and Health, and Gender and Family. The group also engaged in campus actions, supporting the Uni group that organized the annual Take Back the Night programing and holding a bake sale designed to educate the campus about the gender pay gap. Its membership and leadership overlapped with other feminist groups on campus, with two of its Exec Board members interning at the Uni Women's Center and some of its other members being involved with the women-only sexual violence prevention group on campus. They also saw themselves as

allied to the men-only sexual violence prevention team and tried to build bridges with a nascent woman-of-color-run feminist group, University Sisterhood.

I selected this group due to its centrality to Uni feminist life. To gain access, I reached out to Alma and Josie, two young white women who were then co-Presidents. They were joined by a white man named Karl who served as their Vice President. Other positions on the Board included a Social Media Coordinator, a Zine Editor, a Treasurer, and a Secretary. These roles were filled by young white women, except for the Treasurer position, which was held by a Latina-Asian woman named Jolie. The Exec Board were happy to host my study, approving it via email and inviting me to their first meeting in the semester. The Board did not specify a preference for how I could announce my presence as a researcher to their general members, so I opted to do so during group introductions.

Much of the Board changed hands the second semester of my observation as multiple members graduated. Alma and Josie handed the Presidency over to a white woman named Jessica. Another young white man, Tim, also joined the Board as Social Media Coordinator. Perhaps the most significant (and contentious) change, however, was the creation of an Outreach/Activist Chair position; this position was originally held by a young Asian woman named Mindy who then suggested another woman of color, Rabiah, be appointed as her co-chair—a request that resulted in the creation of two O/A co-chair positions, which ultimately ended up being held by two white women (i.e., Darlene and Lila) when Mindy abdicated after Rabiah did not win the open election (For more details, see Chapter 4.) This turnover did not impact my access to the group, however, and I was able to stay with the group for another semester.

Observing these groups enabled me to get a closer look at LGBTQ and feminist activism on the ground, seeing how groups both within the University and broader University Town community navigated privilege and power within their bounds. However, as a small Southeastern college town with minimal socioeconomic and racial diversity, these observations were limited in what they could say about these two movements. To compensate for these limitations, I supplemented my year of ethnographic observation in University Town with observations of organizations in a larger social movement field with a more diverse offering of organizations.

*Metro City*

To expand this research, I relocated to Metro City, a large Northeastern urban area with a vibrant LGBTQ community and a long history of activism across multiple movements. Metro City's population was exponentially larger than University Town.[9] According to the U.S. Census (2019), it is also significantly more racially diverse, with around 43% or 30% of its population being white, depending on whether Hispanic respondents were included in the figures; Black residents made up around 24% of the remaining population, Asians composed around 14%, Latinx were around 29%, and the remainder were multiracial or belonging to other ethnic groups. There was also a bit more socioeconomic diversity than University Town since only around 37% possessed college degrees—a figure that is slightly higher than the national average of 30.9%, but significantly lower than UT's rate of almost 50%.

However, the high cost of living in Metro City meant many of its residents were significantly more affluent than in University Town. The Census lists the 2017 median income as

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[9] I am vague on how much larger the population is to protect the city's location. It was one of the larger cities on the East Coast.

just below $58,000. This high median income, however, may be less a sign of general overall affluence and economic security, but rather of the high gap between the rich and the almost 20% of the population who live in poverty. In the early 2000's, Metro City underwent an extensive bout of development intended to reduce drug crime and clean up vice in the center of the city. Although these initiatives were broadly declared a success, such development projects often come at the expense of gentrification that displaces people of color and the poor in urban enclaves (Lees 2016; Whittemore 2015). Many respondents, like Paulo, a Latino gay man who was born and raised in Metro City, had noted these changes and how they had hurt residents:

> I was born in lower MC…The building that I grew up in is actually now…really expensive condos…When I was growing up it wasn't…at that point yet…I know there were still a lot of old timers in our building, and when my parents moved into that building [in 1985], I know that it was technically affordable housing…Then we moved [out of state] in 1990 because the rents were spiking up…but my family has really deep roots in that neighborhood…They did kind of grow up in the Golden Age of South MC. And then going back even further, my grandparents…my mother's family was here for I think a few generations…[and] my dad's family…they were one of the first Latino families in the neighborhood.

Paulo was not the only long-time Metro City resident whose family was pushed to move either out of the city or into one of the more affordable neighborhoods on the outskirts of the town, as the area became increasingly inaccessible and unaffordable to its most marginalized members.

Extending my study to Metro City had clear advantages. Relocating to a larger city enabled me to engage with more specialized groups, since organizations embedded in more sizeable institutional contexts typically are more diversified (e.g., Carrol & Hannan 1989; Hannan et. 2005; Minkoff 1993). This diversification allowed me to observe groups that were more ally-inclusive, such as support groups for straight and cisgender allies (i.e., Together with LGBTQ Friends) and discussion groups about how to best bring men into feminism (i.e., Masculinity Talks and Male Profeminists United); it also allowed me to include more ally-

exclusive groups, such as the woman-only Feminist Circle. It also enabled me to examine how ally politics were negotiated by more compartmentalized groups like Metro City Pride, which tailored different events to distinct movement constituencies, and Radical AIDS Activism, which served a very specific subgroup of the community (i.e., people with AIDS) that transcended sexual identity boundaries.

*LGBTQ Field Sites in Metro City*

I observed three LGBTQ organizations in Metro City. The first, Metro City Pride, was the urban equivalent of the UT Community Pride group. Both were non-profits who managed the Pride festivities in their respective cities. However, it differed from this group in a few key ways. First, it was significantly older, having its roots in the early days of the LGBTQ rights movement. It was also much larger in scope. Rather than planning a single festival, its members organized over a week's work of events and collaborated with neighborhood-level Pride groups on programming throughout the month of June. In addition to their day-long Pride Festival, they organized a large March through the center of Metro City. Preceding these festivities were a family-oriented movie night and large political rally that juxtaposed live entertainment with activist speeches. They also organized other events throughout the week like a large women's dance, smaller dance parties, and a brunch with local businessmen and political figures, culminating with a much larger dance with a celebrity headliner. The sheer scope of these events meant that there were multiple committees in addition to the Exec Board—typically one for each major event—with their own chair and internal hierarchy of volunteers. There were also full-time staff members, some hired year-round and others on a temporary basis for the festival season, who worked out of a physical office in the historically gay area of the city.

I first connected with this group at a LGBTQ Trade meeting in Metro City where LGBTQ-owned and -oriented businesses in the Northeast came to network. I approached the MC Pride table, which was being manned by rally coordinator, Clint. and expressed my interest in getting involved in the group. Once I had his contact information, I followed up with him via email about the possibility of studying the organization as part of my dissertation. He put me in contact with the Board, which was being run by a white man named Ethan and a white woman named Sam, who gave me permission to observe the group. There was no objection to my involvement, which I announced in informal conversations and as part of formal introductions at events.

As part of my observation from May 2016 through July 2016, I attended planning meetings for most Pride committees, as well as most of the Pride events. Some events like the March and the smaller dance parties I was not able to attend because they overlapped with other events and because there were institutional limits to volunteer commitment. Early in my observation, I was claimed by festival organizer, Angela, and rally organizer, Clint, which meant I was most centrally involved with these branches of Pride, serving as the point person for rally volunteer coordinator, Roland, and as a captain for the festival, where I was responsible for overseeing a large sub-section of the tables. I also volunteered for the movie night and the women's dance, though I did not hold a position of authority in those groups. Despite my centrality and extensive involvement with this organization, I did not intervene in ally-specific or privilege-related conflicts therein. When I gave feedback, it was only logistical input requested by organizers about how to make the festival run smoother rather than recommendations made in my capacity as a researcher.

This group was also more diverse than the UT Community Pride group. Though it was run by two white community members, other committee leaders were men and women of color. For example, the largest dance was organized by a Black gay man named Enrique, and the smaller woman's dance was headed by a Black lesbian named Shiane. The March was run by Damon, an immigrant from South Asia, and Carlotta, a Latina woman, ran other smaller events. People of color, like volunteer coordinator, Roderick, also filled less visible leadership roles in the organization. A group that was notoriously absent, however, were transgender and non-binary participants—an absence that the group was keenly aware of, prompting them, as we saw in Chapter 2, to rethink the ways they gendered leadership positions. The leadership team were also almost exclusively young professionals of at least lower middle class status. Thus, the group was racially, if not always socioeconomically, diverse.

I complemented my observation of this explicitly LGBTQ-focused group with observations of two groups that complicate identity-based models of mobilization. The first, Together with LGBTQ Friends (TLF), was an ally-focused group established in the 1970s that explicitly targeted allies, providing support groups for people who wanted to learn more about the LGBTQ community and how to support it. Although the lead organizer, Jason, noted TLF is "not a political organization," he described them as "an organization that wants to create a safe world for LGBTQ people and those who love them"—an implicitly political goal. To facilitate this mission, TLF organized monthly meetings at a local church, which they divided into a LGB-oriented support group and a transgender-oriented support group. There was also a smaller support group for gender-non-conforming youth and an affiliated group that met in another part of the city, which I did not observe. These support groups were run by Jason and a team of ally facilitators (e.g., Marci) who worked with long-time LGBTQ attendees like Ray, Casey, and

Chip to mentor nascent allies. This group was demographically very white, though there were a couple of Black men and women who attended as newer members.

I reached out to Jason, the organizer, about observing the group and he invited me to sit in on the monthly meetings from April 2016 through August 2016. I mostly attended the LGB-oriented support group, but was invited to sit in on the Trans-oriented group in August during my last day in the field. Overall, participants were welcoming about my presence in the group and happy to contribute to study. However, this was the one group where a member was resistant to my presence. The ally in question did not formally object to my involvement, but was uncomfortable with my note-taking and concerned about her stories being taken from the group. Out of respect to this group member, Jason asked that no note-taking occur during support group meetings. I readily agreed to this restriction. Furthermore, though I was not explicitly asked to do so as a condition of my continued involvement, I decided to omit any references to this participant from my dissertation data out of respect for her reluctance to be part of the study. This did not drastically constrain my data collection since the participant in question was only present in two meetings, and one of those meetings was when I observed the trans-oriented support group, which she did not attend.

The final LGBTQ group I observed decentered LGBTQ identity in a different way. Radical AIDS Activism was started by gay men during the AIDS epidemic to fight against government inaction against the epidemic; however, these gay men were not the exclusive focus of the group which, at least in theory, advocated for all people with AIDS. Radical AIDS activism was also different in that it did not have a clear leadership structure, preferring to operate non-hierarchically. Although the older gay men who were involved at the organization's founding were given a degree of reverence and clearly saw themselves as informal leaders, the

closest thing this organization had to a formal leadership structure was the team of elected facilitators who were responsible for moderating the group's weekly meetings and keeping the energetic group on task. Many of these facilitators and group members were white, but there was a sizeable minority of Latino and Black gay men who were involved. The group was also mixed as far as HIV status; though HIV+ gay men seemed to be highly central to the group's workings, there were also HIV- women and LGBTQ folks who collaborated with these men. Many of these activists were economically comfortable, however, as was evidenced by their struggles in Chapter 2 to include the homeless and other marginalized community members in their mobilization.

The fluid hierarchy and uncertain leadership structure of this group made identifying a pathway to access complicated. I visited this group the first time during a preliminary information-gathering trip to Metro City in 2015 when I stopped by the LGBT Community Center where RAA met. There I met Palmer, a gay male facilitator for the group. When I returned to Metro City in the Spring of 2016 for my fieldwork, I re-established this connection with Palmer, asking him if he thought the group might be open to participating in my study. He agreed to put my proposal on the group's agenda in late March, and I petitioned the group to allow me to observe their meetings and political actions. After a question and answer session about how I would navigate confidentiality, a majority of the group voted to host my study and a facilitator signed the consent form. Once I had access, I attended the group's weekly meetings and frequent protest actions through July, including a large anti-Trump protest, an action at a Hillary Clinton fundraiser, and a leafletting outside a Human Rights Campaign fundraiser. The actions I participated in reflected the group's rejection of partisan politics and commitment to disruptive protests that challenge politicians across the political spectrum.

Together these sites allowed me to examine how different kinds of LGBTQ organizations with varying degrees of radicalism and divergent constituencies negotiated allyship and privilege on the ground. In the next section, I will outline my three feminist field sites and the new information they generated about these processes.

*Feminist Field Sites in Metro City*

I examined two feminist groups in Metro City designed to bring men into feminism—Masculinity Talks and Male Profeminists United. Both groups met at in Free Thoughts, an independent bookstore in Metro City known for its commitment to social justice and community outreach. The group I spent most time with, Masculinity Talks, was a monthly discussion group designed to bring men and women into dialogue with one another about masculinity and gender inequality. The group was the brainchild of two young white women, Grace and Judy, who were disillusioned with feminist groups that excluded or did not engage with men. Together with a gender-diverse team of facilitators, including men like Logan and Jackson, as well as genderqueer folks like Felix, they moderated discussions about masculinity with a racially and ideologically diverse group of general members. These discussions included conversations about gender-based violence, men and fatherhood, and institutional gender violence.

After attending one of these meetings in February 2016, I reached out to Grace about the studying the group. After discussing the possibility with facilitators, I was given access on the condition that I announced my presence during introductions and offered to stay after to discuss my project with interested parties. Although some participants did discuss my project with me after the meetings, none expressed discomfort with my presence, and I continued to observe the groups meetings until July. It was during such an informal post-meeting chat that I got to know

Samira, a young Moroccan-American feminist who was trying to get a group called Male Profeminists United off the ground, which she co-founded with a white male feminist named Edwin. The purpose of this group was twofold: Edwin, the male co-founder, wanted to create a safe space where men could do the internal work of learning to be better feminists and unlearning masculine socialization that conditioned men to dominate social space, while Samira wanted to encourage men to seek external opportunities for activism.

Samira and Edwin were excited about my study and invited me to their February meeting. They often had their group meet immediately following Masculinity Talks sessions, so their core base often overlapped with that group, though they did have a couple members that only attended their meetings. Their most regular members were a young Black man named Alonzo, a French-born woman named Trinity, and Trinity's male partner. I observed the group's monthly meetings and their sole attempt at external activism—a volunteering stint as clinic escorts, serving as buffers between clients and potential protesters at a city abortion provider. I attended these meetings until May, when the group disbanded due to Samira's relocation out of the country and Edwin's frequent work travel.

I supplemented my observations of these ally-focused groups by attending a couple meetings of an even shorter-lived group called the Feminist Circle. I came across the Feminist Circle when I was perusing Metro City Feminist groups online. The group was founded by a young Middle Eastern woman who wanted to establish a woman-only group for feminist discourse. She hoped that the group would develop a feminist blog that could consolidate news, local resources, and events for feminist-minded women. She held the first meeting in her home, which was in a racially diverse but gentrifying neighborhood on the outskirts of Metro City; the meeting was attended by three women apart from ourselves, two of whom were white, but one of

whom was a Black feminist. The group maintained this core membership for one more meeting before abruptly disbanding when the organizer also had to leave the city for a job opportunity overseas. Though I was only able to observe a couple of meetings, the struggles of this organizer to establish a woman-centered group in a context where such groups have been criticized as exclusionary (Doan 2010) was illuminating.

These Metro City organizations collectively allowed me to observe more specialized organizations that served less general constituencies. This enabled me to observe how different kinds of LGBTQ and feminist organizations navigated privilege and how their more inclusive or exclusive goals mediated this process. In the next section, I will discuss the interview-based portion of my project, outlining how my interviews supported this ethnographic work, how I designed my protocols, and what the ultimate demographics of my sample were.

## Interviews

I supplemented my 1.5 years of fieldwork with 106 interviews with activists and allies in LGBTQ activism and the feminist movement. These interviews, which were typically 2-3 hours in duration, allowed for an in-depth exploration of how activists both inside and outside the ethnographic field sites I observed conceptualized allyship and privilege within the two movements. Since ethnography cannot easily access the 'interior worlds' of research subjects (Hogan and Pink 2012), such exploration was essential for unpacking the emotional aspects of activism (Goodwin, Jasper, & Poletta 2009; Gould 2009; Jasper 2011), examining how the 'ally' was conceptualized and constructed through maintenance of an insider/outsider binary (Butler 1997; Fuss 1989; Sedgewick 1997), and outlining how activists made phenomenological 'sense' (Gill 2014; Kupers 2017) of the allies in their midst.

## *Recruitment and Research Design*

To explore how LGBTQ activists and feminists made sense of allyship, I developed a semi-structured interview schedule that invited respondents to reflect on the role of allies in social movements. Most of these respondents (n =73) were theoretically sampled from the groups I observed; I solicited interviews from allies and community members in both movements, taking care to select members at both the center and the margins of these groups. My goal was to identify both the most focal members of these organizations—powerful insiders who had the power to set the tone regarding 'allies' in each respective movement—as well as activists on the periphery who may have controversial or underrepresented attitudes towards allyship and politics. These within-group activists, however, cannot represent the entirety of the social movement fields they were embedded in, especially in a large urban area like Metro City. To compensate for this, I solicited 33 interviews from outside the groups I studied. I utilized two strategies to recruit these respondents: 1) I asked interviewees to recommend other activists and allies who might be interested in participating; 2) I compiled a list of feminist and LGBTQ organizations within each city and solicited interviews from the heads of those groups.

There were several focal movement groups that I was particularly keen to sample. In University Town's LGBTQ activist field, I was sure to include members from the large Queer Social Central group on campus as well as the contentious (and now defunct) Queer Activists group; in the community, I also interviewed a couple of people who worked with the local LGBTQ youth support group, and a representative from the Human Rights Collective that advocated for the rights of LGBTQ people within the community. I also recruited respondents who were affiliated with University Town's feminist sexual assault prevention groups, both on campus and in the broader University Town community. In Metro City, I interviewed radical and

queer feminists affiliated with the local Dyke March, an employee at an LGBTQ violence

outreach group, activists involved in a Marxist Feminist reading group, and an activist in a group

serving gay men of color; I also approached respondents who were affiliated with more

mainstream organizations like NOW. These supplemental interviews allowed me to explore how

ally politics and privilege negotiation were navigated in more radical groups and more

institutionalized organizations than the sites I studied.

I either approached these respondents in person about participating in the interview or

contacted them with the following message via email or Facebook Private Message:

> "My name is Jaime Hartless, and I am a graduate student at the University of Virginia. I
> am conducting a research study that explores how allies are incorporated and experienced
> within the feminist movement and LGBTQ activism. I am looking to speak to people
> involved in feminist activism (irrespective of gender identity), as well as LGBTQ and
> straight people involved in LGBTQ activism. If you are willing, I would like to sit down
> with you for a 2-hour interview at a location where you feel most comfortable. If you
> agree to be interviewed, I will keep all your information confidential, and you will have
> the right to opt out of the study at any time prior to my findings' publication. I have
> attached the consent form if you would like to read more, but if you have any questions
> or want to set up an interview feel free to contact me by email or phone. Please only reply
> if you are 18 or older. Thank you for your time."

Most respondents chose to meet in coffee shops or restaurants, though I occasionally met with

interviewees in public parks, the field sites themselves (when they had permanent physical

premises), places of employment, personal residences, or private library rooms. I never selected

a location myself unless a respondent firmly insisted they wanted me to pick a meeting place; my

goal was to allow interviewees to control the level of privacy of our interview, so that they felt

secure.

Wherever the interview was ultimately held, I began the process by talking respondents

through the consent process and having them sign the interview consent form. Before the

interview began, I asked all respondents to fill out a brief demographic survey (See Appendix

A). This survey had two functions: 1) it allowed me to collect racial, gender, class, and sexuality-related demographics in a non-obtrusive way; 2) it helped get my respondents thinking about how they positioned themselves within activism by asking them where they find the activist news they consume and to list what groups they are connected to within each movement. The interview schedule was semi-structured (e.g., Galletta 2013; Wengraf 2001), meaning I had a list of topics I aimed to cover but allowed respondents to follow tangents about allies that were generative. (See Appendix B). First, I opened with an abbreviated life history (Cole & Knowles 2001; Goodson 2001) of respondents, asking where they come from, what the politics of their home-lives were like, how they got involved in LGBTQ and/or feminist activism, and exploring the conflicts and tensions they had seen within their organizations. In the process of collecting this information, respondents often talked about the role of allies and their experiences with privilege informally without being directly prompted to do so. This allowed their attitudes towards and experiences with allies to emerge organically.

The second half of the interview protocol implored respondents to think more explicitly about allyship. I first asked respondents how they defined the term 'ally,' before encouraging them to clarify the applicability of the concept (e.g., to movements like feminism) and outline how allyship is determined (i.e., through self-identification, insider designation, or an interplay between the two). If they had not done so already, I then encouraged them to think about the position of allies within the movements they were embedded within (i.e., their numbers and what positions in the organizations they occupied).

Once a descriptive portrait of ally politics had been constructed, I invited respondents to consider more normative questions, such as how desirable allies were to activism (e.g., what pros and cons existed to their involvement) and what their appropriate role was (e.g., if they should

hold leadership positions). As respondents worked through these questions, I encouraged them to ground these considerations within their lived experience with allies, asking them to reflect upon times these allies made 'mistakes' (or when they 'as allies' felt they had erred or been 'called out' for bad behavior) and inviting them to speculate on how much leeway mistakes like these warranted. I tailored these questions based on whether the respondent was involved primarily in feminism or LGBTQ activism and whether they identified as an insider or ally in those movements.

I ended the interview with a practical exercise designed to help respondents work through their feelings about ally dynamics. I asked them to read four short articles about allies; two of these articles were ally-positive and two were ally-critical. The first ally-positive reading was a *Huffington Post Queer Voices* article, "Is the Gay Community Scaring Away Our Straight Allies?," by Mason Hsieh (2015), which told a story of when one of the author's straight friends decided to stop attending LGBTQ community events because he was 'called out' for asking, 'In gay dating, who is the girl?" In this piece, Hsieh argues that such attempts to police allies alienate potential supporters, making a case that 'political incorrectness' should be tolerated in LGBTQ activism. I supplemented this with a *Slate* piece, "Why We Should Care How Straight Allies Benefit from Their Support," by Tristan Bridges and CJ Pascoe (2013) that argues that the movement actually tends to 'overthank' allies, even when their actions actively highlight their heterosexuality or are predominantly self-interested.

I also had respondents read men-positive and men-critical pieces. First, I introduced a piece in *Mic* by Lauren Rankin that argued "Feminism Needs Men, Too," making a case about what feminism gains from men and what men gain from feminism. I concluded with a more critical piece by Meghan Murphy in her blog *Feminist Currents* entitled, "The Trouble with

Male Allies," which documents predatory actions on the part of self-identified male feminists like Hugo Schwyzer and critiques male feminists for explaining to women how feminism should be done. Most respondents read all the articles. However, I occasionally halved them on the rare occasion that a respondent was disconnected or opposed to one movement. If respondents were too tired to read I offered to summarize the main points, though this only occurred on one occasion.

I ended the interview by asking respondents to reflect on the future of allyship, inquiring about what they wanted to see from straight allies and male feminists in the future. These questions allowed me to explore how respondents understood the role of allies in their activist lives. While ethnography enabled me to document tension and conflict around allyship and privilege as it occurred in real time, these interviews helped me see how respondents understood the actual and ideal position of allies in the movement. In the following section, I will outline the demographics of my interview sample and discuss how it compared to the organizations I observed and the city they were embedded within.

### *Demographics*

I interviewed a total of 106 activists, 51 in University Town and 55 in Metro City. (See Appendix C for Demographics Charts). They ranged in age from 18 to 84 though they were not equally dispersed across those age groups. Over half of my respondents (n=54) were under 30, with the University-focused nature of much of my data collection meaning that 31 of my respondents were college-age (i.e., 18-22); of the remainder of my sample, 28 respondents were in their thirties and forties and 24 were over fifty. My sample was somewhat racially

homogenous, with almost 74% of respondents[10] identifying as white; the remainder of

respondents identified as Asian (i.e., almost 9% East Asian, South Asian, or Middle Eastern),

Black (i.e., approximately 6%), Latinx (i.e., around 4%), or multiracial (i.e., almost 9%). This

degree of whiteness was typical for University Town and many of the organizations I observed

in Metro City (if not the city itself); the well-documented whiteness of queer and feminist social

and political spaces (e.g., Hull, Scott, & Smith 1982; Lane 2015) may have further exacerbated

this trend. Respondents were also highly educated with almost 90% of respondents having (or on

track to attain) a BA/BS degree and almost 34% of the sample possessing postgraduate

education. This high degree of educational attainment, exponentially higher than the national

average of 30.9%, could be attributed to two factors: 1) the tendency of the most powerful

members of marginalized groups to have time to dedicate to activism (Cohen 1999), and 2) the

grounding of three of my most central field sites in a highly selective University (i.e., the

LGBTQ Services Center, the Fraternity, and University Feminism).

The majority of my respondents were also women, LGBTQ-identified, and/or gender

non-conforming, which is perhaps unsurprising considering I sampled most of my respondents

from the feminist and LGBTQ activist sites I studied. Exactly half of my sample (i.e., 53) were

cisgender women; a bit over a third of the remainder were cisgender men (i.e., 38), and the rest

identified as trans, non-binary of gender-non-conforming in some way (e.g., genderqueer). Over

a third of these respondents identified as heterosexual or straight. The remaining respondents

either identified as non-heterosexual in some way or did not disclose an intelligible sexual

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[10] Percentages were rounded to the highest full number; as such, all figures may not round to 100. More specific percentages can be found in the supplementary tables.

identity on their demographic survey; [11] almost 36% of the total sample identified as gay or lesbian, around 12% as bisexual, and 15% as queer.[12] There were some gendered differences in this sexual identity breakdown; whereas cisgender women were split evenly down the middle with around half identifying as straight and half as LGBTQ, around 63% of cisgender male respondents were non-heterosexual. This had two important implications: 1) many of the men involved in feminism were also LGBTQ identified, and 2) straight allies were very likely to be women.

Most respondents were affiliated to some degree with both movements. For example, although they varied in their level of activism, most either identified as feminists or were at the very least supportive of the work feminism was doing; only six respondents framed themselves as 'at odds' with the movement, including three older gay men who did not see themselves as having a stake in the feminist movement and three women who objected to it for disparate reasons (i.e., two white straight allies in University Town who thought feminism was passé and an African-American lesbian who distanced herself from what she perceived as 'man-bashing' in feminism). Respondents were even more united vis-a-vis the merits of LGBTQ activism; though interviewees varied in how deeply they were involved with said movement, almost none were opposed to its mission—the one exception being a lesbian-identified feminist who was critical of

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[11] It was hard to exactly calculate the number of straight people for two reasons: 1) A small number of my older female respondents, many of whom were concentrated in Women for Community Change, seemed to be confused by the 'sexual orientation or identity' box, writing 'female' or 'attracted to females' despite being married to men. While it is possible that these women were expressing an attraction to women, it seems far more likely they were conflating sexual identity with biological sex. There were also women who left the box blank as a political statement (e.g., a refusal to associate with heteronormativity), but expressed in their interview that that they had only partnered with men. As a compromise between maintaining the integrity of analytical data and respecting their self-determination, I designated these seven respondents as having a sexual identity of 'other.'

[12] I classified respondents as 'queer' whenever they listed this on their survey; some respondents exclusively identified as queer, while others used it to modify or as an alternative to traditional gay or lesbian labels (e.g., Gay/Queer)

the inclusion of trans women in queer and feminist spaces. Thus, the vast majority of my respondents were either beneficiaries of these two movements or could be conceived as allies to them. As such, I typically discussed the allyship dynamics of both movements with interview respondents.

## Access and Analysis

As I began the process of identifying field sites and gaining access to them, my social identities were not baggage I could check at the door. Instead, they largely informed what groups were open to my participation and how they negotiated my presence. My status as an openly LGBTQ-identified woman, for example, undoubtedly smoothed my pathway into these organizations. This was especially true of my University Town field sites where my visibility in the local LGBTQ community made me something of a known commodity, helping me build trust with both University officials like Martin and students who had encountered me through my community activism and service. This allowed me to easily integrate into feminist and LGBTQ groups in a way that may have been difficult for outsiders, who might have needed to develop strategies for navigating this mistrust (e.g., De Soto & Dudwick 2003; Mullings 1999; Ortiz 2003). As a result, this task likely would have likely been significantly harder had I been a straight ally or a man in feminism who was more visibly "othered" queer and feminist spaces.

Although my insider status likely smoothed my entry into LGBTQ and feminist field sites, it made my interactions with men and straight allies in interviews somewhat more fraught. While my insider status helped community members open up, there was sometimes an unintentionally adversarial quality to my relationships with allies. Some straight allies and male feminists, for example, seemed self-conscious in my presence because, as an insider, they treated

me as though I possessed the capacity to the vet their ***ally credentials***. For example, they sometimes seemed to worry that they were not presenting themselves as 'good' allies within my study. For example, when Clara was discussing her skepticism of the validity of bisexuality in men in Chapter 2, she was clearly concerned that I was judging her as an ally, saying "[believing that] doesn't mean I'm not an ally…please don't mistake that… I realize that's probably not good for you to hear…the fact that I'm working with Pride, I'm an event coordinator, and I'm honest-to-God supportive… I don't want you to be misled…I am an ally." In this moment, Clara's anxiety was not about whether she was *objectively* a good enough ally, but whether I was subjectively *perceiving* her to be a good ally to *my* community.

Men sometimes felt this way as well. Male Profeminist United co-founder, Edwin, for example, joked after our interview that he "really liked the conversation with [me]" but that he was "really hoping [I] don't disown [him]." These respondents thus treated me as a community expert of sorts, fearful that I would evaluate their allyship and find it wanting. On a personal level, I strove to reassure these allies that I was not in the business of vetting their credentials. On a scholarly level, I treated these moments as data, seeing their reflexivity towards me as an insider-researcher as indicative of how they approached community insiders.

My gender and LGBTQ identity were not the only aspects of my social position that shaped the kinds of sites I could access—my whiteness also played a role. One of my goals in relocated to Metro City was to seek out more racially diverse field sites. Although such organizations certainly did exist in both movements, I was ultimately not able to gain access to them because my racial identity either disqualified me from entry or made these groups skeptical about hosting me. Considering how white people have often undermined the security of antiracist groups and other spaces meant to be safe for people of color through their self-interested

involvement or 'white fragility' (DiAngelo 2018; Lipsitz 2006), the reservations of these groups were understandable. However, my inability to tap into these segments of the social justice sphere contributed to the overall whiteness of my field sites and research sample. Though I could examine the racial dynamics of diverse organizations like Masculinity Talks and Metro Pride that were more inclusive than the predominantly white groups in University Town, organizations that centered people of color were often beyond my reach.

There were other identity-related challenges that I encountered which problematized data collection in my field sites. Because ethnography as a method does not access the interior 'life worlds' (Habermas 2015) of its participants, it was often tricky to identify who was an outsider to social justice activism and who was an insider. Identifying allies was particularly challenging in LGBTQ activism; since sexual identity is an invisible status in the absence of a vocal disclosure in the form of 'coming out' (e.g., Blair & Hoskin 2015; Irvine 2010), who was LGBTQ and who identified as straight was not always immediately apparent within the groups I studied.

I addressed this difficulty in two central ways. First, I kept a running list of ethnography participants who disclosed their sexuality in social interactions, revising this list in the event of new information. Second, I relied on my interviews to elucidate how participants identified themselves. Snowball sampling, wherein interviewees are asked to refer potential participants to the study (Chaim 2008), has historically been useful for capturing such invisible and marginalized populations (Browne 2005; Moore 2019) because it exploits community networks to identify hard to locate groups; in this case, asking participants to recommend activists and allies who are involved in activism, helped me map who was a community member and who was an ally in the given organization—and  to verify it through our interviews. When I was not able

to directly interrogate respondents on their sexuality, I did not presume it, but rather used the *perceptions* of other participants as data; whether individual X was an ally in actuality was sometimes less important than the fact that X was collectively constructed as an ally. This was typically less of an issue in feminism. Although misgendering of trans participants in feminist spaces was possible, research suggests gender is one of the first aspects we notice about someone (e.g., Contreras, Banaji, & Mitchell 2013), meaning that the gender of participants was usually easier to determine.

In my ethnographic field sites, I followed Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw's guide (2011) for constructing ethnographic field notes; when I was in the field I took short hand jottings in a series of small notebooks or my iPhone. When I was in public places like the Pride rally where participants were on stage, and hence had minimal expectation of privacy, I replaced this short hand system with a more formal recording of the event. After each meeting or event, I translated these jottings and video files into narrative prose, telling the 'story' of what happened in the field in a more dynamic way. Interviews typically required less narrative translation. I recorded each interview with a handheld recorder, and then transcribed each either personally or through an external transcription service.

Once field notes and interview transcripts were complete, I began data analysis. I first selected particularly powerful weeks in each field sites and a handful of compelling interviews for preliminary analysis. Following Strauss and Corbin's model (1998), I open coded this subset of the data. I then used grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) to generate theoretical propositions about allyship and develop closed codes that then could be applied to the rest of the data using Dedoose software. Next, I performed a more systematic closed coding of my ethnographic and interview data, seeing how often the codes I generated emerged in the data. I intermittently

interrupted this coding, organizing my thoughts into broader analytic memos, such as reflections on what caused the boundaries of these movements to become 'blurred' and when they were 'reinforced.'

As I worked to identify these trends in the data, I took specific care to note when the 'honorable discourses' (Pugh 2013) of my respondents' interviews were in tension with their more visceral reactions to allies on the ground in real time. While I constructed these memos, I also made note of 'magnified moments' where "things go intensely but meaningfully wrong" (Hochschild 1994: 766) in my ethnographic data. Examples of such magnified moments included Brian's disruption of UFem in Chapter 4 and the silencing of women in Radical AIDS Activism during the Hillary Clinton meeting in Chapter 2. By juxtaposing my ethnographic observations of group conflicts with activists' ideological perspectives on those conflicts, I was able to identify key tensions around privilege and power that were instrumental to the development of my nuanced comparative model of ally politics, which explained how divergent models of identity politics created distinct barriers and pathways to ally involvement.

# Appendix A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

*Please fill out the following survey before we begin the interview. Feel free to ask me if any items are unclear.*

**Full Name**

_____

**Age** _____

**Gender Identity** _____

**Sexual Orientation or Identity**

_____

**Race/Ethnicity**

_____

**Religious Affiliation**

_____

**Hometown (i.e., birth place)**

_____

**Current Occupation(s)**

_____

**Estimated Yearly Income**

_____

**Highest Level of Education**

_____

**Father's Occupation**

_____

**Mother's Occupation**

_____

**Please list any political organizations you belong to:**

| Feminist | LGBTQ | Other |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |

**Where do you get news about activist issues you care about (i.e., news sites, blogs, etc.)?**

| Feminist | LGBTQ | Other |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |

## Appendix B: DISSERTATION INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

***This is a semi-structured interview schedule. The order and exact quality of the questions were subject to change, and not all questions were asked in every interview. ***

### *Background Info*

**Life History**: Tell me a bit about your life. Where did you grow up? What was your house like? Did you move around a lot or mostly stay in the same place? Where did you go to school?

**Political History**: What were local politics like in your hometown? Was your town conservative or liberal overall? Where did your family fall on the political spectrum? Are your politics similar/different to them now?

**Religious Background**: Describe your religious life. Were you raised in a particular religious faith? Was your family devout? Do you have the same faith now as you did when you were growing up? Why or why not?

### *Feminist and LGBTQ Rights Consciousness-Raising*

#### *Feminist Insiders*

**Identity**: Do you identify as a feminist? If yes, what brought you to feminism? Why did you decide to embrace the feminist label?

**Awareness of Inequality**: When did you first realize women were discriminated against? Did you ever feel when you were younger that you couldn't do things because you were a girl—or did anyone ever tell you this? How did people's expectations of you differ from their expectations of men? What forms of gender discrimination have you experienced? How did they make you feel?

**Awareness of Feminism**: How did you learn about feminism? Was there a feminist presence in your hometown? Were there any feminists in your family?

**Exposure to Anti-feminism:** Do you have friends and family who are against feminism? Do you try to educate them?...Why or why not? Do you ever feel like

you are accountable to negative stereotypes about feminism?...Do they ever bother you?...How do you deal with them?

## *Feminist Allies*

**Identity**: What brought you to feminism? Do you identify as a feminist? If yes, why did you decide to embrace the feminist label? If no, why not? Are there other labels you feel more comfortable with? Why do they feel more appropriate?

**Awareness of Inequality**: When did you first realize women were discriminated against? Did you ever feel when you were younger that your female friends or family couldn't do things because they were girls—or did anyone ever tell you this? What expectations did people have of you as a boy?

**Awareness of Feminism**: How did you learn about feminism? Was there a feminist presence in your hometown? Were there any feminists in your family?

**Exposure to Anti-feminism:** Do you have friends and family who are against feminism? Does your identification with feminism ever cause difficulties with your male peers? Are there times when you find it hard to be a male feminist ally? [Ask for specific examples.]

## *LGBTQ Rights Insiders*

**Identity:** When did you first realize you were not 'straight'? How did you feel about this realization? When did you embrace your current sexual identity label? Did you ever use other labels to define yourself? If so, why the change?

**Awareness of Inequality**: When did you first learn about homophobia? When did you first realize that LGBTQ people are disadvantaged? What forms of anti-gay (or trans) discrimination have you experienced? What privileges do straight people have that you are denied? How does this make you feel?

**Awareness of LGBTQ Rights**: When did you first hear about the LGBTQ Rights movement? What was your family's stance on LGBTQ Rights issues? Are you out to them? If not, why? If so and if they were against LGBTQ Rights before you came out, has having an LGBTQ family member changed their perspective on the topic?

**Awareness of Anti-gay Discourse**: Do you know people in your personal life who are against LGBTQ Rights? If so, what justifications do they give? Do you engage with them on these issues? If so, what are your strategies?

*LGBTQ Rights Allies*

**Identity:** What brought you to LGBTQ Rights activism? Did you ever question your current sexual identity label? Did you ever use other labels to define yourself? If so, why the change?

**Awareness of Inequality**: When did you first learn about homophobia? When did you first realize that LGBTQ people are disadvantaged? Have you ever felt privileged to be straight? What advantages, if any, do you think straightness gives you? What forms of anti-gay (or trans) discrimination have you witnessed? How did they make you feel?

**Awareness of LGBTQ Rights**: When did you first hear about the LGBTQ Rights movement? What was your family's stance on LGBTQ Rights issues?

**Awareness of Anti-gay Discourse**: Do you know people in your personal life who are against LGBTQ Rights? If so, what justifications do they give? Do you engage with them on these issues? If so, what are your strategies? Do you ever feel that supporting LGBTQ Rights disadvantages you?

*Activist History*

*Feminist*

**History:** Describe your history as an activist. What feminist groups have you been a part of? When did you join each?

**Preferred Groups:** Do you have stronger connections to some groups than others? Why do you like the ones you have joined? Do you have any qualms with them?

**Disliked Groups**: Are there feminist groups or women's groups that you don't like? Why do you not like them? How do they do feminism differently?

**Extra-Movement Groups**: Are you involved in any non-feminist political groups (e.g., LGBTQ Rights, anti-racist, anti-classist efforts)? Do you feel your involvement in these groups complements your feminist activism? Do you ever

feel torn between activist groups? [*NB: If the respondent mentioned LGBTQ Rights activism, I determined whether they are an insider or an ally, then go back and ask the earlier questions for that group*].

**News Sources**: Why do you turn to the sites you do for information? What do you like about them? Is there anything you dislike about them? Are there mainstream news sites you would never go to for information? Are there feminist sites you take issue with? Why?

*LGBTQ Rights*

**History:** Describe your history as an activist. What LGBTQ Rights groups have you been a part of? When did you join each?

**Preferred Groups:** Do you have stronger connections to some groups than others? Why do you like the ones you have joined? Do you have any qualms with them?

**Disliked Groups**: Are there LGBTQ Rights groups or LGBTQ groups that you don't like? Why do you not like them? How do they engage with LGBTQ service and activism differently?

**Extra-Movement Groups**: Are you involved in any non-LGBTQ political groups (e.g., feminist, anti-racist, anti-classist efforts)? Do you feel your involvement in these groups complements your feminist activism? Do you ever feel torn between activist groups? [*NB: If the respondent mentions feminism, I determined whether they are an insider or an ally, then went back and asked the earlier questions for that group*].

**News Sources**: Look at their survey responses. Why do you turn to the sites you do for information? What do you like about them? Is there anything you dislike about them? Are there mainstream news sites you would never go to for information? Are there LGBTQ Rights sites you take issue with? Why?

***Identity Politics and Aims***

*Feminism*

**Goals**: What do you think are the most important goals of the feminist movement? What issues are less important?

**On LGBTQ Rights**: Do you think LGBTQ Rights issues are feminist issues? Are some LGBTQ Rights issues particularly important to feminists? Are there any LGBTQ Rights issues that work against feminist issues?

**Intra-Movement Conflicts**: Are there groups in the feminist movement that don't get along? Do you see any tensions in the groups you volunteer with? For example, do white feminists and feminists of color get along? Are there class-based tensions? Political ruptures? Are particular women marginalized? Do you imagine any woman would feel out of place or be unwelcome in your group?

### *LGBTQ Rights*

**Goals**: What do you think are the most important goals of the LGBTQ Rights movement? What issues are less important?

**On Feminism**: Do you think feminist issues are LGBTQ Rights issues? Are some feminist issues particularly important to LGBTQ Rights activists? Are there any feminist issues that work against LGBTQ Rights goals?

**Intra-Movement Conflicts**: Are there groups in the LGBTQ Rights movement that don't get along? Do you see any tensions in the groups you volunteer with? For example, do white LGBTQ people and LGBTQ people of color get along? Are there class-based tensions? Political ruptures? Are particular LGBTQ people marginalized? Do you imagine any member of the LGBTQ umbrella would feel out of place or be unwelcome in your group?

### ***Introducing Allies***

**Defining 'Ally'**: How do you define the term ally? What makes someone an ally? Can they identify as an ally or should the insiders of the movement decide? Who is not an ally?

**Allies in Movement Groups**: How present are allies in the movement? Do allies involve themselves in the groups you are involved with?

### *Past Experience with Allies/Allies*

#### *Insiders*

**Allies You Know**: Who in your personal life do you consider an ally? What makes them an ally? What allies do you know at the organization(s) you are involved with? How do you distinguish allies from insiders?

**Where They Are Found**: What do allies do for the movement in general? Where are they located—are they inside or outside the movement? What do they do in the organization (s) you work for?

**Centrality of Allies**: How important are allies to the movement in general? How important are they in your organization(s)? How high are they in the hierarchy—are they auxiliary helpers or central organizers?

**Ally Slip-ups**: Have you ever been offended by something an ally said or did? [Prompt for feminists: Has a male profeminist ever said anything misogynist, made you feel uncomfortable, or mansplained something to you?; Prompt for LGBTQ people: Has a straight ally ever said anything homophobic, took over a group discussion, or tried to drive the groups goals in a direction they were more comfortable with?] How did you feel at these moments? How were the conflicts resolved?

#### *Allies*

**Allies You Know**: Who in your personal life considers you an ally? What do you think makes you an ally? What other allies do you know at the organization(s) you are involved with? How do you distinguish other allies from insiders?

**Where They Are Found**: What do allies do for the movement in general? Where are they located—are they inside or outside the movement? What do they do in the organization(s) you work for?

**Centrality of Allies**: How important are allies to the movement in general? How important are they in your organization(s)? How high are they in the hierarchy—are they auxiliary helpers or central organizers?

**Ally Slip-ups**: Have you ever felt like you've failed as an ally? [Prompt for male feminists: Has a woman ever called you out for being misogynist, because you

made her feel uncomfortable, or mansplained something to her?; Prompt for straight allies: Has a LGBTQ person ever accused you of saying something homophobic or heteronormative, attempting to dominate a group discussion, or trying to drive the groups goals in a direction they were more comfortable with?] How did you feel at this moment? Did you feel like they had a point or were they being unfair? How was the conflict resolved?

## Current/Perceived Attitudes Towards Allies

### Feminist Insiders

**Feasibility of Allyship**: Do you think men can be feminists? Are you ever skeptical of men who self-identify as feminists? Why or why not? Do you typically call men feminist? If so, why? If not, how do you prefer to identify them and why?

**Proper Role of Allies**: What should be the role of allies in the movement? Are there things men shouldn't do in feminism? Are there roles that are inappropriate for them to play? Are there issues you think they shouldn't weigh in on? Do you have any objections to men holding positions of authority in feminist organizations? Why are you supportive/ambivalent/resistant?

**Tolerance of Ally Slip-ups**: How much leeway do you leave for men who slip up? How badly do they need to 'mess up' before they can no longer be considered an ally? Can you give me some examples of forgivable and unforgivable offenses?

**Pros of Allies**: What are the advantages of having men in the movement? Do they bring any important insights to gender inequality? Are there things for the movement they can do that women can't or have more difficulty accomplishing? Do you think people in power take men more seriously?

**Cons of Allies**: What are the disadvantages to having men in feminism? Do you think some men take over feminism and direct it towards themselves? Are most men like that? Do the men you know ever derail dialogue, for example by insisting that feminists clarify that 'not all men' hurt women? Are there aspects of feminist activism that only women should do or be responsible for?

### Feminist Allies

**Feasibility of Allyship**: If respondent calls himself a feminist—Has a woman ever objected to your right to identify as a feminist…how did that make you feel? Has

this backlash ever caused you to question your identity? If respondent calls himself an ally or pro-feminist—are you ever skeptical of men who self-identify as feminists? Why or why not?

**Proper Role of Allies**: What should be the role of allies in the movement? Are there things men shouldn't do in feminism? Are there roles that are inappropriate for you to play? Are there issues you think you shouldn't weigh in on? Do you have any objections to men holding positions of authority in feminist organizations? Why are you supportive/ambivalent/resistant?

**Tolerance of Ally Slip-ups**: How badly do men need to 'mess up' before they can no longer be considered an ally? Can you give me some examples of forgivable and unforgivable offenses?

**Pros of Allies**: What are the advantages of having men in the movement? Do they bring any important insights to gender inequality? Are there things for the movement they can do that women can't or have more difficulty accomplishing? Do you think people in power take men more seriously?

**Cons of Allies**: Can you imagine any possible disadvantages to having men in feminism? Do you think some men take over feminism and direct it towards themselves? Are there aspects of feminist activism that only women should do or be responsible for?

*LGBTQ Rights Insiders*

**Feasibility of Allyship**: Do you think straight people can be inside the LGBTQ Rights movement? Are you ever skeptical of straight people who self-identify as allies? Why or why not?

**Proper Role of Allies**: What should be the role of allies in the movement? Are there things straight allies shouldn't do in the LGBTQ Rights movement? Are there roles that are inappropriate for them to play? Are there issues you think they shouldn't weigh in on? Do you have any objections to straight people holding positions of authority in feminist organizations? Why are you supportive/ambivalent/resistant?

**Tolerance of Ally Slip-ups**: How much leeway do you leave for straight allies who slip up? How badly do they need to 'mess up' before they can no longer be

considered an ally? Can you give me some examples of forgivable and unforgivable offenses?

**Pros of Allies**: What are the advantages of having straight people in the movement? Do they bring any important insights to homophobia and heteronormativity? Are there things for the movement they can do that LGBTQ people can't or have more difficulty accomplishing? Do you think people in power take heterosexuals more seriously?

**Cons of Allies**:  What are the disadvantages to working with straight allies? Do you ever suspect straight allies try to moderate the movement? Are there aspects of being LGBTQ that they don't get? Are there jobs in the movement that should be reserved for LGBTQ people?

*LGBTQ Rights Allies*

**Feasibility of Allyship**: Has a LGBTQ person ever objected to your right to identify as an ally or questioned your ally status…how did that make you feel?

**Proper Role of Allies**: What should be the role of allies in the movement? Are there things that straight allies like yourself shouldn't do? Are there roles that are inappropriate for you to play? Are there issues you think you shouldn't weigh in on? Do you have any objections to straight people holding positions of authority in LGBTQ organizations? Why are you supportive/ambivalent/resistant?

**Tolerance of Ally Slip-ups**: How badly do straight people need to 'mess up' before they can no longer be considered an ally? Can you give me some examples of forgivable and unforgivable offenses?

**Pros of Allies**: What are the advantages of having straight allies in the movement? Do they bring any important insights to homophobia and heteronormativity? Are there things for the movement they can do that LGBTQ people can't or have more difficulty accomplishing? Do you think people in power take heterosexuals more seriously?

**Cons of Allies**: Can you imagine any possible disadvantages to having straight allies within the movement? Are there jobs in the movement that should be reserved for LGBTQ people?

## *Ally Exercise*

Respondents will be given excerpts from two news articles/blog posts about allies—one extolling the virtues of integrating allies, the other describing poor ally behavior. Respondents affiliated with both movements will receive two sets of articles—one concerning male pro-feminists, the other addressing straight allies. [NB: The article links are not necessarily the articles that will be used. I will likely substitute them with more recent pieces].

### *Feminist Insiders*

**Positive Ally Piece** http://mic.com/articles/41655/feminism-needs-men-too: Why does the author think we need allies? Do you find her justification compelling? Do you see any issues with the way she appeals to men? Does this have implications for men's ability to be effective allies?

**Critical Ally Piece** http://feministcurrent.com/7798/the-trouble-with-male-allies/: What do you think the author is trying to convey about allies? Do you this this is generally demonstrative of men in feminism? Have you met men who tried this kind of thing before? Is she being too hard on men?

### *Feminist Allies*

**Positive Ally Piece** http://mic.com/articles/41655/feminism-needs-men-too: Why does the author think we need allies? Do you find her justification compelling? As a male ally, how does her support of male feminists make you feel?

**Critical Ally Piece** http://feministcurrent.com/7798/the-trouble-with-male-allies/: What do you think the author is trying to convey about allies? Have you met other men who tried this kind of thing before? Is she being too hard on men? How does reading this, as an ally, make you feel?

*LGBTQ Rights Insiders*

**Positive Ally Piece: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-the-gay-community-scar_b_6464804** Is the LGBTQ community scaring away allies? Was it this group's fault that the ally in question never came back? Does the ally have a responsibility to return to a movement group after being 'called out'?

**Critical Ally Piece** http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/12/13/straight_allies_do_they_get_too_much_recognition_for_their_support.html: What concerns do the authors raise about allies? Do you find them compelling—are they fair to allies? Are good intentions enough? Do you think their critiques would apply to female straight allies, too?

*LGBTQ Rights Allies*

**Positive Ally Piece: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-the-gay-community-scar_b_6464804** Is the LGBTQ community scaring away allies? Was it this group's fault that the ally in question never came back? Does the ally have a responsibility to return to a movement group after being 'called out'?

**Critical Ally Piece** http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2013/12/13/straight_allies_do_they_get_too_much_recognition_for_their_support.html: What concerns do the authors raise about allies? Do you think they are fair to allies? Do you think their critiques would apply to female, straight allies, too? How do these criticisms make you feel?

## *Closing*

*Feminist Insiders*

**Reflections on Men in Feminism**: Do you think men are an integral part of feminism today? Are there challenges to men being inside feminism?

**Future Ideals**: Do men need to be more or less involved—or are things fine as is? What would your ideal role be for men in feminism?

*Feminist Allies*

**Reflections on Men in Feminism**: Do you think men are an integral part of feminism today? Are there challenges to men being inside feminism? Do you feel like a part of the movement? Do you feel marginalized in any way?

**Future Ideals**: Do men need to be more or less involved—or are things fine as is? What would your ideal role be for men in feminism? What do you think you can do for the movement as an ally?

*LGBTQ Rights Insiders*

**Reflections on Straight Allies**: Do you think straight people are an integral part of the LGBTQ Rights movement today? Are there challenges to allies being involved in activism? Should allies be included under the LGBTQ umbrella?

**Future Ideals**: Do straight people need to be more or less involved—or are things fine as is? What would your ideal role be for straight people in LGBTQ activism?

*LGBTQ Rights Allies*

**Reflections on Straight Allies**: Do you think straight people are an integral part of the LGBTQ Rights movement today? Are there challenges to being an ally involved in LGBTQ activism? Do you feel like you are a part of the movement? Should allies be included under the LGBTQ umbrella?

**Future Ideals**: Do straight people need to be more or less involved—or are things fine as is? What would your ideal role be for straight people in LGBTQ activism?

*\*\*\*I ended every interview by asking if they had any final thoughts or questions.\*\*\**

# Appendix C: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARTS

| Demographics | n =106 | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Gender: | | |
| Cisgender Woman | 53 | 50% |
| Cisgender Man | 38 | 35.85% |
| Trans and Non-Binary | 15 | 14.15% |
| Sexual Identity: | | |
| Straight/Heterosexual | 38 | 35.84% |
| Gay/Lesbian | 32 | 30.19% |
| Bisexual Spectrum | 13 | 12.26% |
| Queer | 16 | 15.09% |
| Other | 7 | 6.6% |

| Demographics | n =106 | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Race: | | |
| White | 78 | 73.58% |
| East/South Asian/MENA | 9 | 8.49% |
| Black | 6 | 5.66% |
| Latinx | 4 | 3.77% |
| Multiracial | 9 | 8.49% |
| Education: | | |
| HS Diploma/Some College/Associate's Degree | 11 | 10.38% |
| BA/BS (Including Expected) | 59 | 55.66% |
| Postgraduate | 36 | 33.96% |

| Demographics | n =106 | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender * Sexuality** | | |
| *Cis Woman * Sexuality* | *53* | *50% (of total)* |
| **Straight Woman** | *24* | *45.28% (of Cis Women)* |
| **LGBTQ Woman** | *24* | *45.28% (of Cis Women)* |
| ***Cis Man * Sexuality*** | *38* | *35.85% (of total)* |
| **Straight Man** | *13* | *34.21% (of Cis Men)* |
| **GBTQ Man** | *24* | *63.16% (of Cis Men)* |
| ***Trans/GNC * Sexuality*** | *15* | *14.15% (of total)* |
| **Trans/GNC & Queer** | *14* | *93.33 (of Trans/GNC)* |
| **Trans/GNC & Straight** | *1* | *6.67% (of Trans/GNC)* |

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