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Organizing Queer Civil Rights Movements: Pride Parades and Communicative Dilemmas

David J. Dooling
University of South Florida

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Organizing Queer Civil Rights Movements: Pride Parades and Communicative Dilemmas

by

David J. Dooling

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Co-Major Professor: Sonia Ivancic, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Keith Berry, Ph.D.
Patrice Buzzanell, Ph.D.
David Rubin, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Pride parades ("Pride") are sites of communicative tension for the queer community. While the political origins of queer civil rights practiced widespread resistance to institutional heteronormativity and homophobia, Pride is a space where business owners, community stakeholders, and activists debate the political utility of queerness. This dissertation employs queer and sociomaterial theoretical traditions, and autoethnographic methodological approaches to explore the communicative strategies of *Pride organizers*—individuals who create, coordinate, and conceptualize the display of sexuality and gender in the public sphere. I draw on tension-centered approaches to organizational communication, feminist dilemmatic theorizing, and co-sexuality to investigate power-laden structures and decision-making in Pride spaces. This project occurs within the boundaries of a Pride nonprofit organization, "Gulf Pride," and includes participant interviews (e.g., Board of Directors, parade volunteers, community stakeholders) and my ethnographic experiences at events (e.g., board meetings, planning committees, parade days). My fieldwork included 94 hours of participant observation, extensive fieldnotes, analysis of organizational documents, and 14 semi-structured interviews with Pride organizers. I used phronetic iterative analysis (Tracy, 2018) to package data into a layered autoethnographic narrative (Ellis et al., 2011) to explore how the organizing processes of Gulf Pride can speak to the sociomaterial dilemmas of queer politics, the embodiment of queer labor, and how people navigate systems of sexual normativity. In doing so, I argue that individuals make sense of various (non)human agencies, such as spatiotemporal uncertainties, nonprofit sociomaterialities, and neoliberal branding practices. Pride organizers practice what I call

malicious compliance to conform to and subvert these dilemmas simultaneously. I also contend that individuals navigate the embodied dilemmas of Pride labor, problematizing dilemmas of tokenization, labor, emotion, and systems of organizational recognition. Finally, I argue that organizers engage in contracts of sexual citizenship, which promote belonging while also assimilating Pride into economic and securitized relationships. Organizers employ what I call *homoventriloquism* to distribute queer identity between myriad (non)human agencies. This strategy treats queerness as a puppet, lending adaptability and legitimacy to different participants in Pride contexts. This dissertation produces various theoretical, methodological, and practical insight

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Heat envelops the space between wrinkled clothes and tan skin, erupting in sweat across my forehead and on the nape of my neck. The month of June lays on my chest, and I try to breathe out the humidity pooling in my mouth, throat, and lungs.

My father and I walk quietly toward the town square. His eyes shift to me, crinkling with his half-turned smile. "Are you having fun?" *He came to support me for my first Pride, but he is barely comfortable with the idea of gay people*.

I shrug my shoulders, "I guess we'll see!" We speak in these subtleties. Anything heartfelt would unlock the doors of our family's haunted house.

I hear murmuring waves of laughter from around the corner, shifting my gaze from the boiling asphalt to the entourage of people dressed in rainbow, leather, and apprehension. My excitement builds as I picture what my first time will be like, imagining a version of queer worldmaking (Hummel, 2020; Yep, 2003) where I am loved, cared for, and celebrated. Turning the corner, I encounter a chasm between my desires and the reality of a small-town Pride.

Fluttering footsteps and raised hands,

Flirting with men who

Fuck men like me

<div align="right">

Gaggles of diverse people walk

From business owners in suits

To people in fur suits

</div>

Madonna, Britney, Kylie Minogue

Queer icons jam

From speakers and singers' mouths

Top 40 radio plays Kesha

I'm going down

I'm yelling timberrrr

A feeling of euphoria

Being free from suffocation

A hitch in my throat

Seeing my ex-boyfriend

A home

"I want to *go* home."

My father follows my lead as I walk away from the square. Shame pushes my gaze down and strangles the explanation in my throat.

He looks at me and jingles his keys. "Was that good for you?"

He must be confused about why I wanted to leave so quickly. I laugh it off, "I guess!"

While I grew up with many images of Pride in media, they did not prepare me for the reality of seeing multiple bodies, agendas, and stakeholders negotiating the visibility of queerness. Ever since, I have been fascinated by how Pride continues to (d)evolve in a rapidly shifting society. This project responds to such dilemmas, articulating the strategies of organizers who coordinate celebrations of sexuality and gender in the public sphere.

…

Pride parades ("Pride") are sites of communicative tension for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) community. Born from the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York—an event that sparked widespread resistance to institutional heteronormativity and homophobia—Pride facilitates public spaces where LGBTQ+ people can protest, express their identities, and celebrate with their community (Bruce, 2016; Johnston, 2007). While sexuality and gender are often considered to be private domains, Pride juxtaposes the unabashed, public display of marginalized (i.e., excluded) identity with the flawed logic of heteronormativity—the normalization and institutionalization of heterosexuality in the public sphere (Lamusse, 2016; Yep, 2003). Pride aims for justice, inclusion, and radical politics within the LGBTQ+ community. Scholars argue that Pride challenges stereotypes about gender and sexuality (McGarry, 2016); reflects reduced rates of perceived stigma among younger people (Lyon et al., 2013); provides a veil of anonymity for closeted individuals when surrounded by others like them (Johnston, 2007); and connects LGBTQ+ people to a more significant network of allies and organizations that are willing to help (Lewis & Markwell, 2020). In essence, Pride is one of the most potent sites of protest (Ammaturo, 2016) driving the *queer civil rights movement*—a term I use to describe a coalescence of activism fighting for LGBTQ+ equity, social justice, and accountability in the public sphere.

Pride has evolved into a phenomenon with annual celebrations occurring in cities worldwide, facilitating channels of intercultural exchange (Lamusse, 2016) and organizational expansion. Widespread interest in Pride shifts the celebration from one annual event to an array of affairs that engages with "a multiplicity of interests," such as transgender days of visibility, 'shades' of Pride events that honor contributions from people of color, student-led protests, and more (Bruce, 2016). In the U.S., Pride demonstrates a contentious site of cultural visibility where

LGBTQ+ people are scrutinized. While society generally tolerates alternative representations of sexuality and gender (Aviles, 2019), LGBTQ+ people continue to elicit widespread discussions about identity and difference and galvanize far-right conservative political agendas (e.g., Astor, 2023). In response, Pride negotiates myriad tensions.

Because over six million people attend Pride annually in the U.S. (Bruce, 2016), a variety of stakeholders invest, seeing support for Pride as an opportunity for marketing and higher profit margins. Pride demonstrations include community-led organizations, corporate sponsors, gay bars, and individual donors (Ammaturo, 2016; Bruce, 2016). Many of these stakeholders reflect diverse parts of the LGBTQ+ community, such as progressive churches, BDSM, and other fetish groups (Ammaturo, 2016; Bell & Binnie, 2004; Bruce, 2016; Holmes, 2022), while others maintain historical patterns of privilege in Pride organizing (e.g., White gay men in organizational leadership). Because of the variety of factors that influence these events, Pride is not "immune to controversy and contestations" (Holmes, 2022, pp. 445-446). Since its conception in the 1960s, Pride has negotiated the presence of anti-LGBTQ+ protests (Bruce, 2013), debates about the role of police officers (Luibheid, 2022), and infighting among activists about what Pride 'should' be (Ghaziani et al., 2016; Holmes, 2022; McCann, 2011).

Pride reflects a powerful site of social change due to historical triumphs in LGBTQ+ equality, community engagement, and personal epiphanies about identity. However, critics have also admonished it for its increasing association with commercialism, tourism, and performative activism (Chasin, 2000; Lewis & Herrmann, 2022). Over the past three decades, corporate influence has eroded the public investment in Pride, transforming activist sites into private marketplaces where goods and services are sold to LGBTQ+ consumers. For example, parade marches that once touted anti-capitalist messages now juggle a variety of organizations and

actors who advertise products, such as limited-edition Pride t-shirts, rainbow-clad beer cans, and partnerships with LGBTQ+-friendly hotels. This change is also evident in the millions of dollars that are invested into Pride events annually (Bruce, 2016).

Additionally, Pride's popularity as a tourist destination results in precarious organizational strategies that balance politics of visibility with entertaining celebrations for visitors (Browne, 2009; Lewis & Hermann, 2022). It invites thousands of visitors to host cities, allowing municipalities to market themselves as LGBTQ+-friendly and benefit from increased economic activity. This marketing results in discourses that balance the visibility of Pride with the needs of a greater community. In this case, cultural visibility and economic productivity collide, and sometimes result in a tumultuous relationship between organizers and government officials.

While sponsorship and increased tourism facilitate powerful displays of LGBTQ+ identity, they reflect concerning trends where commercial agendas prioritize the economic capital of LGBTQ+ equality over the alternative, sensorial, and communicative potential of queer ontology (Branton & Compton, 2021; Harvey, 2006). In other words, Pride no longer honors queer bodies; instead, it assimilates queerness into dominant institutions and ideologies. For example, some Pride events undergo controversy when certain political groups are considered too radical for community stakeholders. The Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team incurred significant criticism when they dropped the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence—a group of queer men in nun-drag who satirize the homophobic nature of the Catholic Church— from their annual Pride night (Miller, 2023). The Dodgers cited that the group would create an unwelcoming atmosphere for other stakeholders, such as Christian organizations. This move catered to sentiments that LGBTQ+ identity should be articulated as professional and palatable

for a mass audience (Yoshino, 2007). Such shifts underscore the privatization of social justice and assimilation of sexuality and gender into the public sphere, therefore, rendering LGBTQ+ identity less relevant compared to 'more serious' social movements (Lea et al., 2015; Lewis & Hermann, 2022).

Such shifts in organizing suggest that sexuality and gender are no longer relevant markers of difference in our society, and Pride is a dying form of radical protest. Arguments about LGBTQ+ irrelevance stem from increased tolerance of sexuality and gender (Aviles, 2019) and the argument among sociologists that we live in a society that no longer considers these identity markers indicative of power and privilege (Kampler & Connell, 2018; Ghaziani, 2011). Other scholars assert that injustice persists in mediated representations and material forms of violence and discrimination. Semblances of LGBTQ+ equality in media still align with many tenets of heteronormativity (Yep, 2003), prioritizing the bodies of LGBTQ+ people that amass considerable privilege in other sectors of society (i.e., race, ability, and social class; Duggan, 2012; Ghaziani et al., 2016; McCann, 2016; Warner, 1999). For instance, White gay men still make up most of the media representation about sexuality and gender in the public sphere (Shugart, 2003). Additionally, material violence continues to organize the lived experience of LGBTQ+ people, who are more likely to be discriminated against in public institutions (e.g., workplace, bathroom; Neel, 2017), violently victimized (e.g., robbery, beatings, sexual assault; Truman & Morgan, 2022), and murdered—especially when targets are transgender and/or of color (Dinno, 2017).

Pride facilitates contradictory cultural politics about sexuality and gender in the public sphere, necessitating a *communicative* investigation of what factors drive the queer civil rights movement. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on the communicative strategies of *Pride*

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organizers—individuals who create, coordinate, and conceptualize the display of LGBTQ+ identity in organizational settings. Organizers design a variety of processes, stakeholders, and events that galvanize the expression of LGBTQ+ identity. While some research has focused on the *participant* experiences of Pride (see Bruce, 2016), I am particularly interested in how Pride *organizers* balance the sociohistorical commitments of LGBTQ+ visibility with the demands of private stakeholders. They must navigate personal and organizational goals with the goals, values, and levels of acceptance from various stakeholders. Their day-to-day work is not only organizationally complicated but also culturally weighted: any decision made by Pride organizers reflects the political commitments of LGBTQ+ visibility in the public sphere, which affects associated citizens, cities, and regional communities. Thus, I ground this research in communication literature that explores the dynamics of social activism, organizational power, and the fluidity of sexuality and gender (Branton & Compton, 2021; Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Linabary et al., 2022). Next, I move from a general discussion of Pride to an exploration of how communication organizes LGBTQ+ identity.

Communicating Pride

A communicative approach to Pride emphasizes the messages, rituals, and organizational qualities (e.g., roles, tasks, professional structures) that construct sexuality and gender in the public sphere. This perspective underscores the multiple goals of Pride whereby individuals engage in public performances of identity (e.g., same-sex attraction), organizations coordinate such displays within a broader network of community spaces (e.g., planning parades, getting permits), and cultural discourses about identity (e.g., homophobia/transphobia) enable and constrain what performances are considered 'appropriate.' Pride constitutes all levels of identity, creating spaces for individual practices, community engagement, and opportunities for political

resistance. Therefore, a communicative approach facilitates a nuanced critique that addresses the connections between organizational resistance and commercialized ideals. Pride facilitates resistance with public demonstrations that oppose heteronormativity *and* internal struggles that pit competing organizational discourses (e.g., radical protests or sponsored parties) against one another. For instance, parades allow multiple parties to march together while displaying contradictory messages. Some individuals may hold signs resisting corporate involvement, while others may march with banners that tout corporate sponsorship. In doing so, Pride blends boundaries between stakeholders, volunteers, employees, and LGBTQ+ bodies.

In the context of the current study, I define *organizational communication* as a realm of collective meaning whereby individuals (i.e., Pride organizers) navigate various tensions to express LGBTQ+ identity and plan events that challenge the degree to which queer civil rights is solely a 'private' or 'nonprofessional' issue. Just as organizations are sites of meaning-making (Donnellon et al., 1986; Schatzki, 2006; Weick, 1979), Pride facilitates a space where sexuality and gender are organized symbols of contentious visibility, resistance, celebration, and strength. Organizational communication scholars advocate for the investigation of historically understudied spaces and collectivities of people (Linabary et al., 2021). By rejecting the idea that organizational communication only occurs within the physical domain of *organizations* (nouns), scholars instead can analyze how people *organize* (verb) and to what degree (adjective) people come together for organizational purposes (i.e., *organizationality*; Putnam et al., 1999; Schoenborn et al., 2019; Wilhoit, 2016). In this case, Pride reflects sites of public protest where "norms, practices, structures, and power relations" can be thoroughly examined among organizers (Ganesh et al., 2005, p. 179). My study aligns with critical commitments to organizational communication that desire blueprints for "radical democracy" among social

movements (Ganesh et al., 2005, p. 178) and an investigation of communities that offer places of refuge, reflection, and coalition building (Linabary et al., 2021).

Communicative investigations of Pride can also address the *sociomaterial* inequalities that place queer bodies in precarious circumstances. Kuhn and colleagues (2017) advocate for a definition of meaning-making that acknowledges all forms of agency, including nonhuman influences. In this case, communication is not only discursive in terms of the construction of language, symbols, and conversations, but also material in the navigation of extenuating structures, circumstances, histories, and spaces (Cooren, 2018). Pride organizers negotiate material landscapes of communication, such as organizational texts, historical threads of social activism, and the arrangement of queer bodies in the public sphere (e.g., protests and marches). Therefore, a sociomaterial approach combines social and tangible worlds to navigate the contradictory discourses, bodies, spaces, and structures at Pride. I use a sociomaterial approach to communication at Pride to honor and illuminate the affective, embodied, and personal worlds that make Pride happen. Without the materiality of queerness in day-to-day life, Pride would not exist. Additionally, I join other organizational communication scholars in their exploration of sociomateriality to avoid explanations of social life disconnected from power dynamics (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Cooren, 2018; Orlikowski, 2007).

Finally, a communicative perspective on the organization of Pride necessitates a *queer approach* that advocates for an understanding of identity that is anti-normative, fluid, and politically minded (McDonald, 2015). Queer theory contends that performances of identity signal systems of power and privilege along markers of difference (e.g., sexuality, gender, race). Defining identity in organizational contexts like Pride reinforces such systems of power which ultimately serve the needs of dominant interests. In comparison, a queer approach rejects stable

or fixed notions of identity in favor of contextually-bound responses to power, which are subject to change over time (McDonald, 2015; Sedgewick, 2008; Yep, 2014). In line with cultural discourses that problematize the homogenization of the LGBTQ+ community, I use the term "queer"[1] to describe individuals who are united in our shared oppression vis-a-vis heteronormativity. When applied to organizational communication, queer theory implicates the norms, values, and rituals that define normalcy in professional settings. Compton and Dougherty (2017) assert that sexuality, organizations, and organizing are delicately intertwined, which, in turn, mirrors society's proclivity for demarcating public and private spheres of work with 'appropriate' and private displays of sexuality and gender. These power struggles result in complex organizational actions that individuals engage in (Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Compton & Dougherty, 2017), justifying an examination of how Pride organizers navigate multi-layered discourses about sexual freedom in the public sphere. In line with communication research that implicates Pride's social, economic, and political processes, I move next to the description of my dissertation.

Framing the Project: Standpoint, Objectives, and Goals

Methodologically speaking, this dissertation employs queer organizational autoethnography to dissect the configuration of queer identities, community stakeholders, and material structures in the context of Pride. I define *queer organizational autoethnography* as an

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[1] This dissertation uses various terms to describe queer populations. I use the term "queer" to articulate shared experiences of marginalization vis-à-vis cis/heteronormativity. In other cases, "LGBT," "LGBTQ," and "LGBTQ+" are used by scholars and participants to describe organizational titles, articulate their understandings of sexuality and gender, and point to discourses that highlight specific facets of identity (e.g., lesbians and gay men). Similarly, Warner (2000) distinguishes between 'queer' and 'gay' populations, noting that 'queer' often involves challenging conventional norms through dynamic and fluid identity performances, while 'gay' (or "LGBTQ+" more broadly) involves a conformist, stable adherence to identity categories.

analytical fabric of organizational life that interrogates taken-for-granted assumptions about identity (Adams et al., 2021). Queer organizational autoethnography allows me to explore narratives of selves and others, illuminating structures of power and hegemony in Pride spaces. My study is situated within the boundaries of a Pride organization— "Gulf Pride[2]"—and relies on interviews with other organizers (e.g., Board of Directors, parade volunteers, community stakeholders) along with my own experiences as an observer of Pride events (e.g., board meetings, planning committees, parade days). I focus on my involvement with Gulf Pride to underscore the "day-to-day work of social movements" (Bruce, 2016, p. 14) and honor the historical tradition of expressing my own sexuality and gender in the public sphere. As a queer man, I use autoethnography to illuminate representations of identity that are crystallized, intersectional, and politically transformative. For instance, while the term "man" feels comfortable to me, I do not fully identify with binaries such as man-woman and homosexual-heterosexual. I operate somewhere in between and outside of these labels. I do not actively subscribe to categories that depict sexuality or gender in one way (e.g., gay men). Therefore, "queer" allows me to move through life unfettered by (hetero)normative expectations. This positionality illustrates a crystallized self whereby I negotiate sometimes conflicting social roles holistically (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Working with my various identities in these ways requires careful interrogation of what positionalities privilege me and what positionalities result in oppression and resistance. This form of intersectionality allows me to see queerness as a network of meaning that implicates many other parts of life, such as race, socioeconomic status, geography, etc. (Hummel, 2020; Jones Jr., 2010). As a White, formally educated, able-bodied, man raised in a rural area, I now recognize that identities will result in situationally specific and

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[2] Pseudonym

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ambiguous situations where power plays a major role (Yep, 2016). Thus, autoethnography provides me with a methodological approach that examines these identities and implicates them within greater systems of organizational hegemony (i.e., Pride) and social transformation.

The objectives of this dissertation combine narrative and organizational commitments. I aim to illustrate the complex interactions between my own lived experience with Pride and the organizational mechanisms that constitute performances of gender and sexuality in the public sphere. Additionally, I want to expand my analysis to account for sociomaterial investigations of structural inequality and queer problematic representations of identity. These objectives align with the theoretical and methodological goals of this project. By studying the communicative potential of this organizing with autoethnography, I contribute to literature that problematizes the boundaries that surround organizational communication (Schoeneborn et al., 2019) and narrative research (Herrmann, 2017). Additionally, I engage with a small, but sizeable, amount of social justice scholars who deconstruct assumptions about professionalism, normativity, and power in organizational contexts (Buzzanell, 1994; Compton & Dougherty, 2017; Harris, 2019; Linabary et al., 2021; McDonald, 2015). Finally, by committing to engaged scholarship with the community of Gulf Pride, I offer practical insight and recommendations to practitioners, volunteers, stakeholders, and lawmakers.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I outline the extant research literature that informs my study. First, I discuss the historical trends of the queer civil rights movement and Pride organizing. Next, I connect historical trends of Pride to a tension-centered organizational framework. Then, I engage in feminist dilemmatic theorizing to explore the sociomaterial entanglements of Pride. I end the chapter by borrowing from research on co-sexuality to examine the navigation of sexual citizenship and normativity among Pride organizers.

A Historical Overview of Pride

Pride represents the complicated history of the queer civil rights movement. Most scholars trace its beginning to the Stonewall Riots. After midnight on June 28th, 1969, police raided a gay bar in Greenwich, New York called the Stonewall Inn (Armstrong & Crage, 2006; Bruce, 2016; Pierce, 2016). Due to laws that criminalized homosexuality in the 1960s (Rosen, 1980), gay bars were not allowed liquor licenses, which resulted in the organizing and use of covert speakeasies and gatherings among patrons. The subsequent raid at the Stonewall Inn was met with unprecedented hostility, producing riots that pitted marginalized communities, such as "*travestis*, *negras*, drag queens, Puerto Ricans, fags, [and] butch-dykes…" (Pierce, 2016, 132, emphasis in original), against police (Bruce, 2016). The Stonewall Riots demonstrated frustration with legal and cultural systems of heteronormativity, rejecting the "discriminatory incarceration of LGBT people and others targeted by the police" (DeFilippis, 2019, p. 95). This event was a "historical pivot point" for the queer community due to cultural formations of sexuality, gender, and identity that led to infighting and separatism (concepts described later; Marcus, 2019, p. 92).

In this case, the threat from the police united seemingly disparate communities, such as "drag queens and hustlers," along with economically-privileged gays and lesbians (Bruce, 2016, p. 40). This networking allowed widespread publication of the riots in the gay and popular press (Bruce, 2016), which culminated in community activism that fought for continued resistance to homophobia and undue incarceration.

One year later, on June 28th, 1970, protestors participated in the first annual Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day March. This event commemorated the Stonewall Riots, reminding activists and attendees alike of the political implications of being queer in the public sphere (Bruce, 2016; Chasin, 2000; DeFilippis, 2019; Lamusse, 2016; Thompson, 2018). Walking from Greenwich Village on Sixth Avenue to Central Park, around 2,000 activists marched away from the relative safety of the 'gayborhood' to garner increased visibility (Ammaturo, 2016; Thompson, 2018). Protestors extended the politics of the Stonewall Riots by explicitly challenging legal structures. For example, participants shouted "Free our sisters! Free ourselves!" while walking past New York City's Women's House of Detention (DeFilippis, 2019, pp. 95-96; Kunzel, 2008). Other people resisted multidisciplinary forms of oppression, holding up signs saying, "Smash Imperialism!" (Thompson, 2018, p. 1). Thanks to widespread community networking, Chicago and Los Angeles held their own Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day, turning one site of political upheaval into a national movement. The Stonewall Riots "mark the symbolic moment in LGBT history when gays and lesbians took to the streets to demand equality without compromise," commemorating what individuals now recognize as Pride (Bruce, 2016, p. 33). In the context of the queer civil rights movement, the Stonewall Riots are simultaneously remarkable *and* indicative of which historical events are publicly remembered, and which, in turn, are silenced.

The Stonewall Riots are politically and culturally influential, but they are not synonymous with the beginning of the queer civil rights movement. Scholars are quick to recognize that Stonewall's popularity obfuscates the decades of history that precede it (Armstrong & Crage, 2006; D'Emilio, 1983; Marcus, 2019; Mumford, 2019). Historians recognize the public acknowledgment of gay identity in the 1940s when sexuality became a subject of medical scrutiny and gay enclaves like Greenwich rose in popularity (Mumford, 2019). Additionally, national events like the Cold War brought attention to military discrimination, spurring a 'Lavender Scare' that solidified gays and lesbians as a distinct cultural group (Ghaziani et al., 2016; Johnson, 2023). Heteronormative values that dichotomized gays and lesbians from straight folks (e.g., attitudes about marriage, monogamy) resulted in harmful stereotypes, such as "effeminate, sex-crazed men or butch, possibly predatory, women" (Bruce, 2016, p. 36).

Political organizing among queer people occurred frequently (Murray, 1996; Bernstein, 2002), but did not capture the political consciousness like Stonewall did. For example, riots against police in the Compton Cafeteria in 1966 and Los Angeles' Black Cat Tavern in 1967 reflect similar structures of protest, but they lacked concrete resonance among the public (Armstrong & Crage, 2006). In comparison, Marcus (2019) posits Stonewall as a cultural myth which provides an exaggerated narrative that motivates more people to participate in queer politics. For example, it is common narrative that a drag queen threw the first brick at police during the Stonewall Riots. However, this detail does not account for the material constraints of violence:

> Take the legendary kick line of high-heeled drag queens on Christopher Street
>
> outside the Stonewall challenging a phalanx of policemen in riot gear and

chanting "We are the Village girls, we wear our hair in curls. . ." The kick line

and chant were real, but the high-heeled drag queens were actually street kids,

mostly teenagers, "flames" in various degrees of "scare drag," not dresses and

wigs, and definitely not wearing high heels. The street kids knew better. As

Martin Boyce, who was at Stonewall the night of the riot explained to me, you

can't run from the police in heels. But the idea and image of high-kicking, high-

heeled rioters in full drag make for a better, and more cinematic, story. (Marcus,

2019, p. 93)

While the narratives of Stonewall are socially and politically constructed, they occurred at a

critical time when queer communities had staked boundaries in public institutions, such as coffee

shops, health clinics, and bookstores (Mumford, 2019). Stonewall was successful because

multiple factors led up to its critical moment in history, cementing its significance and outlining

a path for meaningful social activism in commemorative celebrations. As Pride continued, it

adapted to accommodate multiple—and sometimes contradictory—discourses.

Pride in the 1950s and 1960s: Political Origins and Infighting

Pride was organized in conjunction with the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), a sect of the

queer civil rights movement that challenges heteronormativity and fights for queer visibility.

GLF centers the pursuit of queerness in radical politics of freedom, desire, and emancipation

from dominant social systems that regulate sexual and gendered bodies (Bruce, 2016). Before

Stonewall, queer activism relied on 'homophiles' whose strategies equated sexuality and gender

with respectful and 'appropriate' citizenship (Bruce, 2016; Carter, 2004; D'Emilio, 1983;

Ghaziani et al., 2016; Kates & Belk, 2001). Formed in the 1950s, homophiles avoided extreme

displays of queerness and instead fought to assimilate into heteronormative society by injecting

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themselves into the public sphere; providing support for people in the queer community; and resisting stereotypical representations such as lust, criminality, etc. (Esterberg, 1990; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Loftin, 2012). Due to the criminalization of homosexuality, homophiles sought a compromise with heteronormative cultural codes, resulting in an 'accommodationist' political strategy (Bruce, 2016). Homophiles engaged in the Annual Reminder—a yearly gathering of picketers who would stand in front of government buildings. These demonstrations enforced a strict dress code and relied on solemn tactics, such as walking silently in a circle (Bruce, 2016; Carter, 2004; Kates & Belk, 2001).

When the Stonewall Riots occurred, queer activists abandoned the Annual Reminder in favor of more revolutionary tactics. The Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations changed the parameters of the Annual Reminder, creating Christopher Street Liberation Day. This proposal shifted the political values of queer activism, fighting for fundamental human rights rather than compromising with heteronormative frameworks (Bruce, 2016). With the networking made available by homophiles and other interest groups (Marcus, 2019), activists harnessed the synergy of Stonewall and jumpstarted Pride in an unprecedented era of gay visibility. Thus, GLF occurred due to paradigmatic shifts in queer activism.

The formation of GLF relied on radical activists whose goal was to uproot heteronormative institutions that policed queer people. Instead of accommodationist strategies that reinforced cultural codes of modesty, GLF activists held demonstrations with unabashed displays of same-sex desire:

> GLF activists had a range of ideas about how to confront oppression, with some
> preferring militant action against police and others wanting to use humor and
> drama to push back against cultural meanings. For instance, one tactic GLF used

to confront culture was to stage "gay-ins," in which gays and lesbians gathered in

public to sing, dance, and generally "hang out." (Bruce, 2016, p. 44)

A central tenet of GLF philosophy is the danger of heteronormativity, or the normalization and

institutionalization of heterosexuality in daily life (Yep, 2003; Yep, 2014). According to GLF

activists, heteronormativity pervades and taints many facets of social life, such as families and

marriages, which, in turn, limits the expression of sexuality and gender to ones that are

recognized only by dominant institutions (e.g., religion, government). In response, gay liberation

ideology pursues pleasure as a freeing and emancipatory ontology that fights against hegemonic

structures (Bruce, 2016). In combination with strategies that aimed to contest heteronormativity,

intentionally hold spaces for political protest, and facilitate a shared collective identity, GLF

crystallized a disparate community into a full-fled social movement (Bruce, 2016; Taylor & Van

Dyke, 2004) that struggled against a host of sociohistorical obstacles.

Pride in the 1970s and 1980s: Growing Institutional Involvement

Pride in the 1970s and 1980s grew in popularity and evolved to accommodate multiple

stakeholders. Bruce (2016) notes that pride parades were initially considered pride *protests* in the

early 1970s. However, the growing need for queer visibility shifted the intent of demonstrations

to facilitate "an air of celebration—rather than…a simpler state-directed march" (Bruce, 2016, p.

92). In this case, *parades* allow for simultaneous protests and parties, inviting a host of picketers,

decorated floats, and curious onlookers. Additionally, Pride grew from a collection of individual,

regional demonstrations to a national movement. Pressure from the Religious Right forced

activists to form a collective identity, culminating in the March on Washington in 1979, where

queer activists and allies took to the streets of Washington, D.C., to demand civil protections

against discrimination (Stone, 2010). Additionally, the AIDS epidemic transformed the urgency

of the movement to articulate a national response to figures who either ignored the disease in public discourse (e.g., Ronald Reagan's silence on the growing death toll) or stigmatized the condition as a moral failure among gay people (Gould, 2009).

While the national movement evolved to meet conservative threats, various stakeholders disagreed on which ideologies aligned best with Pride. For example, GLF hosts competing political identities, such as 'gay rights,' 'gay power,' and 'gay pride' activists. *Gay rights* activism reflects the homophile movement, seeking legal equality along the lines of sexuality and gender via heteronormative displays of identity. In contrast, gay power and gay pride activists resist heteronormative conventions, but they differ in their degrees of political extremity. *Gay power* activists call for a complete cultural revolution, seeking justice along the intersections of sex, gender, ability, and race; and *gay pride* activists simply focus on increasing queer visibility in favor of being considered a legitimate social group (Bruce, 2018; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Thompson, 2018). Ultimately, gay rights ideology receded in the cultural revolution of Stonewall while gay power ideology receded from GLF due to the flourishing of other grassroots movements that accommodated activists' intersectional interests (Thompson, 2018). In its current state, much of the activism surrounding Pride relies on gay pride strategies.

Other tensions complicated the success of Pride, such as the collaboration between queer activists and community stakeholders like gay bars, churches, and corporations. Moderate members of GLF accepted community stakeholders to facilitate the further development of Pride. For example, most Prides in the early 1970s embraced pro-gay churches, providing a stark contrast to heteronormativity in religious institutions. Additionally, political figures in liberal areas like San Francisco, California, marched with protestors, underscoring the impact of GLF's goals as a social movement (Bruce, 2016). More radical members of GLF (e.g., gay power

activists) linked collaboration between Pride and financial influences to greater systems of capitalist exploitation; they cited social respectability in the community as a colloquialism for assimilation and queer erasure (Halperin & Traub, 2009). This fear was not unfounded: In 1974, New York City's Pride parade switched directions, leading protesters to Greenwich Village, where Ed Murphy, a mafia member, sold booths to community vendors to generate profit. In this fashion, Pride no longer spurred social change in the public sphere. Instead, it retreated to gay residential areas where community stakeholders could extract profit from willing participants without inciting political transformation or debate (Carter, 2004). Jenkins (2019) notes that these changes contribute to the corporatization of Pride, where demonstrations expose gaps between privileged members of the queer community who can 'buy in' and those who are marginalized along multiple intersections, such as race and social class. Some activists defend corporate involvement in Pride, citing that economic involvement in queer issues reflects success for populations who have historically been barred from public institutions and were discriminated against by the very workplaces that now signal support through Pride sponsorship (Bruce, 2016; see Rosendall, 2017). Pride continued to amass considerable attention in the 1990s and early 2000s, and its organizers and attendees navigated tensions about what Pride *should* communicate about queer identity in an environment riddled with conflicting opinions, values, and attitudes about sexuality and gender.

Pride in the 1990s and 2000s: Commercialization and Post-Gay Attitudes

Culminating efforts from queer activists shifted societal attitudes about gender and sexuality in the 1990s and 2000s, welcoming Pride into economies with power stakeholders. National corporations, like Budweiser and United Airlines, sponsored parades in major cities (Bruce, 2016), and, in doing so, treated queer social movements as sites for business, not politics

(Sender, 2005). This shift is evident in the visual construction of "queer friendliness" among interested sponsors, producing an array of signs, products, and services that appeal to the queer community. For example, corporations often change their logos in June to represent the rainbow, which portrays queer friendliness *and* signifies willingness to engage in the economy derived from Pride. Commercial involvement is mutually implicated: Pride can offer more events free of charge by being sponsored, but they must negotiate the political and cultural underpinnings of the events due to corporate agendas (Bruce, 2016; Thompson, 2018). Growing commercial influence reflects the substantial economic requirement of Pride, costing millions of dollars in some parts of the country due to substantial event planning (e.g., block parties, charity banquets), collaboration with the city (e.g., police), and the need for independent contractors (e.g., security, drag queens). While participants at parades are aware of ulterior motives from businesses, most of them report an appreciation of institutions that are willing to fund their playful celebrations of queer identity (Bruce, 2016). Other cultural critiques center on the implications of blending queer visibility with unregulated financial power. For example, DeFilippis (2019) argues that corporate influence at Pride erodes the once-revolutionary politics that jump started the movement:

> A 1970s politics that was critical of capitalism was quickly replaced by efforts to be recognized by Wall Street as a powerful niche market worth catering to. Rather than challenging neoliberal policies, wealth disparity, corporate misbehavior, or demanding a stronger social safety net, LGBT politics moved towards a depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (p. 99)

While Stonewall signaled a violent declaration of frustration with heteronormative systems, contemporary versions of Pride increasingly engage with state actors (Grosser & McCarthy, 2019).

In the wake of commercialization, some sociologists note that Pride may be entering a post-gay era. 'Post-gay' refers to the growing homogenization of queer identity, in that sexuality becomes less "central (or possibly, even relevant) to a person's social position, life experiences, and conception of self" (Kampler & Connell, 2018, p. 2; Ghaziani, 2011). Just as corporate stakeholders see Pride as a space for profit and not protest (Sender, 2005), post-gay logics render queer subjects apolitical and virtually identical to straight populations. Additionally, this concept suggests that as different sexual orientations become more accepted, the need for cultural visibility and segregation will decrease, which would eliminate the need for 'safe spaces' like Pride altogether (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016). Post-gay attitudes reflect growing numbers of reported sexual fluidity among young people along with media representations that portray sexuality and gender without clear labels or signifiers (see Montgomery, 2019). However, post-gay identity does not correspond to equality between queer and straight populations. In fact, Ghaziani (2011) argues that rhetoric equating queer and straight identity may ignore persistent societal attitudes about homophobia.

Additionally, post-gay attitudes may only hold for people with intersectional privileges, such as Whiteness, able-bodiedness, and wealth (a concept discussed later). In line with post-gay rhetoric, Pride has adjusted to encompass multiple identities rather than just sexuality and gender. While marginalized groups have always existed, their presence in this context has been historically muted by the privilege of White gay men (Bruce, 2016). Bruce (2016) notes that

activist groups host alternative marches for specific demographics within the queer population, such as "Dyke Marches, Trans Marches, and Black and Latino Gay Pride Events" (p. 7).

<p style="text-align:center">…</p>

When I attended my first Pride in 2014 shortly after coming out to my family, I pictured an event that would meet my wildest dreams of queer desire. After walking around my small-town square, I quickly realized that these aspirations did not correspond to the agendas, goals, and commercial stakeholders present at Pride. These parades are undoubtedly beneficial to many queer children and adults who want to feel validated in a climate that is constantly trying to silence them. While my experience of Pride did not meet my expectations, it did set me up for a future where I felt increasingly comfortable within spaces as a queer, White, able-bodied man. This comfort sparked my academic interest in the communication of sexuality and gender. As a form of inquiry, Pride feels like I'm coming home to a place where I can understand both myself and the cultural fabric of the queer civil rights movement. I return to the story of my orientations toward (and methodological commitments to) Pride in Chapter Five.

In summary, Pride looks significantly different compared to the revolutionary origins of Stonewall. What was once a fight against "policing…incarceration, militarism, capitalism, … poverty," and "the traditional nuclear family" has now turned into an assemblage of political agendas that favors various (sometimes conflicting) agendas, such as queer pleasure and alliance with influential stakeholders (DeFilippis, 2019, p. 95). This dissertation aims to explore the organizational logics that renders many of these discourses "common sense" in contemporary society (Thompson, 2018, p. 2). By illustrating the construction of organizational tensions, scholars and activists alike can better understand how Pride has adapted to systems of power.

Tension-Centered Approaches to Pride

Organizational terrains, such as Pride, are home to a variety of structural tensions, contradictory messages, and pesky paradoxes (Ashcraft, 2006; Fiol et al., 2009; Tracy, 2004). Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004) outline a *tension-centered approach* that acknowledges organizational spaces as "conflicted sites of human activity," necessitating a deeper understanding of how tension is discovered and managed (p. 82). Further, critical researchers extend the meaning of tension beyond interpersonal conflict to encapsulate the politicized and power-laden communication that privileges some and marginalizes others (Mumby, 2004; Zoller & Ban, 2019). Gender and sexuality reflect organizing principles that elicit numerous conflicts due to differences in power, identity, and control (Hearn, 1998; Rice, 2021). Hegemonies such as patriarchy and heteronormativity (see Yep, 2003) pervade organizational life, leaving queer activists with the labor of navigating troublesome tensions. Specifically, Pride reflects spaces wherein cultural values, marginalized bodies, and economic agendas collide. A variety of scholars note the conflicts endemic to Pride, such as "tricky infighting" (Poletta, 2002, p. 1), "boundary disputes" (Stone, 2010, p. 465), and a lack of "fundamental commonality" (Armstrong, 2002, p. 110). These issues ultimately underscore competing agendas that drive Pride, such as "transgender and bisexual inclusion; the visibility of polyamory and BDSM practices; challenges to the race, class, and gender biases of LGBT leadership; and arguments about who benefits from gay marriage" (Stone, 2010, p. 465). Additionally, the growing alliances between Pride and community stakeholders implicate organizational conflicts regarding three frames of social phenomena: micro- (e.g., interactions between marchers, civilians, police officers, government officials), meso- (e.g., negotiating ambiguous bureaucratic policies in Pride organizing), and macro-levels (e.g., cultural discourses about Pride and queer identity).

Based on the turbulence of queer politics in organizational settings, my dissertation uses a tension-centered approach that conceptualizes Pride as a marketplace of competing "strategies, tactics, goals, and targets" (Ghaziani et al., 2016, p. 167). While a taxonomy of organizational tensions (e.g., contradictions, paradoxes,) is outside the scope of this study (see Putnam et al., 2016), scholars note that many of these terms are discussed interchangeably (Ballard-Reisch & Turner, 2017) and depend on the positionality of the researcher. Tensions typically fall into one of these three dimensions of organizing: structure, messaging, and values.

Structures of Tension

Historical advancements in queer visibility build tensions within the structures of Pride, which complicate notions of professionalism, nonprofit organizing, and inclusive practices. Pride increasingly engages with commercial interests; in doing so, it participates in organizationally constitutive behaviors. Social movements adopt organizational structures when in contact with financially influential stakeholders and terminologies emphasizing the exchange of capital (e.g., return on investment; Ganesh et al., 2005). In this case, Pride represents one of many collectivities that vie for credibility by assimilating into professional networks. For example, Pride displays tenets of professionalism by establishing non-profit organizations that run events, parades, and coordinate volunteers. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) posit professionalism as a symbolic product contributing to a division of labor (e.g., white-collar and blue-collar work), which upholds the professional as an expert class; and constructs professional identity as moral and ethical. Pride represents one of many special interest groups (e.g., communities, professional networks) that assert professionalism and vie for "collective social mobility" (Macdonald, 1995, p. 51). When groups attain professionalism, dominant powers grant expertise, legitimacy, and privilege (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Weber, 1978). For example, Ward (2008b) notes that Pride

borrows from corporate practices to appear professional and gain legitimacy, which increases the chance of sponsorships and grant funding. Not only does Pride increasingly communicate professionalism, but it also relies on structures of state government, such as "permits from local authorities," "approved routes," and officials like police and marshals (Luibheid, 2022, p. 11).

Attaining professional capital is not constrained within the boundaries of an organization (e.g., business). Weber (1978) focuses on how individuals navigate the necessary channels to achieve the identity of an 'expert,' opening the capacities of professionalism to other organizational actors, such as queer activists and Pride. Additionally, organizational communication scholars underscore the power-laden struggles that confer professionalism to some (privileged) identities and unprofessionalism to (oppressed) others. Channels of professionalism align with greater political systems, such as Whiteness and heteronormativity (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Ferguson Jr. & Dougherty, 2022; McDonald, 2015). In the context of Pride, queer activists emphasize cultural visibility to gain access to professional channels, such as nonprofit organizations.

Many queer social movements exist within the boundaries of nonprofit organizing (Meyer et al., 2022). Some historical scholars note that Pride only achieved national relevancy due to an assemblage of nonprofit organizations that supported the movement (Bruce, 2016; Carter, 2004). For example, the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations was responsible for shifting the focus from solemn demonstrations (i.e., The Annual Reminder) to protests in commemoration of Stonewall (Metcalf, n.d.). Some activists criticized the presence of nonprofit movements, arguing that the professionalization of Pride would result in less decision-making from regional outlets and more political distancing from the revolutionary origins of Stonewall (Stone, 2010). Peterson et al. (2018) emphasize the growth of queer nonprofits, and

contend that efforts to establish a national queer civil rights movement in the 1980s resulted in a global nonprofit network called InterPride—The International Association of Pride Organizers.

While nonprofits aid in the legitimacy of Pride, they also foster organizational tension. Sanders (2012) discusses the tension that characterizes nonprofit organizing, where "communication practices must simultaneously and continuously manage the pull between the financial imperatives of the market and the need to address privately unprofitable, but publicly beneficial, social missions" (p. 179). For example, lauded values in the nonprofit sector, such as altruism, freedom, and dignity, are constantly at odds with the competitive and self-centered values of offering lucrative goods and services (Sanders, 2012). This tension translates to queer civil rights issues because organizations that endorse equitable perspectives, such as diversity, are granted higher capital in a rapidly shifting capitalist economy (Branton & Compton, 2021; D'Enbeau & Buzzanell, 2013). Ward (2008a) illustrates this notion by offering three case studies of Pride organizations. In their efforts to emphasize the importance of diversity, Pride organizations struggle with maintaining norms of professionalism due to oppressive expectations based on social class, Whiteness, and what constitutes the "right" kind of diversity (Ward, 2008a). This struggle reflects other trends in identity and difference: While diversity is championed for being equitable and inclusive (Mease, 2016), it can lead some to feel uncomfortable because the act of isolating specific identity categories (e.g., women, gay people) and showcasing their economic value to the organization can result in essentialism and tokenism (Bendl & Hoffman, 2015).

Much research suggests that negotiating queer identity in progressive organizations is rife with structural tension. Table and colleagues (2021) point to the processual tensions of 'becoming' queer inclusive. Organizational members feel discomfort based on whether their

practices are inclusive enough, if there are irreconcilable knowledge gaps between queer and non-queer members, and if their efforts translate to an open culture of constructive criticism and feedback (Table et al., 2021). Even if organizations espouse a positive environment where queer people can express themselves more freely, it may not be enough to ward off persistent structures of heteronormativity. Just as Colgan and colleagues (2008) contend, working at a "gay-friendly workplace" does not "guarantee a working environment which engages with and embraces 'sexual minorities' or prevents homophobic attitudes and treatments across the board" (p. 65).

In some cases, scholars argue that the construction of queer-friendly organizations acts as a diversion tactic that showcases the illusion of diversity at the expense of equitable policies and procedures (e.g., Burchiellaro, 2021). In other cases, progressive organizations must choose between various stakeholders, creating further divisions and negative affective states. Branton and Compton (2021) note that in attempts by gay bars to stay alive in an economy characterized by dating apps on smart phones, there is tension regarding whether these spaces are "for us [LGBTQ+ people]" or "for all [straight, cisgender people]" (p. 80). Ultimately, these tensions reflect the shifting cultural values that characterize queer civil rights in contemporary society, implicating the organization of Pride and the potential tensions that lay within. In my study, structural tension serves as a communicative blueprint, dictating how Pride organizers can encapsulate politically emancipatory messages within routine channels of professionalism, nonprofits, and demands for inclusivity. Not only are tensions organizationally structured in Pride, but they are also reinforced by competing messages between individuals.

Competing Messages

Contradictory messages are a ubiquitous part of queer-oriented organizations. Not only are nonprofit organizations often troubled with day-to-day choices that teeter between social

good and capitalist expansion (Sanders, 2012), but social justice organizations specifically deal with the contradictory decisions made by the different marginalized groups that they represent (Ashcraft, 2006). In organizing social movements, activists must build a collective identity to motivate participation, aid in logistical decision-making, and define agendas (Bruce, 2013). Pride reflects a history of complex decision-making because of split messaging between different subcultures in the queer civil rights movement. In the 1970s, decision-making was split between the GLF whose mission was based on revolutionary capitalist protest (i.e., gay power), and other activists who grounded civil activism in solely gay issues (i.e., gay rights and gay pride ideology; Bruce, 2016; Holmes, 2022). Because these gay power activists conflate capitalism with systems of oppression, they resisted any decision-making that favored business participation in Pride. In their view, capitalist influence contributes to a system where some queer people are privileged and accepted in marketplaces (e.g., White gay men), while others, such as transgender Black women, are socially excluded and stigmatized. On the other hand, gay rights and gay pride activists favored relationships with stakeholders that highlighted the legitimacy of queer people (Bruce, 2016). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, gay power activists within the GLF joined other intersectional causes, such as "advocating for Black Power, women's liberation, and anti-war efforts" (Bruce, 2016, p. 97), contributing to their receding influence and the rise in gay pride ideology in the 1990s and 2000s.

The role of family is one example of contradictory decision-making among Pride organizers. DeFilippis (2019) outlines the erosion of radical politics due to disagreements among activists regarding the importance of family. Gay power activists in the GLF posit the nuclear family as a blueprint for heteronormativity (e.g., traditional gender roles) and legal structures that maintain the subjugation of queer people (e.g., marriage). These activists seek an ethic of love

and cooperation that is untethered from these oppressive structures. This ethic includes alternative structures of family—such as "polyamorous relationships, families of choice, children created and raised by gay men and lesbians together, and committed caregiving relationships"—and legal loopholes to love, including domestic partnerships and civil unions (Boggis, 2012; DeFilippis, 2019, p. 98). As queer activism grew in popularity in the 1990s, Pride messages that resisted the nuclear family shifted to a campaign which sought to legalize same-sex marriage, seeking assimilation into—and protection within—heteronormative society. Many activists critique this shift as a failure which contributed to depoliticization and post-gay attitudes that maintain hierarchies and systems of oppression among queer people (Duggan, 2012; Ghaziani et al., 2016; McCann, 2016; Warner, 1999).

Such conflicts are illustrative of the "deep ideological rift[s] in the LGBTQ rights movement [which] represents a choice between a corporate politics of prudence on one hand, and a corporeal politics of desire on the other" (McCann, 2011, p. 250). Like the switch from Pride *protests* emphasizing radical politics to Pride *parades* celebrating queer visibility and a spectacle for tourism (Bruce, 2016; Lewis & Hermann, 2022), contradictory decision-making among queer activists is split between seemingly incommensurable values. Making matters more complicated, activists can make different decisions by isolating threads of queer history. Because the formation of queer civil rights and Pride is multifaceted, activists can pick and choose parts of history that support their argument. For example, gay power activists can draw from the political motivations of the Stonewall Riots to limit police presence at Pride, and gay pride activists can assert the importance of cultural visibility in the public sphere to justify state-directed partnerships at such events (Holmes, 2022). Pride encompasses these contradictions due to the unique formation of the queer civil rights movement. Bruce (2013) notes that 'serious'

social movements are characterized by resistance to the state, opting for strategies that integrate culture as a secondary strategy to gaining political power. In this case, the seriousness of a social movement is based on what the motivating factor behind protest is: either in conflict (serious) or cultural visibility (unserious). In comparison, contemporary Prides tend to blend cultural and legal strategies to make queer visibility a personal *and* political issue.

Contradictory decision-making also indicates intersectional identities that encounter different issues based on lived experience. Hearn (1998) notes that even if a gendered system creates a structured hierarchy of who is privileged (men) and who is oppressed (women), intersectional identities result in a variety of perspectives within one social category. For example, a collectivity of gay men carries different experiences based on their affiliations to socioeconomic status, geography, race, etc. These markers of difference translate to contradictory goals and messages in queer-oriented organizations. Parker and McDonald (2019) note that this contradictory view of identity is a feature of feminist studies in that identity is never stable, binary, or easy to discern. Feminist and queer-oriented organizations share many similarities in their shared positionalities on gender equality and the liberation of sexual minorities. Contradictory messages among Pride organizations construct people as notably different from others (Ashcraft, 2014). For example, Pride often facilitates distinct events where people are separated according to race (e.g., Black folks) and sexual orientation (e.g., lesbian nights). At the same time, progressive organizations may further contradictory messages by appealing to a common culture that can supposedly be fixed:

In "fix the culture" (as in "fix the woman"), celebrating difference as a message

strategy assumes that all women (or communal men) are similar. Creating equal

opportunities…again assumes that all men and women are fundamentally the

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same. It also assumes that the structure—and not people—create gender

inequalities. (Buzzanell, 2019, p. 263)

When applied to Pride, opportunities for inclusion are often suppressed due to archaic definitions of sexuality and gender identity that force people into dichotomies of man—woman, radical—assimilationist, and normative—deviant (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Priola et al., 2019). As a result, queer activists, such as those who take part in organizing Gulf Pride, may face difficulties in making sense of their identities.

Historically, Pride has relied on rhetorical strategies that emphasized unity and harmony among queer populations, allowing collective social mobility and the formation of a "quasi-ethnic" gay identity (Epstein, 1987, p. 12). However, marginalized members—such as Black, Latino/a, Asian, Pacific Islander, and transgender individuals— have resisted efforts to homogenize the queer civil rights movement, citing that much of the existing leadership is privileged along lines of gender and social class (e.g., upper-class White gay men; Ghaziani et al., 2016). The standpoint of Whiteness in queer civil rights leadership is problematic, in that efforts to fight against heteronormative legal structures ignore the intersectional implications of race. For example, historical efforts to establish hate-crime laws for queer people did not acknowledge the racist structure of the legal system. By asking for justice in line with incarceration, many queer activists overlooked the way racial minorities would continue to be punished (DeFilippis, 2019). Some activists in the queer civil rights movement ignored the historical origins of Pride altogether. Mumford's (2019) work illustrates the attention paid to movements outside Stonewall:

I had focused my last book on black gay men and therefore never expected

Stonewall to play a central role or become a key turning point, and it didn't. Black

gay men—from James Baldwin to the activist Joseph Beam—rarely if ever

mentioned Stonewall. For the most part, black gay activists grappled with the

meaning of black power liberation and how to deal with gay racism in the bars

and baths. (p. 88)

In addition to race, transgender activists started separate movements and groups that accounted

for their struggles (Armstrong, 2002). For instance, in 1970, two transgender women of color—

Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson—collaborated with founding members of GLF, sex

workers, and veterans of the Stonewall Riots to form STAR—Street Transvestite Action

Revolutionaries—which addresses homelessness among transgender youth of color. These

divestments from the original political agenda of Pride ultimately illustrate the difference

between the strategic positioning of queer visibility and actions that aid in marginalized groups'

survival (Holmes, 2022).

In conjunction with rising conservative attitudes in the 1970s, the movement held back on

radical decision-making that would incite further violence, causing gay power activists and

marginalized populations to fade into the background (Armstrong, 2002). It was not until the

1980s, when the AIDS epidemic ravaged the gay male community, that marginalized individuals

gained renewed agency in the movement. By highlighting the collaborative efforts of *everyone* in

the community, "Anti-AIDS activism reignited an emphasis on militancy and flamboyant

defiance, which became the hallmarks of the next protest cycle" (Ghaziani et al., 2016, p. 169).

For example, Roth (2016) notes that lesbians facilitated channels of support and political

participation for gay men affected by AIDS, highlighting their importance in a social movement

that often ignored them.

Messages such as event planning and organizational goals (party or protest) include these political and intersectional dilemmas. However, they also implicate the broad values that characterize what a 'good' Pride should be. In the context of this study, I outline the various messages that characterize the constitution of Pride among associated organizers, extending discussions of how queer civil rights has changed in the past decade.

Paradoxical Values

When individuals encounter two equal and mutually exclusive choices with no apparent solution or alternative, they negotiate a paradox (Ballard-Reisch & Turner, 2017; Hearn, 1998; Tracy, 2004). Paradoxical dimensions of power pervade feminist and queer issues. Socially progressive organizations perpetuate paradoxes due to the incommensurability between social justice efforts and organizational ideals. Ballard-Reisch and Turner (2017) note that paradoxes associated with diversity management and marginalized identity persist due to accumulated knowledge about differences that are then contradicted by organizational hierarchies, norms, and policies. In these cases, generating solutions to social issues acts against policies that protect organizations from liability.

In the context of Pride, attempts to create an inclusive environment are riddled with paradoxes. Burchiellaro (2021) notes that while queer-friendly organizations may urge individuals to be themselves, they may inherently contradict the structures, policies, and behaviors that expect people to be both genuine *and* professional. As discussed above, 'professional' formations may encourage values that ask queer activists to downplay their political and personal identities. This policing encourages people to internalize bureaucratic forms of discipline, which may defeat the purpose of the organization's original message (Burchiellaro, 2021). Often, these forms of control reflect greater cultural issues. Priola and

colleagues' (2018) investigation of heteronormativity in an Italian firm reveals that the privatization of sexuality (e.g., 'Keep it in the bedroom') renders queer organizational members in a paradox of existing peacefully: "As a result, LGBTQ individuals were always caught in between their private freedom and the public control of their acts/identities, so that the only admissible choice became that of inaction and self-repression. Such legacy continues to influence contemporary society" (p. 741). Similarly, the professionalization of Pride may limit radical expressions of queer identity that disrupt regional, national, and global organizational agendas. While silence and non-action are viable strategies for paradox per Priola et al. (2018), they speak to a dimension of power that seeks to oppress and suppress queer ontologies, even when the overarching organizational mission is that of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Many paradoxes in Pride result from simultaneous values among structures, activists, and historical accounts. First, the parades simultaneously argue for queer equality *and* the value of ontological difference (Bruce, 2016; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Thompson, 2018). Organizers often use the phrase 'unity in diversity' to address paradoxical representations of sameness and difference, championing the unified social movement of queer activism while negotiating intersectional politics. These tensions feed into many contemporary debates about what Pride "should" be: whether that be a place for protest or commercial alliance, a space of serious purpose or joyful celebration, an environment to honor a shared identity of oppression, or an arena where intersectional identities fight to transform hierarchical structures (Bruce, 2016). Gamson (1995) refers to these paradoxes as the "queer dilemma" (p. 390), noting that sameness-difference logics are unlikely to disappear. Instead, queer dilemmas weave in and out of different social issues throughout time, erupting into points of controversy (Ghaziani et al., 2016). For example, many activists and participants debate the role that overt demonstrations of kink play in

the public sphere. Some people argue that that sexual interests are welcome in the public celebration of gender and sexuality.

In contrast, others argue they border on the profane and alienate the movement from civil society. Ultimately, the presence of kink is but one of many queer dilemmas that presents themselves in the context of Pride. Other scholars argue that sameness-difference logics are not a contradiction that activists must choose between. Instead, it is a paradox that is simultaneous, ever-present, and something that activists can negotiate, as "queers at Pride have always been both revolutionary and assimilationist" (Thompson, 2018, p. 69). This dynamic reflects contemporary iterations of Pride paradoxes where difference is celebrated but also scaffolded by the conservative policies and state influences that silence discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion, thus necessitating this dissertation.

Activists also consider that, while Pride contributes to larger, transnational social movements, its presence is ephemeral. Ghaziani and colleagues (2016) contend that queer activism generally has a short life span, struggling to achieve long-standing agendas due to volatile sociohistorical landscapes (e.g., Religious Right, AIDS epidemic, marriage equality, transphobia). This problem is implicated in the temporary space that Pride inhabits, negotiating access to state-directed sites (e.g., fleeting appearances in streets, city centers, venues) with tangential presence in community locations (e.g., gay bars). Kaygalak-Celebi and colleagues (2020) extend this position, discussing the simultaneous values of maintaining a presence of queer visibility while being limited to specific spaces and temporalities:

Pride offers an existential, authentic experience by creating spaces for LGBTQ+ people where they can be themselves. On the other hand, the participants exhibit their "real" and "authentic" identities freely only within limited time and space

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that are not fully separated from the heteronormative order. Participants' accounts

clearly indicate that Pride is seen by the participants as a space of expression to

demonstrate their "normality" throughout the festival. Such a discourse on

normality is subject to a controversial debate among the LGBTQ+ community. (p.

547)

Finally, activists navigate this notion of authenticity, oscillating between genuine

representations of queer visibility that honor history and appropriations that benefit from ulterior

motives. Kates and Belk's (2001) study of Pride reveals the impact of commercialization,

exploring what participants considered to be authentic representations of Pride. Ultimately, the

commercialization results in images, texts, and rituals that appear disconnected from the

historical revolution of Stonewall. However, participants engage in complex rhetorical exercises

that simultaneously condemn commercial interests and buy from them. For example, many

participants pondered the ethics of selling Pride merchandise to a population with myriad

identities, but these same individuals often bought the items because it felt validating to their

identity to the collective whole (i.e., LGBTQ+ community). This phenomenon illustrates that the

paradox of authenticity is a moot point, because even commercialized notions of Pride indicate

ongoing political theorizing (Kates & Belk, 2001).

Queer activists can negotiate such paradoxes by envisioning creative strategies. Some

scholars originally admonished paradoxes for their disruptive nature, but now consider them a

ubiquitous and potentially productive part of organizational life (Ballard-Reisch & Turner, 2017;

Putnam et al., 2016). In many cases, the response to organizational paradoxes—whether

constructive or destructive—leads to the consequent impact (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Negative

responses to paradoxes, such as denial and distancing, can exacerbate the situation and leave

organizations in states of imbalance (see Berti & Simpson, 2021). In comparison, practical strategies, such as strategic visions, restructuring, cognitive complexity, and humor, can produce creative approaches to organizational problems, structural transformation, and effective management strategies (Berti & Simpson, 2021; Hargrave & van de Ven, 2017). All these outcomes relate to synergy—the ability of actors to "differentiate and coordinate contradictory elements in order to produce mutually advantageous practices and arrangements" (Hargrave & van de Ven, 2017, p. 323). Regardless of outcomes, paradoxes cannot be solved; they can simply be acted upon to inspire future decision-making (Jay, 2013). Ghaziani and Baldassarri (2011) find that Pride organizers respond to paradoxes by engaging in *thin coherence* (Sewell, 1999)—a state of communicative harmony whereby a heterogenous group finds cultural anchors that ground incommensurable discourses, such as unity in diversity, (im)permanence, and the struggle of authenticity. Throughout the queer civil rights movement, Pride organizers relied on cultural anchors of community building and equality to traverse different historical events (Ghaziani & Baldassarri, 2011). I build on this notion in my study by exploring emergent tensions in organizing Gulf Pride—a terrain characterized by renewed political threats of transphobia, right-wing extremism, etc.

In summary, Pride honors a complicated and multi-layered history which reflects a variety of organizational tensions. In the following section, I move from a tension-centered approach to Pride to a discussion of feminist dilemmas, which expands the communicative exploration of Pride to consider the material inequalities that plague queer activism.

The Need for Feminist Dilemmatic Theorizing

Feminist dilemmatic theorizing embraces tension-centered approaches to communication in the examination of sociomaterial entanglements (Barad, 2007; Harris, 2016). As I previously

discussed, organizational communication scholars tend to use a variety of terms to describe tension (Putnam et al., 2016), but Harris (2016) argues that the term "dilemma" allows feminist movements to investigate the agency of communication, encompassing both social (discursive) and tangible (material) phenomena (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Cooren, 2018). This position is critical in the context of sexuality and gender because dimensions of identity escape concrete definitions (Pauly & Buzzanell, 2019). Feminist dilemmatic theorizing responds to organizational structures that codify sexuality and gender (e.g., workplace policies) in overly simplistic and Western ways. Reframing dilemmas as emancipatory gives practitioners, scholars, and activists the tools to deconstruct binaries (e.g., resistance—complicity) and construct powerful opportunities for cultural change—especially in the context of social movements (Buzzanell, 2021: Harris, 2016).

Feminist dilemmatic theorizing challenges assumptions about reality. Harris (2016; 2019) notes that feminists oscillate between two notions of truth: correspondent and constructionist. *Correspondent* frameworks rely on communication to disseminate objective notions of reality (e.g., descriptive statistics). In this case, communication only reports on observable bodies, objects, and structures. Communication reflects a reality that is 'out there.'

In contrast, *social constructionism* frameworks give communication the credit for creating, organizing, and altering our reality. In this view, there is nothing *but* communication because language and meaning shape our perceptions of all tangible phenomena. Both ontological frames fail to account for each other. Harris (2019) explains this tension further:

On the one hand, if I assume that communication merely represents the world, I

separate the symbolic from the physical. Communication is reduced to a mirror,

one that can reflect but not impact the world. Because words do not act, they are

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somewhat impotent: They can describe violence but never enact it…On the other

hand, if I assume that communication completely constitutes the world, then I

miss reality…I can talk things into being regardless of external circumstances.

(pp. 21-22)

Such feminist dilemmas are present in social movements, where activists grapple with the weight

of communicative messages and agendas. Bruce (2016) notes that activists respond to historical

inaccuracies about marginalized populations with educated (i.e., correspondent) responses while

simultaneously providing more prominent cultural messages about their platform that hope to

change the world (i.e., social constructionism). In the context of Pride, activists often shift

constructivist messages when material circumstances change, such as when the AIDS epidemic

challenged the motivations spurring queer civil rights (Ghaziani & Baldassarri, 2011). Such shifts

reflect a struggle to encompass discursive and material phenomena, which is more broadly

implicated in the field of communication.

Organizational communication scholars historically rely on social construction to

investigate the lived experience of organized bodies (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Orlikowski,

2007; Robichaud & Cooren, 2013). This preoccupation can harm feminist movements that

grapple with tangible structures of inequality (Alaimo et al., 2008). Thus, feminist dilemmatic

theorizing highlights the material implications of organizing, complicating models of

communication (Harris, 2016; 2019). Not only does feminist dilemmatic theorizing collapse

traditional dualisms, such as object—subject, sex—gender, and essentialist—constructivist, but it

also asks individuals to grapple with the entanglement of theory and activism, which aligns with

many feminist ideals (Linabary et al., 2021). Next, I outline feminist dilemmatic theorizing in the

broader movement of *feminist organizational communication*—a subfield of theory and activism

that implicates communicative dilemmas.

Feminist Organizational Communication

Feminist organizational communication outlines dominant structures that shape

(ab)normalities about gender and its intersections with "race, class, and other forms of social

inequality" (Benschop, 2021, p. 1; Buzzanell, 1994). Feminist organizational scholars explore

many communicative phenomena, such as "how language creates gendered relationships; how

communication reaffirms hierarchies that subordinate organization members and alternative

views; and how women express and interpret organizational experiences" (Buzzanell, 1994, p.

342). These frameworks not only challenge notions of gender and sexuality but also the history

of organizational studies—a subfield that until recently ignored issues of intersectionality,

systemic justice, and reflexivity (Linabary et al., 2021). Thus, feminist organizational

communication engages in activism by committing to the rights of the academically and socially

subordinated (Buzzanell, 1994).

Many feminist organizational scholars do not just argue for women's social, political, and

economic rights. Buzzanell (1994) asserts that there are many strands of feminism—some of

which consider gender within greater frameworks of marginalization (e.g., White supremacy,

capitalism, heteronormativity). Some scholars utilize postmodern conventions of identity to

escape archaic definitions of 'men' and 'women,' instead examining the connections between

power and domination that render certain subjectivities vulnerable (McDonald, 2015; Mumby,

1996). These academic shifts mirror greater social movements (i.e., The Third Wave) that

actively destabilize notions of "sex, gender, feminisms, sexuality, organizing, and organization"

(Buzzanell, 2019, p. 255). Therefore, I argue that a feminist organizational communication lens

aligns with the investigation of Pride because it can address dilemmas regarding the structuring of queer people in public life.

The history of feminist organizing reflects trends in political activism, neoliberalism, structural inequalities, and material considerations. First, feminist organizational communication politically interrogates the notion of 'genderless' organizing. In the 1990s, feminists resisted the assumption that organizations are gender-neutral and reward employees based on arbitrary metrics (e.g., meritocracy; Amis et al., 2020). Instead, scholars argued that dominant organizational structures are 'gendered' and function to subordinate women and uphold men's privilege (Acker, 1990; Ashcraft, 2005). For example, Buzzanell (1994) links gender and communication by examining competitive individualism, linear thinking, and separation/autonomy—all concepts that are typically considered to be 'objective' and 'rational.' In addition to deconstructing taken-for-granted assumptions about gender, feminist organizational communication engages in praxis, whereby scholars and activists imagine more equitable futures (Benschop, 2021; Buzzanell, 2019). Praxis sets feminist organizational communication apart from other theories about gender that simply describe lived experience (Hearn & Parkin, 1983).

Second, contemporary feminisms fight for cultural, social, and economic justice among marginalized populations, but they struggle to overcome the massive influence of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism transcends an economic philosophy that vies for the deregulation of publicly owned interests (Ashcraft, 2017). It acts as a communicative "mode of discourse" that "has pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices" (Harvey, 2006, p. 23). Neoliberalism contributes to the depoliticization of social movements through messaging that appears socially progressive but, in fact, contributes to further inequality. This process occurs by

conflating the political agency of marginalized people with their capacity for profit, commodifying identity into something that can be sold, marketed to, valued, etc. For example, free-market agendas appropriate feminism, championing progressive buzzwords such as 'empowerment' and 'choice' while advancing policies that further inequality and marginalization (Grosser & McCarthy, 2019; Prugl, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014). These strategies aim to strip radical politics from feminism and profit from a palatable platform of gender equality. Just as post-gay conceptualizations erase concerns of sexual difference in the public sphere, neoliberalism favors feminist logics that render gender equality an apolitical issue that is already widely accepted (Huang & Tan, 2020). In this view, feminism is simply another product neoliberalism can profit from.

Third, structural inequalities shape feminist agendas and discourses. Inequality regimes, or systems of communicative practices and policies that reinforce power imbalances in organizational settings (Acker, 2006; Benschop, 2021), have widespread effects on marginalized populations. These regimes weave through various processes, such as "organizing work into jobs and hierarchies, recruitment and hiring, wage setting and supervisory practices, and informal interactions at work" (Benschop, 2021, p. 5). Inequality regimes often exert power over individuals by constructing an inherent amount of credibility. For example, bureaucratic displays of rules and policies command respect, even when people voice concerns about equity and social justice (Benschop, 2021). Inequality regimes reflect feminist resistance against various phenomena, such as glass ceilings (Acker, 2009), sexual harassment (Grosser & Tyler, 2021; Harris, 2019), and the intersectional experiences that link professionalism and violence (e.g., White supremacy; Donahoo, 2023; Ferguson Jr. & Dougherty, 2022).

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Finally, feminist organizational communication increasingly considers the agency of material phenomena, such as objects, texts, environments, and bodies. Buzzanell (2019) advocates material feminisms that "seek to understand the confluence of social arrangements that result in particular forms of gender relations and structures in a specific time and place" (p. 257). Therefore, material feminisms erode the dichotomy between epistemology (social constructionism) and ontology (materiality), arguing for a sociomaterial entanglement of identity and organizing (Buzzanell, 2019). This study contributes to feminist organizational communication, examining how contemporary iterations of socially progressive organizations (i.e., Pride) resist and maintain feminist dilemmas. In this dissertation, I investigate the dilemmas among Pride organizers that constitute the entanglement between social and material worlds.

Sociomateriality

Sociomaterial approaches frame communication and materiality as performatively entangled. Barad (2007) coins sociomateriality when describing the "intra-action" of physical and symbolic worlds, which inform our foundations of knowledge (epistemology) and existence (ontology). While "*inter*action" assumes discrete boundaries between two influences, "*intra*-action" posits the inseparability (i.e., entanglement) of discursive and material forces (Barad, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015). For example, queer identity is performatively entangled due to discursive negotiations of identity (e.g., "coming out" of the "closet") and material considerations of embodiment (e.g., gender dysphoria and euphoria). Generally, materiality refers to the tangible things that shape communicative experience, such as texts, objects, bodies, and the "materialization" of social phenomena (e.g., emotional displays; Cooren, 2018). The field of communication historically de-emphasized materiality in organizational analyses, instead focusing on elements of language, social interaction, and culture (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004;

Cooren, 2018). Sociomateriality aims to correct this over-reliance on the "discursive turn" in the field (Orlikowski, 2007), grounding theory and praxis in "the material details of oppression and the mechanics of power" (Lannamann, 1998, p. 6). In the context of Pride, sociomateriality interrogates the meanings ascribed to both discursive strategies of queer visibility *and* the physical arrangement of queer bodies, spaces, and places.

Sociomateriality provides an analytical umbrella with many competing philosophies (Fox & Aldred, 2017). Cooren (2018) argues that social and material worlds are not entangled but instead relationally implicated. In their critique, entanglement still implies two discrete forces coming together. A relational ontology allows a blend of physical and symbolic worlds, resulting in something unique and impossible to dissect (Cooren, 2018). However, sociomaterial entanglement allows for the careful and nuanced analysis of power (Mutch, 2013), especially in situations where organizational terrains weave materiality and discourse together (Gist-Mackey & Dougherty, 2021). Scott & Orlikowski (2013) ultimately acknowledge that sociomateriality should welcome a plurality of perspectives that carefully engage with epistemological and ontological underpinnings. I engage with various subsets of sociomateriality in this dissertation: feminist new materialism, ventriloquism, and embodiment.

Feminist New Materialism

Feminist new materialism expands the notion of sociomateriality by decentering human agency and collapsing 'progressive' notions of time (Harris, 2016; 2019). Stephens (2014) describes the fluidity of feminist new materialism: "...it remains a constitutively ambiguous category, less a coherent disciplinary field than a collection of often contradictory or disparate works" (pp. 186-187). While feminist new materialism acknowledges the sociomaterial entanglement of physical and symbolic worlds, it also politically decenters human-centered

notions of communication. Barad (2003) argues that humans are intra-actions, composed of discursive and material forces that are not simplistically or ontologically finite. Just as Campbell (2005) notes that the construct of humanity coincided with a Western, individualistic approach to identity, feminist new materialism rejects the notion that humans (subjects) are analytically separated from the world they inhabit (objects). Thus, an intra-active view of agency disperses influence to all actors—human and non-human (Barad, 2003). This political move decenters humans as solely responsible for political inequalities (Harris, 2019), which aligns with organizational work that acknowledges the material agency of objects (e.g., medical directives and organizational texts; Putnam & Cooren, 2004). Harris (2019) argues that feminist new materialism divests from organizational work that analyzes sociomateriality in apolitical ways. In comparison, feminist work routinely grapples with the entanglement of social, political, and economic oppression.

In addition to dispersing agency, feminist new materialism rejects normative, linear approaches to time. Because sociomaterial entanglements fold the "word and world" together, time is not an objective measure but a political project that must be interrogated (Harris, 2016). Therefore, feminists approach time in unconventional ways, borrowing from various histories that account for narrative inequalities (Fannin et al., 2014; Hemmings, 2011). Harris (2016) argues that scholarly norms desire cutting-edge approaches to social issues, which erases alternative and under-studied histories. For example, some ideological commitments of Pride erase the cultural contestation of queer identity and politics in the wake of increasing commercialization. Similarly, the wave model of feminism posits social movements as most effective to the public when institutionalized in professional settings (e.g., nonprofits), but this linear approach to history ignores the undercurrent of Whiteness that conflates radical politics

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with 'uncivilized,' 'unprofessional,' and 'inappropriate' pejoratives (Harris, 2016). In response, feminists engage in "new" forms of materialism by transposing existing structures to reveal critical and transformative insights (Harris, 2016; van der Tuin, 2012).

Ventriloquism

Ventriloquism illustrates how sociomaterial theorizing is grounded in multiple channels of communication. Ventriloquism refers to "our capacity to make other beings say or do things while we speak, write, or more generally, conduct ourselves" (Cooren, 2012, pp. 4-5). As a ventriloquist speaks through a puppet, ventriloquism disperses communication between dummies—or figures (Goldblatt, 2006)—such as people, texts, ideologies, and ideas (Cooren, 2010). For example, an individual (figure) may speak on behalf of an organization (ventriloquist), which presumes the significance of material phenomena. When applied to critical sensibilities, ventriloquism illustrates how power, (in)justice, and (in)equity animate people, places, and things (Cooren, 2012; Cooren et al., 2013).

Often, ventriloquism is bidirectional, oscillating communication between multiple ventriloquists and figures. Cooren (2012) speaks further about this relationship:

It implies that all the beings that we (re)produce in our conversations and discourses also participate in what defines or identifies us. For an accent or a language to live and exist, we have to make it live and exist in our interactions and discourse; for a policy or law to apply itself, it must be implicitly or explicitly invoked or ventriloquized in our discussion. And the same reasoning applies, of course, for many things (ideologies, cultures, situations, realities, etc.). (p. 6)

In this study, ventriloquism challenges boundaries of authority, power, and identity in Pride spaces. For example, queerness acts as a cultural identity that animates (ventriloquizes) others

(e.g., governmental officials, organizers, external stakeholders, nonprofit structures).

Simultaneously, these entities alter definitions of queerness based on political and cultural

differences. Additionally, Cooren and colleagues (2013) suggest that the messages produced in

these relationships may transcend the agency of ventriloquists and figures. Using ventriloquism

allows me to reconcile dilemmas about queerness in the public sphere by oscillating between

different communicative agencies.

Embodiment

Embodiment captures the a dynamics of bodies in social justice contexts. Perry and

Medina (2011) define embodiment as

> bodies as whole experiential beings in motion, both inscribed and inscribing
>
> subjectivities. That is, the experiential body is both a representation of self (a
>
> "text") as well as a mode of creation in progress (a "tool"). In addition,
>
> embodiment is a state that is contingent upon the environment and the context of
>
> the body. (p. 63)

Scholars note that 'bodies' are symbolic, collecting various meanings, narratives, and discourses

based on systems of power (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, social class; Butler, 2015). Bodies

respond to these ideologies, integrating cultural messages or resisting them entirely (Merleau-

Ponty, 1962; Sekimoto, 2012). Additionally, bodies produce unique forms of knowledge,

expanding sociomaterial theorizing with sensorial phenomena (e.g., touch, sight, hearing,

internal/external sensations; Ellingson, 2017; Jones et al., 2006). Barad (2007) distinguishes

bodies from 'flesh,' which refers to the corporeal matter making up oneself (i.e., skin, hair,

blood). Together, bodies and flesh implicate the "sensuous and affective process" of

communication more broadly (Crossley, 1997, p. 19) despite being ignored in research and methodological considerations (Ellingson, 2017).

Social science scholars have historically privileged Cartesian dualisms, splitting knowledge between all-knowing minds and useless bodies. These epistemologies assert the irrelevance of embodiment in research, instead valuing theories of rationality and objectivism (Crossley, 1997; Ellingson, 2017; Sekimoto, 2012). In contrast, Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that bodies inform conceptualizations of identity, ideology, and materiality. For example, their discussion of habitual bodies illustrates how knowledge is accumulated based on interactions with the world and oneself (e.g., a blind man's cane, typist's keys; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). These conclusions inform conceptualizations of identity.

Embodiment and identity are entangled in sociomaterial relationships. Dale and Latham (2015) explain that embodiment and materiality intertwine, putting individuals in positions of "radical alterity" (p. 170). In other words, the dynamic relationship between social systems, material phenomena, and bodies produces unique identities. For example, sexuality is not just a marker of difference based on heteronormative social systems. Instead, people exist in unique social locations based on embodiments of sexuality (e.g., affinity with certain bodies, public displays of touch, arousal), which are signified as (in)appropriate due to heteronormative systems.

In many cases, ideologies organize bodies differently to uphold systems of privilege and oppression. When applied to economic contexts, Marvin (1994) differentiates between body classes and text classes. Body classes signify lower social class privilege, relying on manual labor and utilizing one's flesh to survive in a rapidly shifting capitalist economy (see Gist-Mackey, 2018). In comparison, text classes confer privileges to disembodied tasks, which utilize

technology, texts (e.g., paperwork, resumes), specialized abilities (e.g., literacy), and professional structures (e.g., White-collar work; Marvin, 1994). Beyond social class, identity and embodiment implicate intersectional identities. Embodiment results from the intersections of unique social locations (Sekimoto, 2012), which helps explain why Black women experience unique sensorial states due to their race and gender, for example.

In this study, embodiment allows me to explore how bodies communicate in Pride spaces, illustrating intersectional, political, and organizational dynamics. In line with Sekimoto (2012), I "focus on the modes of interaction and engagement through which particular social constructs (i.e., identities) become materially present and embodied. This shift requires reconfiguring our approach to human communication, moving from communication as fundamentally symbolic to communication as embodied" (p. 228). Thus, I foreground the ways that the work of organizing Pride is an embodied experience, as is embarking on the ethnographic participation and writing of this dissertation.

In summary, feminist dilemmatic theorizing embraces tension-centered approaches to organizational communication while grappling with sociomaterial entanglements. A feminist dilemmatic approach facilitates the interrogation of power, identity, and organization in the context of Pride while paying specific attention to the collision between social and material worlds. Pride reflects an intra-action of organizational structures, queer bodies, neoliberal influences, and ahistorical threads of political contestation. Next, I ground discussions of tension and dilemmas in the navigation of queerness vis-à-vis co-sexuality.

Co-Sexuality: Navigating Normative Sexual Systems

Co-sexuality is a theory that explores "the process of how humans communicatively organize around sexuality" (Compton & Dougherty, 2017, p. 875). Based on systems of sexual

normativity (e.g., heteronormativity), people engage in a variety of communicative strategies to reinforce, maintain, or resist such hegemonies (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014). These sexual 'norms' implicate the "communicative and embodied push-and-pull" that plagues interpersonal interactions and organizational structures. Co-sexuality is multifaceted, exploring communicative understandings of dominant sexual norms, outlining individuals' connections to sexual systems, and combining discursive and material strategies of organizing around sexual norms (Branton & Compton, 2021, p. 74). In these ways, co-sexuality enables me to engage with and articulate systems of sexual normativity that may inform Pride organizers' work. Two theories underly the formation of co-sexuality: co-cultural theorizing and queer theory.

Co-Cultural Theory

Co-cultural theories typically provide an explanatory framework of *what* communicative strategies non-dominant group members (i.e., marginalized populations) use to negotiate systems of power and *why* they choose those strategies (Orbe, 1998a; Orbe, 1998b; Orbe & Roberts, 2012). For example, non-dominant group members may *assimilate* into structures of power, *accommodate* them while balancing intercultural conflicts, or *separate* from them by displaying radical politics. These strategies differ in degree of communicative urgency (i.e., non-assertiveness, assertiveness, and aggressiveness) and rely on an interrelated framework of motivational factors:

> Situated within a particular *field of experience* that governs their perceptions of the *costs and rewards* associated with, as well as their *ability* to engage in, various communicative practices, co-cultural group members will adopt certain *communication orientations*—based on their *preferred outcomes* and

communication approaches—to fit the circumstances of a specific *situation*.

(Orbe, 1998b, p. 19, emphasis in original)

This framework is practical when exploring the struggles of queer populations who must navigate dominant sexual norms. Scholars use co-cultural theorizing to explore the experiences of queer people when engaging on educational panels (Rudnick & Munz, 2022), navigating heterosexism (the institutionalization of heterosexual experience in daily life; Camara et al., 2012), negotiating identity on social media (Fox & Warber, 2015), and balancing contradictory cultural ideals (Bie & Tang, 2016). Co-cultural theorizing also considers the communicative strategies of dominant group members (i.e., privileged people) in their support, maintenance, or dismantling of hegemony (Razzante & Orbe, 2018). While co-cultural theorizing often focuses on one category of identity at a time, Razzante and colleagues (2021) emphasize the importance of intersectionality and intersubjectivity, acknowledging the lived experience of oppression and privilege, which is situational, historically situated, and dilemmatic. When applied to co-sexuality, co-cultural theorizing emphasizes *communicative* strategies that respond to the organization of sexuality in social life. Next, I outline the central tenets of queer theory and its connection to co-sexuality.

Queer Theory

Co-sexuality stems from queer theoretical commitments that view sexuality as fluid, unfinished, and power-laden (McDonald, 2015; Sedgewick, 2008; Yep, 2014). Queer theory originated from academic discourses in the 1990s that rejected sexuality as a stable identity, resisting the heteronormative convention that straight and queer populations must be ontologically identical (McDonald, 2015). As discussed previously, queer activists and theorists alike criticize heteronormativity due to its hegemonic undercurrents, creating a standard of ideal

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sexual citizenship that reinforces marginalization (Halperin, 2003; McDonald, 2015). Instead, queerness can be a site of sexual and political celebration—an ontology of difference that challenges taken-for-granted notions about social life (e.g., marriage, romance). When applied to Pride, queerness represents an ontological commitment to visibility that challenges heteronormative displays of identity. The use of the term "queer" derives from a political contestation, taking a term that once meant "strange" or "abnormal" (Halperin, 2003, p. 339) and turning it into a celebration, interruption, and disruption of what makes people different (de Lauretis, 1991; McDonald, 2015).

A core tenet of queer theory includes the deconstruction of normativity. Yep (2003) defines normativity as the "process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values" (p. 18). Queer theory connects normativity to hegemony—a system of dominance that punishes those who stray from prescribed social norms (e.g., Whiteness, able-bodiedness; Compton & Dougherty, 2017; McDonald, 2015; Warner, 1999; Yep, 2003). Systems of normativity have wide-reaching consequences. For example, heteronormativity does not just create divisions along the binary of homosexual—heterosexual, but it also demonizes any form of sexuality that is not societally tolerated (e.g., casual sex, sex work; Yep, 2003). Because of the etymology of the term "queer," many theorists value the explicit exploration of sexual and gendered norms in line with radical politics.

Some queer theorists argue for a more inclusive approach, expanding the fluidity of queer theory to all systems of normativity (Freccero, 2011). For example, queer people experience unique forms of oppression based on the linkages between sexuality and other social categories

(e.g., gender, race, ability, and social class). In response, queer theory can account for such nuances (Butler, 2004; Warner, 1999; McDonald, 2015). Branton and Compton (2021) agree with this notion, stating that there are "other processes" that account for the construction, regulation, and resistance of sexual normativities (p. 75), such as communicative pressures to reveal, conceal, and moderate identity in professional contexts (see Clair et al., 2005).

In response to static notions of identity that discipline and limit expression (Butler, 2004; Yep, 2003), queer theory advocates fluid, unstable, and contextually-bound definitions of identity (McDonald, 2015; Sedgwick, 2008; Yep, 2014). Normative conceptualizations of identity assume categorical boundaries around labels like sexuality, gender, and race, but queer theory is anticategorical. Anticategorical complexity allows an open analysis of how normativity affects people along different intersections (McDonald, 2015). For example, anticategorical approaches would problematize the universal experience of "women," instead opting for an interrogation of how gender is rendered normative and non-normative in particular contexts. Some scholars, such as Love (2011), note that identity is a discursive accomplishment; therefore, concrete notions of identity cannot be abandoned completely, resulting in "partial…sticky, [and] familiar" forms of self (p. 185). Others take an extreme approach to fluid identities, such as Butler (2011), who articulates gender identity as a ritualized performance that becomes institutionalized in daily life. Therefore, the status of being a 'man' is nothing more than a performance, a constitutive making and remaking—one that can be deconstructed and resisted, according to queer theorists. In summary, queer theorists do not suggest that identity is any one "thing" but instead a "process" that can be communicatively examined (Compton & Dougherty, 2017, p. 878).

Another tenet of queer theory is its strong political commitment to the contestation of normativity. Queer theory's politics align with previously described intellectual investments, such as challenging heteronormativity and emphasizing unstable notions of identity. First, political displays that reinforce heteronormativity are antithetical to queer commitments. Any practice that aims to justify queer ontology in otherwise straight praxis (e.g., marriage) is not based on "absolute recognition" (McDonald, 2015, p. 320). Instead, practices such as marriage reinforce heteronormativity by characterizing queer identity as a facade of ideal sexual citizenship (heterosexuality). Second, political agendas that target particular identities do not adequately account for intersectionality and differing lived experience (McDonald, 2013; Sedgewick, 2008). This problem can include programming that aims to highlight a specific population (e.g., queer people at Pride) but portrays them in a way that ignores differing political motivations for the event. By outlining a broad political agenda for queer people, non-normative voices are unable to speak. Therefore, a fluid approach to identity acknowledges the flexible boundaries around political action, focusing on how various people can organize around difference instead of focusing on the liberation of one identity category at a time. Like gay power activists who link capitalism to all forms of oppression (e.g., White supremacy, heteronormativity), queer theorists demand political action that advocates for a unified liberation of all folks who are oppressed in unequal landscapes of power (Eguchi, 2021; McDonald, 2015).

Unfortunately, queer theory's political emphases falter in the wake of neoliberalism. Both the rise in gay pride ideology (i.e., emphasizing queer visibility while ignoring intersectional causes) and the commercialization of queer spaces result in a one-dimensional definition of liberation based solely on the category of sexuality. Instead of linking all forms of oppression to capitalism, neoliberalized feminism turns queer politics into a single issue cause by hyper-

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focusing on just *an* aspect of one's identity. Rather than acknowledging how mechanics of

privilege and power operate across linkages of identity (i.e., race, sexuality, gender, social class),

neoliberalized feminism isolates sexuality to increase visibility *and* garner economic support.

This fixed agenda helps financial stakeholders assimilate queerness into the public sphere,

generating profit while simultaneously presenting a vision of emancipation—even if it is unlikely

to work. Thus, Chavez (2013) argues that the amount of research regarding queer theory has

waned in the past couple of decades due to the conflation between queer freedom and inclusion

(i.e., assimilation).

When applied to Pride, queer theory facilitates opportunities for political hegemony *and*

resistance. Wesling (2012) coins *queer value* to explore the presence of sexuality in public life

and its connections to capitalist investment. Queer value underscores how financial stakeholders

harness "the productive value of queer labor" to reproduce systems of inequality (Burchiellaro,

2021, p. 765). For example, drag queens contribute to the economy by facilitating an outrageous

spectacle of gender, sexuality, and identity, thus generating profit in channels of tourism and

entertainment. Pride may accumulate queer value by extending the pink economy—a

marketplace where queer bodies generate profit based on mutual interests. Other queer

theoretical frames resist single-issue causes of neoliberalized feminism. Take, for example,

Holmes (2022), who explores the ways in which queer activists engage in *adaptive queerness*—

"a discursive strategy that queer activists use to successfully claim legitimacy in advocating for

seemingly non-LGBTQ issues by demonstrating how such issues in fact affect LGBTQ people"

(p. 457). Adaptive queerness allows queer activists to revive intersectional issues of liberation,

such as the connection between White supremacy and heteronormativity. In the context of Gulf

Pride, organizers may benefit from adaptive queerness that resists the marketing of any one population, thus favoring an unstable notion of identity.

In summary, co-cultural theorizing and queer theory undergird the framework of co-sexuality, which examines the (ab)normalities of sexuality in social life. This connection is vital because co-sexuality foregrounds the communicative strategies that Pride organizers use to resist and/or maintain normative conceptualizations of identity in socially progressive spaces. In the next section, I extend this framework by exploring three other systems of normativity: sexual citizenship, homonormativity, and homonationalism.

Sexual Citizenship

Sexual citizenship is a multifaceted concept, capturing the different ways queer individuals claim fundamental rights and cultural sites of belonging (Richardson, 2017; Weeks, 1998). Weeks (1995; 1998) notes that queer individuals exist between moments of transgression—when dramatic moments of upheaval (e.g., coming out) punctuate identity—and moments of citizenship—when individuals state their desire to be accepted and understood within sociopolitical systems (i.e., the state). Similarly, sexual citizenship underscores desires to exist peacefully with other people in society (Conover et al., 1991; Wilson, 2009), achieving basic welfare and safety (Dwyer, 2010) despite harmful systems of cis- and hetero-normativity. Beyond social recognition, sexual citizenship also articulates the authority of state actors (e.g., government officials, litigators, police officers) who recognize or deny claims to fundamental rights. In this case, queer visibility is not enough to guarantee fair and equal treatment in just societies; it is also contingent on dominant interests and their rationales for what kinds of identities are considered appropriate and permissible (Phelan, 2010; Wilson, 2009).

Sexual citizenship can illustrate myriad communicative phenomena. For example, several scholars (Bell & Bennie, 2000; Evans, 2013; Richardson, 2017) note that sexual citizenship entails the right to participate in consumerism, marketization, and access to capitalist marketplaces. When applied to Pride spaces, queer citizens participate in neoliberal configurations of social justice that uphold the visibility of sexuality and gender while also profiting from its unique cultural appeal. Cities with queer tourism channels (e.g., gay bars, gay neighborhoods, Pride) grant sexual citizens the right to cultural sites of belonging if they maintain sustainable economic channels. In other words, queer citizens have rights because they produce unique economic opportunities for surrounding communities, cities, and states (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Taylor, 2011; Richardson, 2017).

Such claims to economic spaces illustrate concerning trends of assimilation into heteronormative systems. Historical moves toward queer inclusion and tolerance result in nuanced attitudes about what kinds of sexuality and gender performances are considered normal (Seidman, 2009), warranting a discussion of what happens when queer individuals welcome the title "citizen" (Barker, 2012; Richardson, 2017). Unfortunately, assimilation comes at the cost of shedding radical performances of queerness, privatizing, depoliticizing, and de-eroticizing (Warner, 2000) the celebration of sexuality and gender (Ammaturo, 2015). In my study, sexual citizenship underscores the communicative mechanisms that state actors use to control Pride spaces, permitting the celebration of queerness within systems that surveil, control, and govern societal members. Consequently, organizers may engage in various behaviors to resist, accommodate, or maintain these dominant systems. Echoing the ways that Wilson (2009) advocates a multisectoral approach to sexual citizenship through exploring cultural, social, economic, and political systems, this study interrogates how communication among Pride

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organizers implicates communities, economies, and state-sanctioned systems (e.g., cities and governments).

Theorizing around citizenship necessitates a discussion about how power is exercised and internalized. Foucault (1977; 1991; 2007; 2008) illustrates how state actors control citizens in his discussion of disciplinary power, which focuses on the technologies that observe, surveil, and police people. These agencies rely on systems of neoliberal governmentality, extending beyond state actors' direct control. Instead of exerting power and influences on people outright, governmentality internalizes the control of citizens (i.e., subjectification), resulting in self-policing attitudes and behaviors (Foucault, 1988; Hamann, 2009; Lemke, 2002; Pyysiäinen et al., 2017). One behavior includes "responsibilization," a mode of governance that appeals to individual responsibility and autonomy. Responsibilization gives citizens the illusion of freedom by allowing them to control themselves, thus, avoiding direct consequences from state actors (Rose, 1999; Pyysiäinen et al., 2017). In this study, disciplinary power and neoliberal governmentality territorialize power-laden relationships between Pride organizers and state actors, articulating the technologies that render queerness appropriate in the public sphere.

In addition to sexual citizenship, I explore other normative systems of sexuality that politicize queerness in Pride spaces.

Homonormativity

Homonormativity refers to an ideology that accepts queer identity if it is palatable and profitable (Duggan, 2002; 2012). Homonormativity differs from heteronormativity. Both systems assimilate queer people into straight society, but heteronormativity reinforces homosexual—heterosexual binaries (Yep, 2003), and homonormativity assumes some level of similarity between all sexualities. Homonormativity favors sexual identities that harness other

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intersectional privileges, such as race, social class, and place-based identity (e.g., urban cosmopolitanism; Duggan, 2002; 2012). For example, Pride typically privileges the experiences of White upper-class gay men in cities (Bruce, 2016). Discussions of co-sexuality do mention homonormativity and its relationship to other dominant systems of power (e.g., heteronormativity; Branton & Compton, 2021), but as I illustrate, the commercialization of Pride necessitates further analyses of the term.

Pride tends to reinforce homonormativity because the presence of both neoliberalism (i.e., commercialization of public sites) *and* queer visibility uphold an ideal sexual subject—one that reinforces systems of power (Lamusse, 2016). Pride facilitates tourism and collaborates with state actors (e.g., cities and police) while simultaneously presenting queer-friendly messages. In doing so, it creates moral systems where certain queer people are uplifted and others are stigmatized. Similar to critiques of neoliberalized feminism that articulate the inequalities present in messages regarding empowerment and choice (Harvey, 2006; Holmes, 2022), homonormativity acts as a system whereby queer people feel pulled into a particular presentation of their difference, such as being "affluent, white, stylish, monogamous and clean-cut" (Markwell & Waitt, 2009, p. 157). In effect, discourses that conflate morality with economic activity silence marginalized populations. In my research with Gulf Pride, I explore how homonormativity is relevant in organizational strategies or representations that uphold subjects as privileged and palatable.

If purchasing power becomes the hallmark of being a 'good' queer person, activists will inadvertently create a culture where marginalized people feel excluded and unwanted. This explains why lower-class black transgender women are shut out from public discourse and held responsible for their oppression in an individually responsible culture (Bruce, 2016; D'Emilio,

1983; Harvey, 2006; Holmes, 2022). In this case, political agency is only afforded to the wealthiest in the queer community, exacerbating intersectional systems of inequality along lines such as social class, race, geographic identity, and more (Weiss, 2018). Even more concerning, queer people can become commodities themselves, turning Pride into a site of entertainment and scrutiny for straight populations (Ammaturo, 2016; Eguchi, 2021; Rushbrook, 2005). In essence, neoliberalism acts as a framework for understanding the sociopolitical terrain of queer identity (e.g., Pride). At the same time, systems of sexual normativity provide an individual understanding of what queer people feel motivated to achieve in social movement organizing.

The pressure of homonormative identity informs Pride organizing. Stone (2010) argues that the professionalization of Pride demands assimilation into bureaucratic forms of control, which absorbs queer identity into a capitalist ethic of organizing. This phenomenon may explain the lack of radical queer politics in the past two decades, as homonormative pressures favor policies that consider queer people in normative frameworks, such as "same-sex marriage and family recognition rights, market/cultural visibility, access to the military, and hate crime/safety legislation" (Weiss, 2018, p. 109). Additionally, Pride reinforces homonormative ideals by partnering with stakeholders who advertise marketable queer subjects in flyers, goods, services, and images, creating a marketplace where certain kinds of queerness are prescribed to the public (Bruce, 2016). Questions remain about how homonormativity pervades Gulf Pride, whether this causes tensions for organizers, and what strategies they use to navigate said pressures.

Homonationalism

While homonormativity aligns queerness with intersectional markers of privilege, homonationalism utilizes the queer subject as a tool for imperialism. Puar (2013) defines homonationalism as a rhetoric of respectable (queer) citizenship that privileges certain bodies

(U.S. citizens) and demonizes others for their homophobic capacities (e.g., terrorists, undocumented citizens, poor people; Puar, 2018). Homonationalism borrows from racist and xenophobic discourses that occurred after 9/11, posturing the United States as a free nation that fights against injustice abroad. Such notions absorb queer people into transnational discourses that reinforce moral universalism and colonialism—pitting the civility of developed societies against 'barbaric' and 'uncivilized' nation-states (Chavez, 2013). Binnie (2004) expands on this dynamic further: "The logic goes something like this: you are less developed than us because you treat your gays badly. Thus, the western state becomes the guarantor of lesbian and gay rights versus the threat constituted by the savage brutal other" (p. 76). Homonationalism stigmatizes queer subjects who are deemed homophobic by national discourses regarding religion (e.g., Muslims) and social location (e.g., immigrants; Moss, 2016). For example, national discourses often characterize Muslims as being extremely homophobic, which reinforces militaristic structures of imperialism and islamophobia in the Middle East. Simultaneously, homonationalism articulates the openness and freedom of the 'civilized' nation-state, in which the commercialization of queer identities contributes to increased tourism and profit in pink economies (e.g., countries that engage in multi-million-dollar Pride parades; Weiss, 2018).

Like homonormativity, discourses about ideal sexual citizenship run through the history of Pride. Campaigns in the 2000s that argued for the assimilation of queer people into U.S. institutions, such as the military, relied on homonationalism to sell the end of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the institution of same-sex marriage, and the assertation that "LGBT rights are human rights" (see Chavez, 2013; Moss, 2016; Weiss, 2018). Ammaturo (2016) contends that participants of Pride often use rhetorical strategies that conflate queer quality with national

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rights, such as the First Amendment's proclivity for (queer) expression. Other scholars argue that the negative implications of homonationalism may be "queered" for positive social change. Moss (2016) articulates that homonationalism does not have to "swallow" queer subjects into xenophobic discourses; instead, queer activists can mobilize alternative national histories (e.g., Stonewall) and establish pride in one's citizenship to dismantle hegemonic systems (p. 65). In this case, homonationalism must grapple with the contradictory and simultaneous histories that map sexual cultures (Moss, 2016).

Together, sexual citizenship, homonormativity, and homonationalism extend the communicative navigation of Pride vis-a-vis co-sexuality. By articulating the queer subject as being pushed and pulled between systems of citizenship, political desirability, belonging, and national identity, co-sexuality serves as a valuable construct with which to outline the communicative strategies that Pride organizers use when negotiating the landscape of "'pink-washing,' a normalization of gay/lesbian leisure and recreational landscapes resting on the differentiation between queer-friendly and queer-phobic establishments" (Huang & Tan, 2020, p. 393). Branton and Compton (2021) share this regard for exploring co-sexuality in cultural spaces and places, such as gay bars, and I contribute to the utility of the theory by focusing on systems other than heteronormativity.

Summary and Research Questions

In totality, I have outlined *tension-centered approaches* to embrace ahistorical structures of the queer civil rights movement, grounded each of these constructs in the sociomaterial commitments of *feminist dilemmatic theorizing*, and introduced *co-sexuality* to capture the communicative strategies whereby Pride organizers navigate sexual normativities. These central issues have led me to identify the following three research questions that guide this study:

RQ1: How do Pride organizers identify and negotiate communicative tension within their work?

RQ2: How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate the embodiment of their work?

RQ3: How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate systems of sexual normativity?

These questions help me sift through different organizational structures, messages, values, and normativities during my time at Gulf Pride. I use queer organizational autoethnography to explore how these issues are both politically constructed and personally embodied. In the following sections, I outline my methodological approach (Chapter Three) and present my results (Chapter Four-Six).

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

"We're gonna rock this year. There's so much at stake."

I am surprised to hear the passion in Nancy's[3] voice as she talks about the upcoming season of Gulf Pride. After emailing back and forth for weeks, I am convinced she is an embodiment of limitless bureaucracy: cold, withdrawn, and obsessed only with the legalities of inviting a researcher in to surveil the organization. But in person, she invited me in with immediate magnetic force. Her eyes dart around the room with each passing idea, hands flying up in moments of frustration, concern, and triumph about Gulf Pride's goals. I am recounting the proposal in my head: volunteer work, note-taking, interviews, and the chance to help the organization in any way they needed.

I am wringing my anxiety-ridden hands, "I want to assure you that I'm committed to maintaining confidentiality for anyone that I write about. I want my relationship with the organization to be engaged (Dempsey & Barge, 2014), allowing for mutual insights and care between my role as a lead volunteer and the board's vision in implementing systemic changes to Gulf Pride."

Nancy does not seem interested in the specifics. She says, "We need all the help we can get. The legislation in this state is perpetuating so much violence in the community. It's to the point where I have a contingency plan if I get arrested at political rallies. I'll connect you to Devon. He is the Volunteer Director, and he can get you onboarded. I'm sure he'll be so excited

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[3] Pseudonyms are used for all individual names.

to have someone with your expertise around." *This is amazing! I got access.* I am leaving this meeting feeling hopeful and giddy at the chance to participate in meaningful social change in my community.

<div align="center">…</div>

"I'm going to be real with you. Our organization is a fucking mess."

My lips curl inward as I try to hide the feelings of horror bubbling up in my stomach. Devon laughs, giving me a signature smile that reads, "Welcome to the chaos!" *We just sat down for coffee five minutes ago.*

I swirl my cup, "What gives you that impression?"

Devon does not hold back, unleashing a history of organizational dysfunction indicative of nonprofits: instability, ephemeral labor, differing motivations between board members, and a lack of long-term planning that adds to an already insurmountable pile of burnout (Sanders, 2012). While Nancy's description of Gulf Pride is hopeful, Devon's is pessimistic, clouded by the disproportionate labor he donates to the organization.

Devon is earnest in his request, "I'm wanting you to help me navigate all of this if you want. It'll be fun for someone to see the organization from an outside perspective." I grapple with the insinuation that I will be an unfamiliar stranger in the day-to-day operations with Gulf Pride. While many organizational members are long-time friends or professional acquaintances, I am new to the organization, and my participation will intimately shape the communication that constitutes upcoming events, organizational practices, and responses to political extremism. I leave the meeting keenly aware of how my presence among board members and volunteers will be negotiated, filtered, and potentially rescinded in the upcoming weeks.

<div align="center">…</div>

This dissertation uses queer organizational autoethnography to explore the above issues as they appear within the communication present at Gulf Pride—a large Pride organization in the Southeastern U.S. I include my own personal narratives related to my time as a lead volunteer, ethnographic observations of organizational processes at Gulf Pride (e.g., board meetings, public events), and insight gleaned from one-on-one interviews with members (e.g., board members, volunteers). Generally, *autoethnography* combines personal experiences ("auto") and cultural accounts ("ethno") through evocative methods of writing and artistic expression ("graphy") (Adams et al., 2021). Primarily driven by the use and power of personal narrative, autoethnography problematizes the separation between researchers who observe culture and individuals who experience social phenomena first-hand. Personal narrative allows autoethnographers to introspectively interrogate ourselves and our cultures simultaneously. This reflexive work can lead researchers to experience catharsis. By telling and exploring stories about our lived experience, we extend our identities to a community of readers who can glean myriad meanings and epiphanies about their own lives, therefore opening these narratives to "undebatable conclusions" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 794). Additionally, these stories indicate social, cultural, and political systems of power that pervade day-to-day life, generating future opportunities for praxis, resistance, and/or transformation (Adams et al., 2017; Holman Jones & Adams, 2016). Autoethnographies can address multiple levels of power, such as micro-level interactions (e.g., conversations, relationships), meso-level phenomena (e.g., organizational hierarchies, communities), and macro-level structures (e.g., heteronormativity, White supremacy) (Adams et al., 2021).

When applied to the context of Pride, *organizational autoethnographies* use personal experience and deep investigations of institutional life to "comment on, critique, and imagine

more liberating and empowering organizational beliefs and practices" (Herrmann, 2017, p. 7). Organizations are ubiquitous to one's identity: "An organization was involved bringing you into the world, and an organization will be involved in burying you" (Herrmann, 2017, p. 6). In line with a variety of scholars who challenge organizational boundaries (Putnam et al., 1999; Schoenborn et al., 2019; Wilhoit, 2016), organizational autoethnography questions what settings are considered worthy of analysis, investigating sites such as "local bar[s], family businesses, the military…dialysis clinics and information technology" (Sambrook & Herrmann, 2018, p. 223).

The formation of organizational autoethnography reflects multiple paradigm shifts in both organizational communication and narrative research, which work to step away from positivism, grapple with the nuances of interpretivism, and negotiate the politics and power indicative of critical studies (Herrmann, 2020a; 2020b). As a result, organizational autoethnographies center on the subjective human experience (e.g., emotions, memories, interpretations) as a form of inquiry that adds heartfelt value to an otherwise withdrawn terrain of 'hard facts,' figures, and numbers (Douglas & Carless, 2013; Ellis et al., 2011). It is important to note that such shifts have not necessarily sought to overshadow or replace traditional ethnography and other modes of enacting social science research. Instead, organizational autoethnography offers a different perspective that can coexist with many other paradigmatic and methodological ideas (Ellis et al., 2011). For this project, I use organizational autoethnography as an "entry point" (Herrmann, 2020a, p. 498) to investigate the bureaucratic, sexual, and contradictory politics present at Gulf Pride. I bring my own experiences into organizational phenomena at Gulf Pride to reflect on multiple parts of my identity. As both a queer man and a lead volunteer in the organization, I move between organizational messages that apply to my

own sexuality and gender and practices that implicate the complicated terrain of social justice and nonprofit communication.

I add the adjective, '*queer*,' to organizational autoethnography to advocate for marginalized populations in organizations and destabilize archaic definitions of identity that maintain hierarchy and hegemony. Just as queer theory champions non-categorical, fluid performances of identity (McDonald, 2015; McDonald, 2019; McDonald & Rumens, 2020; Yep, 2003), I use a queer organizational approach to explore ontologies that resist notions that purport a fixed or static identity as well as the insidious agendas of shallow social progressivism. Thus, a queer organizational approach can articulate "embodied and emotional accounts of how people experience and challenge sexual discrimination and stereotyping in social and organizational life" (Pullen et al., 2016, p. 4). Additionally, I center my investigation on the various tensions, contradictions, paradoxes, and dilemmas that Pride organizations perpetuate, providing enriching narratives. This tension-centered approach (see Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004) assumes that the conflict between actors, discourses, and cultural rules (e.g., heteronormativity) is a rich space for organizational investigation. Similarly, an autoethnographic approach showcases the lived experience of these tensions when embodied in queer perspectives. In totality, I crave research that contributes to queer worldmaking, which:

> happens when any of us fails to meet each other we are, an occurrence most of us
> have in common. Queer worldmaking happens when we acknowledge these
> failings as productive points of departure from normative expectations, when we
> are willing to implicate ourselves and be implicated by others, when and where
> we find ourselves willing to listen openly with rawness. (Hummel, 2020, p. 106)

I posit that our societal efforts of social justice are flawed, and even though Pride organizations appear to be equitable, they represent a new form of bureaucratic control that queer scholars must interrogate with openness and rawness.

Site: Gulf Pride

As mentioned above, I ground the use of queer organizational autoethnography in my day-to-day experiences as a lead volunteer at Gulf Pride. This nonprofit organization coordinates a variety of events that serve the queer community, such as an annual Pride parade, fundraisers, drag queen pageants, and educational workshops. It operates with a small circle of paid employees, such as the Executive Director; a Board of Directors; and hundreds of volunteers who coordinate events, strategize marketing, request permits from the city, and engage in other activities.

This organization provides this study with a significant cultural site. Gulf Pride boasts high attendance at events, substantial investment from private stakeholders, and consistent partnerships with the city—a gay capital in the associated state. While Gulf Pride benefits from its popularity in the community, my participation in the organization speaks to shifting cultural attitudes about queerness in an age where far-right extremism, transphobia, and "anti-drag legislation" persist (Burga, 2023). Additionally, my time at Gulf Pride revealed many organizational shifts. After the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gulf Pride struggled to maintain a consistent number of volunteers and interest in public events, resulting in a partial collapse of the organization. Thankfully, the organization restructured and coordinated one of the biggest pride parades in the U.S. in 2022. As illustrated in the previous vignette, my time in the field shined a light on an uncertain culture where many organizational members are either new, retiring, or just uncertain about their roles.

During my time at Gulf Pride, organizers noted record attendance during Parade Weekend, including Parade Day and the Street Festival[4] (see Table 1: Event Glossary). Records indicate that 350,000 people attended these two events. Additionally, economic reports from the city argue that the organization brought in approximately $84 million in revenue for local businesses, a windfall of cash that highlights the entanglement between cultural expressions of identity and progressive capitalist marketplaces. These figures resulted in the organization labeling itself the "#1 Pride in the Southern United States," which was a self-awarded ranking due to the lack of concrete measurements regarding how to rank Prides throughout the country.

Autoethnographic Fieldwork

After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of South Florida (see Appendix A), I engaged in an autoethnographic exploration of the cultural field. This data collection includes my lived experience *and* a variety of ethnographic methods, such as engaging in observations and gathering field notes, analyzing organizational documents, and engaging in extensive interviews with organizational members (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Data collection occurred from May 2023 to December 2023.

I used various data collection methods. First, my involvement with Gulf Pride occurred through the act of *participant observation*, which involved "becom[ing] increasingly skilled at performing routine practices in ways that are honored by other group members, and…creat[ing] increasingly precise and relevant accounts of this experience" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 176). My time as a volunteer at mirrored the activities of other board members, such as attending meetings and events and assisting with organizational tasks (e.g., fundraising, note taking). During this time, I committed to a form of *engaged scholarship* where I met

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[4] Pseudonyms are used for event names.

Table 1. Event Glossary

Event	Description
Children's Day	This event celebrates queer families. Gulf Pride holds age-appropriate entertainment for this event (e.g., clowns, bubbles, drag entertainers singing Disney songs).
Halloween Event	Gulf Pride rents out part of the downtown block, selling merchandise and handing out candy. This event is run by the city.
Juneteenth Event	This event honoring the contributions of Black and Brown queer community members. It includes a live radio show, educational panels, and a ballroom extravaganza.
Marsha P. Johnson Banquet	This is a philanthropic event, inviting stakeholders, sponsors, and government officials to learn about Pride's history.
Parade Day	Gulf Pride hosts an annual parade, which includes a procession of floats, ceremonial vehicles, and individual marchers. This event is in the city's downtown area across three zones: Aldridge Airfield (where the procession gathers), Strong Park (where individual attendees go to watch the parade), and Victory Park (where the parade ends and the nightly concert begins).
Pride Kickoff Day	This is Gulf Pride's first event during the month of June, symbolizing the beginning of Pride Month. It is a block party on Main Street (a street cutting through the city's historically gay neighborhood).
Parade Weekend	This term is what organizers say to discuss both Parade Day (Saturday) and Street Festival (Sunday).
Gulf Pride Pageant	This is a drag pageant determining Gulf Pride's honorary marshals for the season.
Street Festival	This is a block party occurring on Main Street the day after Parade Day. This event signifies the end of Pride Month, inviting food trucks, community sponsors, and individual attendees to celebrate one last time.
Transgender Talent Show	This is a talent show for transgender community members. It is co-sponsored by a nonprofit organization fighting for transgender healthcare.

Table 1. Continued.

Volunteer Banquet	This is a celebratory retreat for Gulf Pride's volunteers, usually held the first week of July.

organizational members' social, political, and cultural needs (Dempsey & Barge, 2014).

Participating in the organization gave me multiple insights about Pride. In return, organizers

asked for my insight on different organizational processes, such as communication networks,

channels (e.g., cloud sharing and technologies), and professional recommendations to the Board

of Directors at the end of the season. Participant observation serves the primary function of

helping me write about my lived experience and the secondary purpose of acclimating me to

diverse organizational values, rituals, norms, and needs. As a lead volunteer, my role allowed me

to participate in 15 organizational meetings (i.e., Board of Directors' meetings, volunteer

trainings, and operational discussions) and 11 community events, leading to 94 hours in total of

participant observation. Accompanying participant observation, I took *fieldnotes* that described

and interpreted the communicative dynamics of events (see Appendix B; Lindlof & Taylor,

2019) along with attending to the physical embodiment Pride organizing (Ellingson, 2017). In

writing fieldnotes, I prioritized "thick description" (Geertz, 2008) whereby a vivid cultural scene

gives "readers a sense of being there" (Adams et al., 2017, p. 3). Additionally, fieldnotes

included photos of events, people, and places, which honors embodied methodological

approaches (Ellingson, 2017). I produced 20 sets of fieldnotes, totaling approximately 75 pages

of single-spaced text and photographs.

Second, I gathered *organizational documents* (e.g., new stories, event plans, Excel

spreadsheets) that reflected Gulf Pride's material culture. These documents underscore the

communicative agency of nonhuman objects (Cooren, 2018; Harris, 2019), helping me to

unravel Gulf Pride's sociomaterial entanglements. I collected the items that the organization disseminated through a shared cloud folder, granting me access to 54 documents with 158 single-spaced pages in total.

Finally, I engaged in both ethnographic and semi-structured interviews. *Ethnographic interviews* occur informally when navigating the cultural field (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). In this case, I had casual conversations with attendees, volunteers, and stakeholders at various events sponsored by Gulf Pride. These interactions allow me to analyze emergent cultural phenomena and gain insight from informants who have deep knowledge about the communicative topics germane to my study. Since these interviews occurred in public and spontaneously, they were not audio recorded and only reported vis-à-vis fieldnotes. In comparison, I enacted *semi-structured interviews* with organizational members, which included volunteers, board members, employees, and other informants (e.g., city officials) from the field. Semi-structured interviews include specific questions about communicative phenomena but grant flexibility if other topics arise (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019).

I recruited 14 participants for the semi-structured interviews based on organizational connections, reaching out to the volunteers, board members, and employees I worked with (see Table 2). The interviews occurred in person at coffee shops and restaurants or virtually via Microsoft Teams. I outlined the project's scope for participants and gained verbal consent before the interviews, and made audio recordings of all interviews. Semi-structured questions (see Appendix C) included a variety of communicative dilemmas about Pride, such as organizational tensions, embodied responses, material considerations, and sexual normativities. After each interview, I asked participants to answer demographic questions that asked them to report race, ethnicity, gender identity, etc. Interviews ranged in duration from 58 minutes to one hour and 55

minutes in length. The average interview was one hour and 17 minutes. I recorded meetings

using an automatic transcription software, which I later edited for accuracy, producing 531

single-spaced pages of transcript in total. I assigned pseudonyms to each participant, to help

provide them with anonymity in my analysis. I stored audio recordings, field notes, and

organizational documents on an encrypted hard drive on a personal computer.

Data Creation

I engaged in *phronetic iterative analysis* (Tracy, 2018) to crystallize all forms of data

(Flick, 2018) into a multi-layered autoethnographic narrative. This analysis borrows from lived

experience and analytical forms of data (e.g., fieldnotes, photos, organizational documents,

interviews) to outline the organizational terrain of Gulf Pride (Armstrong-Gibbs, 2019), and

translates nuanced cultural knowledge into creative forms of storytelling (Adams et al., 2017).

Phronetic iterative analysis intuitively moves between theory and

Table 2. List of Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Organizational Title	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexual Orientation
Amanda	Board President	White	Woman	Lesbian
Amara	Board Member	Black	Woman	Lesbian
Bryce	Co-Vice President	Black	Man	Gay
Devon	Volunteer Director	White	Man	Gay
Eden	Board Member, Part-Time Administrator	White	Woman	Heterosexual
Isaiah	Board Member	Black	Man	Gay
Jason	LGBTQ+ City Liaison	White	Man	Gay
Miguel	Board Member	White, Latino	Man	Gay
Nancy	Executive Director	White	Woman	Lesbian
Renee	Volunteer Coordinator	White	"Woman-ish"	Bisexual
Serena	Co-Vice President	Biracial—Black and White	Woman	Lesbian
Spencer	Board Member, Treasurer	White	Man	Gay

Table 2. Continued.

Tim	Volunteer Coordinator	White	Man	Gay
Tyrique	Board Member	Black	Man	Gay

data to answer "*problems-to-be-transformed*" (Tracy, 2018, p. 62, emphasis in original). In this

case, I used phronetic iterative analysis to address the various organizational and cultural

tensions present in Pride organizing. I began my analysis with *primary cycle coding,* which

organizes data into open codes—one-word descriptors (Charmaz, 2014; Tracy, 2018). For

example, much of my data included interesting discussions about "marketing," "agency," and

"products" in Pride organizing. Based on my inspection of fieldnotes, organizational documents,

and interview data, I produced 42 open codes, which addressed the three research questions in

this study.

While engaging in primary cycle coding, I noticed that codes (e.g., "marketing") related

to theories about tension-centered approaches to communication, feminist dilemmas, and

normative sexual systems. Next, I used *secondary cycle coding* to revisit pertinent literature and

consolidate open codes into theoretical constructs (Tracy, 2018). For example, discussions about

"marketing" reflected more significant forms of activism among Pride organizers that pandered

to profitable audiences and stakeholders, thus limiting political agency (see Chapter Four). After

noticing this data, I went back to the literature and added discussions about neoliberal branding

practices (e.g., Branton & Compton, 2021). Embodying the iterative nature of this method, my

second research question resulted from surprising theoretical insights that engaged with literature

on embodiment (Ellingson, 2017), emotion (Cooren, 2018), and problematic systems of

organizational recognition. Coding practices resulted in 11 major themes with several sub-

themes, which are split between three chapters. I present results in a *layered account*, illustrating

themes with double-sided discussions of ethnography and narrative sensemaking (Ellis, 1991; Ellis et al., 2011). I use layered accounts to show two sides of the same issue—one embodied in my lived experience as a volunteer, and another reflected in the shared understandings among volunteers, board members, and external stakeholders. My analyses in Chapters Four, Five, and Six oscillate between personal narratives and thematized results from fieldnotes and interviews. In this fashion, I build my understanding of the "story" of Pride from multiple sources.

Ethical Considerations

Queer organizational autoethnography requires researchers to effectively negotiate ethical issues when navigating cultural sites, talking to other organizational members, and discussing confidential information. Autoethnographers should consider the ethical ramifications of different approaches to studying the self, other, and culture (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2012; Tullis, 2021). Since my research deals with the stories of others via fieldwork and interviews, I rely on insights from Ellis' (2007) conceptualization of *relational ethics*. This approach encourages researchers to remain attentive to the emergent dilemmas that implicate various actors: "Central to relational ethics is the question, 'What should I do now?' rather than the statement 'This is what you should do now' … "(Ellis, 2007, p. 7). In this case, studying Gulf Pride included gaining institutional approval; retrieving consent from people I explicitly refer to in the project; using pseudonyms for the organization, community events, and individual names; doing member checks to address discrepancies between parties; and remaining mindful of the afterlife of the project (Tullis, 2021). For example, I often had conversations with organizers about the scope of my project, checking in with them to discuss potential themes, data practices, and ethical considerations. This process also requires a commitment to *reflexivity*—where I interrogate my own standpoint within a greater culture of power (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011; Berry,

2013)—and *mindfulness*—an orientation that cherishes meditative awareness and appreciation of human experience (Berry, 2021). Throughout my fieldwork, I checked in with myself, reflecting on my actions as a researcher and organizational member to ensure ethical conduct and healthy boundaries surrounding time management and labor.

These steps align with a commitment to protecting other people's privacy and dignity in sensitive organizational settings (Sambrook & Herrmann, 2018). In writing about the cultural landscape of Pride, I am concerned that, by speaking about others, I will be speaking *for* them (Alcoff, 1991), especially in a queer community that is often falsely regarded as being a monolith. Through my work, I aim to help protect the nuances of people's lived experience by representing phenomena from multiple perspectives and ensuring anonymity whenever possible (e.g., pseudonyms). In addition, part of this process involves *process consent* (Ellis, 2007). Process consent assumes that any actions taken to protect participants may not be enough; that participants can change their minds at any time; and that it is a participant's right to challenge an autoethnographer's procedures. In this case, I routinely asked participants if they wanted to be included in the project and gave them multiple opportunities to enact voice and assert their autonomy. While the promise of reducing harm is never guaranteed (Tullis, 2021), these ethical procedures set up a framework for "beneficence, justice, and autonomy" (p. 104).

Preview of Results

In response to RQ1—"How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate sociomaterial dilemmas in queer politics?"—Chapter Four examines the different forces influencing sociomaterial dilemmas in Gulf Pride, including spatiotemporal uncertainties, the (non)human agency of nonprofit organizations, and commercialized activism that constrains political efficacy. Pride organizers practiced what I call *malicious compliance* to conform to and subvert

these dilemmas simultaneously. This approach allowed them to adhere to various (non)human forces while engaging in indirect, paradoxical, and seemingly absurd forms of resistance.

In response to RQ2—"How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate the embodiment of their work?"— Chapter Five highlights how organizers' physical and emotional investments produce dilemmas of tokenization, emotional distress, and problematic systems of organizational recognition.

In response to RQ3—"How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate systems of sexual normativity?"—Chapter Six argues that organizers engage in contracts of sexual citizenship, which, while promoting queer civil rights, also involved commodifying Pride efforts within capitalist and secure marketplaces. Organizers employed homoventriloquism as a sociomaterial tactic to distribute queer identity across various actors. This strategy treats queerness as a puppet, lending adaptability and legitimacy to different participants in Pride contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR: NAVIGATING SOCIOMATERIAL DILEMMAS AMONG PRIDE ORGANIZERS

Scheduled during the first weekend of June, Pride Kickoff Day signifies the beginning of Pride Month and invites a host of community partners, food trucks, and entertainers to take over Main Street, which cuts through the city's historically gay neighborhood. This event is my first volunteer opportunity for Gulf Pride. After checking in with Devon—the Volunteer Director—I am placed in the merchandise tent, eliciting memories of my seven years working in retail. People flock to the tent, forcing me to quickly acclimate to the piles of t-shirts, Pride flags, and souvenir buttons scattered under the foldable tables. My hands shake over the tablet during transactions. *If volunteers are not performing well, do leaders ask them to leave? I do not want to mess this up. I have worked so hard to gain access to this organization.*

Before I can let my anxiety get the best of me, a man in line points to a couple walking past the merchandise tent, "Why are you all not selling *those* t-shirts?"

My eyes trail from his finger to the couple's t-shirts: "DON'T SAY DONALDSON." Before I can look more closely, the couple disappears, wading into the promenade of people drinking, dancing, and having fun.

I look back at the man, noticing his coy smile. *He knows what he is asking. I feel like he is trying to get us to admit that we cannot sell them due to political reasons.* The phrase is a clever combination, criticizing the 'Don't Say Gay' bill that threatens expressions of gender and sexuality in public schools and insulting the state governor who signed it into law (see Trotta, 2023 for a general discussion of anti-queer legislation). By combining the bill with the

governor's last name, the t-shirt acts as a social and material symbol that resists hetero- and cis-normative expectations. I look down at the t-shirts we sell in comparison—layers of white, black, and blue polyester that state our organization's name. My breath exhales as I feign a laugh, prepared to give the spiel that Devon gave me earlier that evening: "These t-shirts act as a donation that supports all of Gulf Pride's events, including Parade Weekend. With your help, we can continue giving back to our community." Before I could say anything, Renee— a Volunteer Coordinator—jumps in, "Unfortunately, we have very particular rules around what nonprofits can and can't say. But it's definitely a cool t-shirt!" The man nods his head and walks away. This conversation would be one of many politicized incidents while volunteering.

I note the connections between the 'DON'T SAY DONALDSON' t-shirt and the line of merchandise Gulf Pride sells. The first object taps into the subversive and humorous tactics of queer politics (Eguchi, 2021; McDonald, 2015), and the latter collection reflects products used to ensure the integrity of the organizational mission: education, celebration, and the cultivation of safe spaces. Both the 'DON'T SAY DONALDSON' t-shirt and Gulf Pride merchandise exert monetary agency, contributing to an economy that profits from the "productive value of queer labor" (Burchiellaro, 2021, p. 765). Throughout the night, I continue to see stark comparisons between the different bodies, performances, and objects that signify Pride and the 'appropriate' and 'permissible' products that insulate our organization from other forms of social activism. In this case, the social and material phenomena at events culminate in an intra-action (Barad, 2003) of politics that territorialize contentious landscapes of power. Whether or not a t-shirt is politically active does not matter, but what *does* matter is the way those t-shirts reflect a concerning trend that privatizes, profits from, and limits the potential of social movements.

…

This chapter grapples with the sociomaterial dilemmas that render Pride organizing contentious and precarious. I draw from literature on historical trends in organizing, tension-centered approaches to communication, and feminist dilemmatic theorizing to answer RQ1: "How do Pride organizers navigate sociomaterial dilemmas in queer politics?" I argue that Pride struggles to engage in meaningful activism due to various threats, such as spatiotemporal uncertainties, nonprofit sociomaterialities, and a lack of political effectiveness fueled by neoliberal branding practices. Organizers respond to such dilemmas by engaging in what I call *malicious compliance*—subversive forms of obedience that produce unintended outcomes. Historically, organizing reflects myriad dilemmas that pit dominant interests (e.g., policing, capitalism, economic insecurity) against marginalized people in the queer community, resulting in communicative actions that simultaneously push for cultural revolution *and* assimilation into cis- and hetero-normative society (Thompson, 2018). Just as the vignette above points to the variety of bodies, performances, and objects that characterize power disparities at Pride, I ground this analysis in the material investigation of social movements by exploring structures, circumstances, histories, and spaces (Cooren, 2018).

Feminist dilemmatic theorizing provides a framework that critically analyzes the entanglement of social and material worlds, decentering human agency and offering insights on issues related to inequity, oppression, and privilege (Harris, 2016; 2019). In this chapter, I identify different sociomaterial dilemmas that organizers face in their work, unraveling the entanglements that characterize what makes a social movement 'effective.' It is essential to acknowledge that while feminist dilemmatic theorizing decenters human agency, it still acknowledges it as one of many actors in a fluid intra-action of power (Barad, 2003). Thus, I draw from my lived experience as a lead volunteer, in-depth semi-structured interviews with

organizers, and organizational texts to make sense of such dilemmas. Packaged in a layered account (Ellis et al., 2011), I move between narrative vignettes, ethnographic data, and insights from organizational documents to articulate various dilemmas. I begin by identifying different sociomaterial threats, such as spatiotemporal uncertainty, and conclude by defining and illustrating malicious compliance.

Spatiotemporal Uncertainties

I have never worked for a nonprofit, but this seems chaotic.

I try to temper my expectations as I wade through the merchandise, alcohol containers, and rainbow flags that litter the office of Gulf Pride. This room will be a makeshift staging area for upcoming events, such as Pride Kickoff Day, Children's Day, and Parade Weekend. While I am a new volunteer for the organization, I am struck by the casual environment and attitudes among organizers during a year of political extremism. Legislators have attacked the morality of drag entertainers in the public sphere, banned mention of queer identity in public schools, and stripped the medical rights of transgender people (Choi, 2024). *I was expecting a more organized office. Gulf Pride is so significant in the community, but their internal operations seem more relaxed. This meeting should feel more serious.* It was not until a board member contextualized the organization's history that I began to understand. Amanda—the Board President—begins the board meeting with a reflection, "Eden [board member] and I were just talking about the fact that, three years ago, we were at a place where it would be the night before an event, and we didn't have a liquor license. That may sound crazy, but that was the reality of how this organization ran for 18 years. And we are a whole new Pride. Even on our most disorganized day—where we feel overwhelmed—we are leaps and bounds ahead of where we were. It is a little sad and disheartening about what's happening, but it's also pretty incredible how much

support we've had from allies, parents, or kids that may have never been to Pride until this year."

I am taken aback by how, even amid political extremism that labels queer identity as dangerous

and inappropriate, organizers are grateful for the increased attention and support.

…

Spatiotemporal uncertainties hindered the political potential of Gulf Pride, embedding

celebrations of queer identity in the hostile period and environment that organizers worked in.

Space and time both exert their own agencies in the organization of sexuality and gender in the

public sphere, resulting in contextually bound performances of identity and difference

(Kaygalak-Celebi et al., 2016). Especially in 2023, unique spatiotemporal agencies pushed back

against queer progressivism, threatening the credibility and political agency of the organization.

Barad (2007; 2024) coins the term 'spacetimemattering' to discuss the ephemeral boundaries

between different points in space and time, resulting in a "continuous manifold" that exerts its

own agency. As previously illustrated in the vignette, organizers make sense of time and space to

determine the feasibility of their mission, contextualizing their work in the shifting landscape of

queer civil rights. Isaiah—a Black board member—understood Pride as a remembrance of queer

identity throughout time and space:

> Pride is not all about fun or a party, but it's also about remembering, right? You know,
>
> remembering what the people and folks before us had to endure so that we could have
>
> Pride. For us to be united and work for a common purpose, you know, to be advocates for
>
> one another.

Isaiah credits the historical contributions that inform contemporary Pride agendas. Pride reflects

both a space for community refuge (united and work for a common purpose) and historical

reflection. Pulling from feminist new materialism (Fannin et al., 2014; Harris, 2016; Hemmings,

2011), organizers like Isaiah dealt with the dilemma of how to reconcile traditional wave models of feminism—ones that equate linear approaches to time with increasing forms of queer visibility and liberation—with contradictory temporal agencies that slowed this organization's progress, such as narratives about being "frozen" in organizational progress, boundaries about when Pride was *supposed* to happen, and compressed timelines that encouraged chaotic forms of organizing. In this case, organizers pointed to time as a problematic entity.

Many board members shared that Gulf Pride has been in disarray for years. Amanda—the Board President—recollected on joining the group:

> So, we met with [past president] and ten other people who were like, "You guys are super White, super male, and it's not inclusive. We don't feel safe. There's nothing for women." Like it's one of our huge weak spots. So, it's like having this 20-year-old startup with no infrastructure and no documentation in place…and it's my side gig.

Here, Amanda understands the lack of infrastructure as an indicator of failure for the organization. By being labeled a "20-year-old startup," Amanda notes the contradiction of having a long-lasting organization with limited resources. On the other hand, Eden—a part-time Office Manager and board member—challenged the sentiment that stagnation was not effective:

> We have too much work to do to put our energy into writing a process manual, right? And, again, quite frankly, we've managed for 20 years to put on a Pride parade without a meticulously detailed process. Do I regret that there weren't some of these historical records? 100%. Do I hope we're doing better now? Yes.

Eden denies that having limited resources keeps Gulf Pride frozen in an era of uncertainty. Instead, she is confident in the organization's perseverance, foregrounding "20 years" of objective success.

Other organizers contextualized the lack of resources based on the temporal constraints of Pride itself. Serena—a Board Co-Vice President—discussed the boundaries that stopped the organization from succeeding consistently:

I've seen how that really plays out in terms of the speed in which we work…the decision-making is very siloed. Execution ultimately is not good, right? And so, there's just a lower output because there isn't a lot of inherent trust in the group.

Here, Serena mirrors Kaygalak-Celebi and colleagues' (2020) notion that Pride is limited to the heteronormative temporalities that create clear boundaries regarding when it begins and ends (i.e., the month of June). When time is limited, organizers have less agentic capacity to build trustworthy and reliable communication networks. Thus, temporal uncertainties reflect interconnected pressures among organizers, such as cohesion, trust, and exclusion/inclusion.

Often, the temporality of Pride resulted in frantic and disorganized forms of decision-making that limit reflexive practices. Bryce—a Board Co-Vice President—discussed how Pride Month can inhibit meaningful discussions about political positioning and event planning:

So, it's almost like pigs at a trough. So, as soon as a thing comes into the trough, whoever picks it up first, takes it and deals with it. Eat it up, digest it, shit it out, and keep it moving. It makes sure that we keep things moving because we have to get to the end.

Bryce's understanding of time underscores the urgency of "getting to the end," resulting in fast-paced and erratic forms of organizing. By comparing organizers to "pigs at a trough," Bryce highlights the lack of resources forcing organizers to pick up tasks quickly without assigned roles or processes.

In my time in the field, I noted temporal disconnections between the organization's mission and the history of Pride organizing. For example, limited resources and tight timelines

produced ephemeral goals among organizers, which inhibited reflexive practices (Ghaziani et al., 2016). Eden noted this lack of historical connection:

> I would love somebody to recreate some historical information and really kind of go back. There are certainly still people around in [city]. The original, *original* founders. There are people who have the sort of history and some of the actual in-the-moment knowledge of the transition.

Eden acknowledges that Gulf Pride is in a state of constant survival, characterized by a lack of material resources and a compressed timeline based on when queer organizing *should* happen. Due to these agencies, the organization lacks the historical knowledge to succeed in its mission, creating narrative inequalities (Fannin et al., 2014; Hemmings, 2011) rooted in contradictory, overlapping, and contentious timelines (Harris, 2016; van der Tuin, 2012).

Pride organizers did not only point to time-related uncertainties, such as stagnation, boundaries around organizing, and frantic forms of organizing based on compressed timelines. Spatial uncertainties also threatened the organization's existence. Due to trends of political extremism in the Southeastern U.S., local stakeholders, city officials, and state legislators withdrew support. In response, organizers narrated spatial uncertainties due to their emplacement (Valentine & Sadgrove, 2014) in regions with conservative territories. Nancy—the Executive Director—contextualized Gulf Pride in a precarious environment:

> For us to create community-inclusive spaces, we need to acknowledge where we are in history. We're in a really shitty fucking place. And what we're doing is trying to have an opportunity for joy that looks so different in so many different ways. When [anti-queer legislation started coming out, I had a few calls with people who had venues, and I asked,

'Can we just use your lawn on an off day? If the city pulls their support and shit goes

South?'

Here, Nancy points to the spatial constraints limiting their efficacy. Being "in a really shitty

fucking place" denotes not only the historical trends that oppose queer progressivism but also the

territories that oppress Southeastern organizers.

These constraints exerted their own agency on the surrounding community. Eden noted

that, even in local governments where queer progressivism is welcome, organizers still faced

politics about what kinds of queerness can or cannot be validated in the public sphere:

> And this current administration here has not once walked the main street of [city] with us
>
> to give out annual Pride flags. It's really bothersome because that wasn't the language
>
> before Mayor Lorne's election. And I try to be compassionate and understand he is in a
>
> and incredibly challenging, difficult role. He has a ton to learn. He risks drawing too
>
> much attention. And it makes us feel slightly less secure.

Eden identifies the mayor's lack of political visibility, highlighting his absence as a sociomaterial

signifier of organizational uncertainty.

These spatial agencies affected how organizers constructed personal definitions of safety

in their work. For example, Serena recounted the uncertainty of her safety navigating the parade:

> At the last minute, a [board member] radioed, "Hey, is anyone joining us on the float?"
>
> So, I sprinted and made it up there and my first thought was, "Am I gonna get shot? Is
>
> this a prime opportunity for somebody to make an attack?" And that's sad, and that fear
>
> sort of quickly faded, but it was definitely a thought and is still a thought with all of the
>
> legislation this year.

Temporal ("prime opportunity") and spatial (being visible on a parade float) agencies contribute to Serena's worries about safety in the wake of political extremism. Often, spatiotemporal uncertainties fed into broader discussions of the country's political climate. For example, Renee rationalized worries about safety due to the U.S.'s proclivity for mass casualty events:

> [Safety] is at the forefront of everybody's mind with big, big crowds. We live in America. Mass casualties are not uncommon anymore. Like I get it because Gulf Pride's the biggest one in [the state]. We're now top ten in the nation. Like there are some eyes. Everybody was kind of looking at it.

Here, Renee juxtaposes the popularity of Pride with growing political extremism and the frequency of mass casualty events. In this case, organizers construct different dilemmas pitting material threats of safety against the affective desire for queer visibility. While the fear of organizing is not new, these narratives suggest that fear is not only socially constructed but also configured in the (non)human agencies of space, time, and uncertainty. Thus, organizing captures what it means to be queer in an age where notions of identity are in flux, contentious, and unstable.

Spatiotemporal uncertainties often motivated people to become organizers. Tyrique—a Black board member—summarized his rationale for joining:

> I actually ran for city council back in 2021. Okay, um, you know, during COVID, the whole world was hot. With the murder of George Floyd and living in a predominantly White district, I was like, "What can I do to help my community right now?"

Tyrique later connects his political career to his passion for Gulf Pride, extending his networks of community-based activism. Other organizers saw their community-based experiences as

intricately connected. Politics of race and representation motivated Isaiah—a Black man—to join:

> I didn't see myself or people who looked like me reflected in many of the events, the leadership of the organization. That was kind of my primary focus for why I wanted to be a part of it because I'm wanting to create intentional space for people that look like me and just bring a little more diversity.

Isaiah connects his identity as a Black man to the lack of racial diversity on the Board of Directors, motivating him to join. As discussed later in this chapter, representations of identity motivated organizers to market multicultural events, resulting in dilemmas of tokenization.

Throughout my time in the field, the spatiotemporal agencies that fostered (dis)organization, rushed planning, and material threats of safety also created a heightened sense of urgency for the entire organization, resulting in unprecedented attendance (350,000 attendees for the Pride parade) and high rates of volunteerism. In one board meeting, I noted a conversation where individuals discussed the unique "engagement," "motivation," and sense of "friendship and camaraderie" that resulted from hostile timelines and geopolitical climates.

While organizers struggled to perceive their efforts as successful due to spatiotemporal uncertainties, they did note that such dynamics allowed for queer solidarity and coalition building. Additionally, organizers discussed dilemmas about various stakeholders, or agents who dictated what Pride could and could not be.

Nonprofit Sociomaterialities: Answering to Multiple Agencies

<center>"Do you have to be on today?"</center>

I look over to Omar as the sunlight on his face disappears. Thanks to an underground tunnel, the walk from the city's historic Main Street to the baseball stadium is quick—ten

minutes at most. I chuckle as I scrunch up my nose. The smell of e-cigarettes, Bud Light, and urine-soaked floors are inescapable. My shoulders bump into other sports fans, silencing the answer to his question. I feel reluctant to even look at my boyfriend near other people. I am afraid that our appearance in Pride regalia—specifically the Gulf Pride muscle tanks with colors referencing the transgender flag—will draw more attention to us.

As we exit the tunnel, I look back at him, feeling relieved as the crowds spread out, "Sort of. This is more of a casual event for us, and that's why I was allowed to invite you. We're just accepting a check from the baseball team for Pride Month, so we had to dress up. But it's not like I'll be in volunteer mode the whole time." Omar chugs the rest of his beer and throws it into the nearest trash can, "Well, at least there are benefits to your gig. We'll be in a VIP box, right?" I nod. While my involvement with the organization is engaged, it does provide me access to many events that I would not have if I were simply an attendee or 'casual' volunteer. The baseball stadium will have a section of seats dedicated to people celebrating Pride. However, members higher up in the organizational structure (e.g., board members, sponsors, and lead volunteers) get to enjoy the perks of a VIP box before being invited out on the field to receive a $10,000 check. Just as contemporary Pride organizing is a site of meaning-making (Donnellon et al., 1986; Schatzki, 2006; Weick, 1979), it is also a site where queer visibility is constantly negotiated by the myriad of stakeholders that keep the organization financially afloat, such as other community-led organizations, corporate sponsors, gay bars, and individual donors (Ammaturo, 2016; Bruce; 2016). In this case, the baseball team engages in neoliberal branding practices, whereby queer progressivism is something that can be 'bought' to market to a specific population (Branton & Compton, 2021).

As we enter the box, I immediately feel like an imposter. The room is filled with board members—many of whom I have yet to converse with fully. The corner of the room is adorned with a smorgasbord of catered goods, such as Cuban sandwiches, an ice cream station, and an open bar. Devon—the Volunteer Director—walks up to me before handing me a drink, "Are you going to come out on the field with us?"

I hesitate at the psychological distance I still feel between myself as a researcher and my role as a volunteer, "I'm not sure…if the board would like me there, I'd be happy to." I look at Omar, who darts his gaze between Devon and me. Devon nods his head, "Of course we would love you there! I'll come grab you in a second."

As I walk around the room, I notice a changing narrative about the donation:

"We're not taking the check on the field anymore due to the recent Major League Baseball (MLB) decision about Pride gear. They want us to receive it in a more private room."

"You didn't hear about the MLB decision? They indirectly banned players from wearing Pride colors."

"Didn't a lot of the players last year refuse to wear anything Pride-related?"

"I'm not sure if it's anything against Pride specifically. MLB banned any uniform changes except for league-related observances."

Devon walks back to me, "I'm sorry we didn't come get you. They grabbed us quickly to receive the check in the other room, but we'll be shown on the TV here in a few minutes!"

As we wait for the broadcast, I ponder the agency exhibited between organizers and stakeholders. Set in a mutually beneficial relationship, our organization survives due to donations and sponsorships. However, it must endure subtle and sometimes disruptive practices of power that limit the visibility of queerness in the public sphere. As the broadcast starts, I do not notice

anything unique about the messaging other than the contrast between what the baseball team espouses about queer progressivism and what the MLB has said publicly about not 'distracting' baseball players with the social movements of a local community. Regardless, the room erupts in applause as the TV shows select board members receiving a check. I avoid looking out into the stadium, afraid of what I might see and hear from sports fans who have no interest in what we do. As I write this story, I wince at the news statements published during that time—one where an MLB official called it "one of the most successful Pride Nights" he has ever been to. *How successful does a Pride night have to be for us to receive a check out on the field? When will our visibility not be contingent on the demands of others?*

Collaborating on a Shared Vision of Community Engagement

Gulf Pride navigated the dilemma of answering to multiple stakeholders, sponsors, private donors, and textual agencies, resulting in "boundary disputes" (Stone, 2010, p. 465) and a "lack of fundamental commonality" (Armstrong, 2002, p. 110) in its mission. With an estimated $632,000 worth of sponsorships, organizers struggled to articulate a concrete goal while coordinating and deliberating with multiple parties. As the previous vignette illustrates, our visibility was contingent on the fluctuating politics and demands of local stakeholders and national organizations. These dilemmas culminated most intensely on Parade Day, where board members noted the demands of 16 different entertainers, 163 parade entries, 200 vendors, and thousands of attendees—all with different desires, attitudes, and values regarding how Pride should work. Devon—the Volunteer Director—summarized the primary dilemma of a nonprofit organization dedicated to queer visibility: "I think there's always going to be varying degrees of public display that are not going to align with people's ideals of what Pride means." Devon argues that the organizational dream of a 'perfect' Pride is impossible when reconciled with the

thousands of performances, bodies, and agents that go into organizing it. Miguel—a board member—expanded further on the issue of creating a monolithic picture of Pride:

> We as a community are trying to put everything into one container, which is so ironic that we as a queer community want to create standards, like is it "this" or "that?" Where can we find a way to capture all of us?

Miguel resists the notion that queer visibility must rely on dichotomous definitions of gendered organizing, such as man—woman, radical—assimilationist, and normative—deviant (Colgan & Rumens, 2015; Priola et al., 2019). Instead, he states that Pride is a space for diversity and open expressions of identity. While these perspectives appeared socially-just, they do not reflect the sociomaterial dilemmas prohibiting fluid organizing. Instead, the conflict between diverse agents created rifts in the definition of Pride, which mirrors Stone's (2010) conclusion that organizing of this nature will always have competing agendas.

Internal and external stakeholders discussed competing visions of what Pride should be. For example, the organization's makeup contributed to conflict. Nancy—the Executive Director—pointed to diversity as a dilemma:

> The shared ideal for a community-based nonprofit is a shared vision and shared leadership. We work together to do for the community what they want done. And I think that sometimes, when you're looking at 13 volunteer board members and an executive director, you can't get away from personal wants and desires. And I think that it creates tension because it can seem like somebody is doing something for their own, like for themselves. It may be theirs, but maybe it's not. But I think that that gets in the way that sometimes we have a few board members that are true, good picture, but they are in it for

the bigger community. We have some that are in it for more representation of their own

communities, which is not bad. That's a diverse board.

Nancy identifies multiple reasons for conflict among organizational members, discussing

diversity in identity, motivation, and personality. Like Stone's (2010) analysis of bias in queer

leadership, organizers often rely on their own unique identities (e.g., race, gender, social class) to

lead themed events, which can clash with the standpoints of others.

Organizers also noted pressure from external stakeholders to act in a particular way.

Bryce—a Board Co-Vice President—called attention to the businesses that Gulf Pride partnered

with, noting that 'safe spaces' were difficult to maintain due to contradictory discourses. In this

case, some sponsors were called out for not treating queer entertainers with respect, prompting

Gulf Pride to interject:

> It felt like the attacks were kind of coming from inside the house. Like all the things that
>
> we are doing, we were fielding calls from community members who were not pleased
>
> with businesses in the [city] area…of not being equitable or inclusive overall. That was
>
> hard, in the sense that I don't want anybody in our community to have experiences in
>
> what we deem safe spaces that are not inclusive, especially because of what's going on
>
> outside of our community.

Here, Bryce dissects efforts to create a "safe space"—an organizational mission—based on

criticisms from community stakeholders. As illustrated in Chapter Six, Pride organizers have the

privilege of defining what a safe space is, employing politics of identity, difference, and power to

signify inclusivity in ambiguous environments. In this case, becoming inclusive is difficult when

organizers negotiate knowledge gaps between people inside (queer) and outside (non-queer) the

community (Table et al., 2021).

Bryce continued to talk about tensions with different external stakeholders, often pitting social missions against strategic ones. For example, part of Parade Weekend included marshals—individuals tasked with the ceremonial start of the parade. Bryce noted that three parties were competing between these roles: "junior" marshals who were transgender children, city marshals who had historically started the parade, and organizational sponsors who were given the title of "Grand Marshal":

> We wanted to make sure that our trans kids had an experience that they needed and deserved, but we also had to navigate the relationship with the city council and the mayor's office. And our *actual* Grand Marshal did not want to walk with the *other* marshals. They wanted to walk with their organization, but their organization could not be with them at the front of the parade because their organization didn't get the collective Grand Marshal title—only one person did. So, the Grand Marshal was behind the junior marshals, who were behind the city.

Bryce analyzes the complicated priorities that characterize multiple bodies, missions, and economic relationships. While the organization wanted to start the parade with a form of activism (transgender children 'marching' — rather than parading), they buckled under the pressure of multiple sponsors, resulting in a sociomaterial ordering of bodies from most important (city officials) to significant importance (transgender children) to some importance (sponsors). Additionally, Bryce acknowledges the internal conflict between stakeholders. By noting the reluctance of the Grand Marshal to walk with the *other* Marshals, Bryce contributes to an ordering of stakeholders that ultimately pits the value of sponsorship against the contributions of social justice.

In some cases, organizers were aware of the moral dilemmas indicative of partnering with specific stakeholders but did so in a way that avoided economic entanglement. Nancy recounted the decision to include a controversial organization[5] in the parade lineup: "Some people were saying, 'I can believe you included [company].' And I'm like, 'We didn't have [company] sponsor anything.' They registered, right? So, I'm not gonna say no. I'm like, 'Why not? Why don't I take their money?'" Nancy acknowledges that some partners may not morally align with Gulf Pride's vision but lets them participate anyway to secure additional funds. While sponsorship may signify an association with publicly scrutinized entities, registering for the parade may be seen as more casual and indirect, keeping the organization at a safe distance from the moral dilemmas of the suspicious company. Regardless, organizers highlight these dilemmas to indicate internally contentious politics among stakeholders.

In other cases, Gulf Pride encountered harsh judgments from the community based on what actions were considered 'appropriate' and 'permissible' in the political climate of the Southeastern U.S. In one meeting, board members noted that newscasters accused them of "poking the bear" after Gulf Pride made public statements supporting local drag entertainers. This decision occurred after legislation came out questioning the morality of drag brunches and gay clubs. In this case, a collection of private donors, public community members, and media channels shape the agency afforded to organizers by naming their actions in certain ways (politically antagonistic) versus others (supportive of the transgender community)—even if the mission is typical of queer social justice initiatives.

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[5] This organization is often publicly criticized for its monopolization of e-commerce, reflecting concerning corporate investments in Pride without clear investments in the queer community.

Organizers responded to the demands of stakeholders but did not ultimately yield to them. By modifying actions of community engagement, Gulf Pride was still agentic in its mission of creating educational and entertaining spaces of queerness. In many meetings, board members were adamant in communicating with flagship sponsors, such as a football stadium, major hospital, and transit company, affirming that drag entertainers would be at every event— "no exceptions." Drag entertainers reflect an embodied form of queerness and political activism that many stakeholders resisted. Nancy recounted her strategy of dealing with demanding sponsors and stakeholders, holding firm in her mission of not yielding to fears about queer performance and identity: "I will admit when I fucked up. To the people who say they are sponsors, I would immediately eat my hat and be like, 'How can I make it better?' But I'm also not gonna let you be a bully." As a volunteer, I noticed many interactions where vendors, sponsors, and stakeholders articulated dissatisfaction with the organization's ideals. These tensions resulted in difficult conversations where the line between accommodating and yielding to a sponsor was blurred.

…

Sweat seeps through the layer of thin polyester on my shoulder, armpits, and back. I try to shake the feeling of terror expanding in my chest as I anticipate what the rest of Parade Day will look like. At 10 AM, the heat index is already creeping up to today's high—106 degrees. *I forgot to take my heart medication. Fuck.* I stand on the street, facing the endless line of food trucks waiting to check in with me before entering Strong Park. While we designated two hours for load-in, we have made little progress. Two board members stand several yards away, shaking their heads and gazing down at the clipboard holding the map of where food trucks *should* be. I

look up at the vendor, who is clearly irritated, "Thank you for waiting! We'll be with you as soon as we get the previous truck placed." Silence, drowned out by the roar of 50 diesel engines.

I quickly walk over to Amanda, who is yelling at a pizza truck driver, "You can just park by the trees! It is okay! Go wherever!"

"How is it going?" I ask.

She barely looks up at me as she waves the food truck forward, "Not well. We have this matrix that stops us from putting similar kinds of food vendors together. Last year we had an issue where we put two CBD trucks together, and they were pissed. However, the vendors, of course, are not coming in order, so we're having to sandwich them in and improvise. It's like a game of fucking Tetris. They're also taking forever to get set up. At this rate, we won't have anyone loaded in time."

Eden walks up, "David, the vendor on the street is waving at you. Oh…they look *mad*."

From across the field, the vendor flips her hand up in anger. I look at the two board members, "I'm not great with this kind of stuff. Can one of you come with me?" While I do enjoy volunteering, I am unnerved at the various roles that put me in face-threatening situations. When I got assigned to food vendors earlier that morning, I immediately shrunk back in apprehension. I hate being assertive, and I also *HATE* disappointing people. I also recognize that any negative experience I facilitate in my role as a volunteer may have cascading effects on the entire organization. Amanda nods, and we walk over.

The vendor identifies Amanda as a board member in a fluorescent yellow t-shirt. My volunteer t-shirt is common—neon green. "Are you all ready yet?!"

Amanda does not hesitate, "Almost, ma'am! We're going to place you on the left over here…if you can fit." The vendor's food truck is huge, easily five feet longer than the average.

The vendor balks at us, "This won't do. You all were supposed to have space for me. I was *promised* a space here in the park."

I can tell Amanda is keeping her cool, which is more than I would be capable of at this moment. *This is her third time running Pride, I think.* "Well, if you want, ma'am, we can put you over in Victory Park. It's right down the street, and you'll have plenty of room for your truck."

"Victory Park? No one ever goes over there." She looks down the street, shaking her head.

"Oh, trust me, Victory Park is holding tonight's concert. You'll definitely get some folks." While Victory Park is a secondary location, it is the last stop on the parade where floats and attendees dissipate.

I look down the line of trucks, noticing some driver's heads peeking out, hoping to hear some of the conversation. The vendor slaps her hands on the steering wheel, "Well fine, I guess I'm making less money today. Tell me where to go."

As the truck drives away, Amanda and I share a look before separating. Organizers warned me about the attitude among vendors, but it did not occur to me that they would be this curt. This incident reflects many occasions where vendors prioritize profit over the cultural value of queer social movements. In this case, the "promises" we make to vendors rely on a mutually beneficial relationship: we create an entertaining and well-run event, and in return, we support small businesses—no matter the attitude. I cannot necessarily blame these businesses. At its best, Pride is a chaotic amalgamation of different communities, identities, and organizations. It is no wonder Amanda is not fazed. For her, it is just a part of the process, as she described in a follow-up conversation:

I can tell you exactly who I think we should get rid of, who needs to step up, and what the

structure needs to be. But it doesn't fucking work like that because it's not paid by

numbers, and we're not paid employees, and it's not one person's decision. So there has to

be a willingness to do Pride knowing it's going to be imperfect. And I can be okay with

the imperfection and do my part and not get bogged down or frustrated or insecure

because of it.

Here, Amanda accepts the chaotic conflict, coordination, and compromise between different

organizational stakeholders, even if it exposes members to emotional vitriol and

unprofessionalism. As an intra-action of community engagement, stakeholders were not the only

influences. Textual agencies also dictated our actions.

When a Nonprofit Speaks Back: Impact of Textual Limitations

As a nonprofit organization, Gulf Pride not only had to answer to different donors and

stakeholders but also the rules of what a nonprofit is *allowed* to do. Nonprofits are designated as

tax-exempt if they can prove that they fulfill a 'public interest'—one that is not otherwise

achieved by other dominant groups, such as corporations, businesses, and governing bodies

(Jenkins, 2006). Tax-exempt status—or 501(c)(3) designation—is a federal law barring

nonprofits from engaging in explicit political activity:

Under the Internal Revenue Code, all section 501(c)(3) organizations are absolutely

prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political

campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office.

Contributions to political campaign funds or public statements of position (verbal or

written) made on behalf of the organization in favor of or in opposition to any candidate

for public office clearly violate the prohibition against political campaign activity.

Violating this prohibition may result in denial or revocation of tax-exempt status and the

imposition of certain excise taxes. (Internal Revenue Service, n.d.)

Due to these regulations, organizers struggled to speak to local and state politics without directly

violating federal tax-exemption laws. These barriers to uninhibited political activity are

indicative of nonprofit organizing, resulting in the professionalization of social movements that

stymies decision-making and severs connections to historical origins (e.g., Stonewall; Stone,

2010). Several organizers spoke to the textual agency (Putnam & Cooren, 2004; 2020) of tax-

exempt status, whereby a specific document exerts its nonhuman influence on the organizational

mission. Nancy outlined what is allowed due to Gulf Pride's tax-exempt status:

And it's very, very clear that we, as an organization, cannot lobby for a political candidate

that's running. Which is why we can't say anything about [the governor] because

technically he's running, and we also specifically cannot be involved with any type of

campaign. What we can do is speak out against legislation that harms the community we

serve, 110%. We can speak out against an elected official who harms our community, as

long as they're not actively running for something.

Nancy carefully articulates the boundaries of Gulf Pride's agency, distinguishing between

lobbying (i.e., discussing the politics of campaigning officials) and indirect political activism.

Consequently, the organization's political agency fails to address the full scope of anti-queer

legislation because the person responsible is campaigning. While 501(c)(3) nonprofits can speak

about political issues, they cannot be connected to campaigns without fear of losing tax-exempt

status, creating the conditions for considerable financial risk.

During multiple board meetings, I noted discussions expressing apprehension about

abiding by tax-exempt status. In collaboration with board members who handled media framing,

organizers agreed on an ambiguous strategy where they walked the line between criticizing political figures and speaking freely about queer issues. For example, I noted one statement from a board member in a meeting discussing media strategy:

> If you do want to talk about supporting queer children at large, you're absolutely welcome to do that. If you want to talk about supporting drag or local artists, we can absolutely do that. I just wouldn't connect it to any particular legislation.

While tax-exempt status does not prevent nonprofits from discussing legislation, some organizers prefer avoiding the topic altogether if a political candidate is mentioned accidentally. Ultimately, this strategy contributes to a culture of fear and avoidance regarding public discussion of queer issues, reinforcing heteronormative attitudes.

Other organizers noted the hypocrisy of the 501(c)(3) designation, barring them from fighting against a political individual responsible for anti-queer rhetoric and legislation. Renee— a Volunteer Coordinator—questioned the title of Gulf Pride as a "political" entity: "I think that [organizers] don't want to call themselves a political organization. But I think just being here in [our state] become political, which I hate." Renee ponders the mission when entrenched in layers of text, rendering queerness apolitical and shallow—even when the spatiotemporal boundaries of the state constantly threaten it. Eden went further in describing the layers of textual agency that prohibited political action:

> Some people definitely have passion [for Pride], but they don't necessarily understand that running a large nonprofit, let alone a parade of our size, comes with a lot of business obligations, required legal obligations. You have to do certain things: you fill out certain pieces of paper, you make sure your permits and your insurance are right, and you need the registration with the state to be right, and for your federal 501(c)(3) to be active.

Eden identifies 'certain' texts and bureaucratic processes that carry power over Gulf Pride, such as permits, insurance, and registration with the city, state, and nation. Without abiding by and acquiring these texts, the organization would cease to exist. Other organizers pointed to these textual agencies in connection with the professionalization of nonprofit organizations. Isaiah—a board member—compared Gulf Pride's actions with a nearby city's, indicating that both entities were wrapped up in professional channels of text, laws, and disciplinary structures:

> We are not a political activist organization, so we always have to be mindful. The city, for example, has to be careful because of who the governor is. They have to be careful because that affects the funding. We saw the legislature that threatened the mayor's renewable funding in [our city]. But I mean, those are the times that we're living in. This stuff has real-life implications for our communities. So, we have to firmly believe in standing up and expressing our rights and opinions but doing it in a way that's minimally damaging to the organization.

By comparing the organization to the city government, Isaiah contextualizes the power afforded to nonprofits (and cities) when dictated by myriad textual agencies (i.e., tax-exempt laws, city funding requirements, state legislature). However, he accepts this as a regular part of nonprofit work because it is contingent on helping "real-life" communities related to Pride's interests. Thus, many organizers describe their political agency in tandem with the boundaries surrounding appropriate and permissible forms of communication.

Gulf Pride faced the dilemma of what it was allowed to communicate based on different spatiotemporal, stakeholder, and textual agencies. While the celebration of sexuality and gender in the public sphere is allowed, it does not have complete freedom due to agencies that threaten its existence in space and time, modulate its permissibility due to competing agendas among

stakeholders, and limit its voice based on channels of funding and state-sanctioned speech. As a result, organizers described limited political agency, instead relying on neoliberal branding practices that appealed to a broad audience.

Pride's Marketable Activism

In August, the Board of Directors invited me to an organizational retreat—a three-hour meeting where people discuss the successes, failures, and epiphanies of the past Pride season. Sitting in the conference room, I scan the faces I have become familiar with over the past few months. My emotions jump from security to ambiguity to fear as I consider what the retreat will turn into. Will it be a respectful discussion where people debate the political agendas of our organization? Will the conversations reflect the embodied disparities of our work, facilitating uncomfortable arguments regarding hierarchy, race, gender, and social class? Or will the conversation drift in and out of coherence, reflecting the mundane everyday communication indicative of planning social movements?

As the retreat unfolds, conversations about Gulf Pride do not focus solely on its mission. Instead, they conflate the importance of queer civil rights with metrics of profit, revenue, and return on investments. Nancy—the Executive Director—summarizes the season, confirming my suspicions, "When we look at our overarching events, we do not make money. The bulk of our money comes from sponsorships. I attribute most of our sponsorship dollars to the parade because that is where sponsors want to be. We did make money on our Pride Concert. We made about $3,000. Other than that, we lost on average. We didn't return on any of our investments across the board, which is okay! We talked about that all the time. If it's an aligning event that furthers our mission, that's not a big deal. When we look at events as we move forward, we need to highlight where we invest our money." Nancy's summary of the budget and projected

earnings makes me question the dilemma of putting on community events. To honor the history of marginalized people in Pride, we must navigate various stakeholders who want to invest in educational and appropriate events. Additionally, if an event is not lucrative, its value diminishes, conflating social good with economic gain.

The rest of the retreat spins out into an analysis of each event. Board members switch seamlessly between applauding events' impacts and dissecting them, looking for lower expenses and more significant profit margins. As I am politely asked to leave for the second half of the retreat ("board members only"), I exit the building with the impression that a 'nonprofit' organization is practiced in name only. Organizationally coordinating social movements requires an intricate relationship with for-profit channels, rendering political agency a 'product' that must be vetted, marketed, and revised to honor a general population.

…

Due to various sociomaterial dilemmas, organizers evaluated political agency in tow with its marketability. By conflating queer civil rights with post-gay logics that deem sexuality and gender innocuous (Kampler & Connell, 2018; Ghaziani, 2011), organizers focused on events that avoided radical political performances and instead pandered to a wide variety of (straight, cisgender) people. Within Gulf Pride, individuals designed events to be a site of partying, not protest (Bruce, 2016; Sender, 2005). For example, events often included sites of entertainment for a specific audience, included multiple funding channels (e.g., concession stands, bars, tickets for VIP sections), and avoided direct discussions about the surrounding geopolitical climate. These strategies acknowledge the sociomaterial threats that constrain the political potential of Pride, such as spatiotemporal uncertainties and nonprofit sociomaterialities. In other words, the organizational structures of Pride stopped organizers from engaging in radical, uncomfortable

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work, rendering consequent actions as shallow or "unserious" compared to other social movements (Bruce, 2013). As illustrated in the previous vignette, discussions about Gulf Pride's mission reflect the dilemma of nonprofit organizing, where "communication practices must simultaneously and continuously manage the pull between the financial imperatives of the market and the need to address privately unprofitable, but publicly beneficial, social missions" (Sanders, 2012, p. 179). Additionally, these strategies construct Pride as a marketable product that strips political agency while simultaneously pushing neoliberal brands of "equality," "freedom," and "inclusion" for all (Branton & Compton, 2021; Grosser & McCarthy, 2019; Huang & Tan, 2020; Prugl, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014).

Limited Political Agency

Organizers discouraged political agency due to various sociomaterial threats. Gulf Pride's strategies aligned with 'gay Pride' activism, which emphasizes the importance of queer visibility and downplays the necessity of cultural revolution and coalition building with intersectional causes (Bruce, 2018; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Thompson, 2018). While visibility and political revolution both focus on the validation of marginalized groups, organizers held a precarious balance of uplifting queer populations without upsetting a hostile political climate that threatened their existence. Consequently, individuals engaged in communicative work to explain the boundaries of their political agency. Spencer—a board member with over 20 years of experience in the organization—recalled when he discouraged political agency from another board member:

> You're dealing with someone running for office. You're working for them, *and* you're on the board. You can't do it. I sat this person down and said, "What's your goal here? You're either going to be doing Pride, or you're going to be political."

Spencer provides an ultimatum for Pride organizers. By choosing between politics *or* Pride, political agency is discouraged. Limited political agency was not only discussed by board members but also by city officials who helped with Pride. Jason—the LGBTQ+ City Liaison—pointed to the risks of being political:

> I'm a nonpartisan role. I represent everyone in the city. As liaison, I'm not political. I don't necessarily get into all that, but it impacts the role. So, I have to be aware of how we are limited and things we have to do.

Jason acknowledges the constraints that stop public offices from being political, such as textual agencies prohibiting publicly funded officials from speaking about campaigns. While he is aware of the political mechanisms, Jason cannot act on them, implicating the boundaries of agency indicative of organizers. Other individuals noted these challenging boundaries. Amara—a board member—described limited political agency as a delicate negotiation of power:

> It's almost like walking on eggshells. What you can and cannot say because you are in this organization. You choose your words carefully. But you also try to support your own views, you know, going to rallies or going to different events that support your personal political views, but not necessarily doing so as a representative of Gulf Pride.

Amara negotiates political agency by defining how her organizational role impacts her activism. While she acknowledges that civic participation in other events is permissible, she must identify outside her role as a board member to avoid sociomaterial threats.

Due to a lack of political agency, organizers avoided communicating about Pride in political terms altogether. For example, Spencer recalled the history of how Gulf Pride changed its terminology over time:

A board member wanted to call it a parade. And another wanted to call it a march. And I

said that's too military. And the first guy calls me up and he said, "Let's call it a

promenade." And that's what we did. It was my first year, and I was the promenade chair.

It was very casual, very carefree.

Like historical accounts that distinguish between political "marches" and celebratory "parades"

(Bruce, 2016), Spencer calls attention to the label of a promenade to identify the lack of critical

consciousness among organizers. By using the terms "casual" and "carefree," promenading

denotes a stroll through downtown rather than a political demonstration that challenges cis- and

hetero-normativity.

While many individuals conceded to the lack of political agency in Pride spaces, some

people resented it. Miguel—a board member—problematized the standard label of Pride as a

"party":

Like I love the idea of a celebration—of a party—right? But we need more than that as a

community. That's what I kind of want to pivot my efforts to. I personally don't think that

we as an organization are in a place where we can fulfill those needs.

Miguel goes on to describe his eventual exit from Gulf Pride as a product of limited political

agency. Because Pride is rendered unserious compared to other social movements, focusing on a

celebration fails to fulfill his desire to give back to the community in politically agentic ways.

Limited political agency prompted nuanced strategies for increasing queer visibility while

maintaining the integrity of the organizational structure. Thus, organizers emphasized the

importance of branding Pride as an appropriate event for a variety of stakeholders, cementing

queer civil rights in profitable and sustainable forms of activism.

Selling Queerness: Neoliberal Branding Practices

In response to sociomaterial threats that stymied political agency, organizers focused on events that achieved multiple goals: visibility, profitability, and a "brand" of Pride that acknowledged social movements' importance while reinforcing dominant structures that kept the organization alive. These goals align with Branton and Compton's (2021) study of gay bars. In their analysis, bar owners engage in neoliberal branding practices to appeal to both queer and straight populations, which troubles the notion of 'safe spaces' that protect queer people from uncomfortable interactions and discriminatory systems.

Consequently, individuals accepted that events must cater to a bigger audience than just queer people. Miguel framed Pride as disconnected from political resistance to heteronormative society: "Our focus is on what the party looks like, and now what our impact on the community is." The construction of Pride as a party reinforces the notion that said sites are welcoming, celebratory, and entertaining. Thus, organizers focused on making events "inclusive." Isaiah—a board member—discussed his perspective of events:

> I was very vocal about events and particularly how we make a product that is inclusive of everyone. Not all of our events necessarily reflect that. In those moments, I am one of the ones that will speak out. It comes from a place of wanting it to be for everyone.

Isaiah critiques some events focusing on a particular population (e.g., women's night), stating that they lose the opportunity to invite a bigger audience. Instead, inclusivity acts as a communicative device for marketing events to *everyone.* Tyrique—a board member— corroborated this idea, stating that inclusivity facilitated forms of visibility that bred tolerance and acceptance of queer people to diverse audiences:

The word that comes to mind when thinking about us as a social justice organization is visibility. We provide that platform, so people see the beauty. We are fighting for acceptance via visibility by putting our trans and non-binary people out there in the forefront, so it helps opens the eyes of others.

In Tyrique's narrative, the visibility of queer people creates an opportunity for a bigger audience to see the historical, cultural, and political impact of Pride. By putting transgender and non-binary people "up front," organizers use queer bodies as a branding tool for inclusivity.

In other instances, I noted how organizers framed events with queer bodies, performances, and aesthetics as "family friendly." In one meeting, a board member discussed the inspiration for Children's Day—an event where Gulf Pride invited queer children and parents to the park with age-appropriate entertainment (e.g., clowns, bubbles, drag entertainers singing Disney songs). According to organizers, Children's Day challenged stereotypes that conflate queer identity with inappropriate sexual behavior (e.g., pedophilia) and questioned the idea that Pride was something "lewd" and something "children needed to be protected from." Additionally, Children's Day allowed various sponsors to invest in "age-appropriate content." While this event sounds amicable, it creates a false dichotomy that pits homonormative depictions of queerness (e.g., "family-friendly," "age appropriate") against alternative and subversive political agencies. This distinction between "appropriate" and "inappropriate" forms of Pride was complex, considering the resources, bodies, and performances that signify "family-friendly" queerness were barely distinguishable from performances outside Children's Day. For example, one board member asked if the entertainment subcommittee could "reuse" burlesque dancers from Pride Kickoff Day, asking them to wear less-revealing outfits so they could dance for children instead. These actions underscore the branding practices that help the organization

appeal to different audiences, limiting their political agency. Practices such as this ultimately led

some board members to conclude that they are "so boring now" with little room for anything

"directly controversial."

Part of Gulf Pride's neoliberal branding focused on the economic potential of showcasing

Pride to a heteronormative audience. Commercialization, tourism, and corporatization have

shifted the focus of organizing to monetary channels, expanding the scope of queer visibility at

the cost of preserving political agendas and grassroots social movements (Chasin, 2000; Lewis &

Herrmann, 2022). Gulf Pride's tactics "buy" into commercialization because it is one of the only

ways to hold bigger and better events. For example, Nancy acknowledged capitalism as a driving

force:

> It's rainbow capitalism. When you're talking about the people in the parade, they see us
>
> as a growing market of people. Like, we are here, we have the money. They also have the
>
> money and want to invest in whatever is going, which is why you market to this
>
> community. And it's funny because we get bullshit about our parade being too corporate,
>
> and my response is always the same: We are not New York or Los Angeles Pride.

Nancy cites "rainbow capitalism" to make sense of the consumerism, corporatization, and

tourism that appropriates queer civil rights for profit. However, Nancy defends the corporate

involvement because it is one of the few resources that facilitates successful events, such as

Parade Weekend. Comparing Gulf Pride to New York or Los Angeles Pride signifies a

difference in resources. Gulf Pride does not have the mass corporate and public investment New

York or Los Angeles Pride does[6]. Thus, Nancy rationalizes corporate investment to "make up" for the difference in resources.

Rainbow capitalism functioned not only in the motivation to market beyond queer communities but also in the logistics of event planning. For example, Parade Weekend—while historically held on Main Street in the city's gay district—moved downtown to accommodate more people and provide safety in the case of a mass casualty event ("We bring 300,000 people, I think that's also a deterrent [to mass casualty events]" — Nancy). Historically, parades and their routes reflect more significant systems of power. The change of the parade route—one moving from a gay neighborhood to the downtown area—may represent a sociomaterial display of "coming out" of the closet, allowing heteronormative audiences to witness the power of queer activism in the public sphere. On the other hand, organizers noted that the exit from Main Street contributed to animosity among queer businesses, citing "abandonment" and "selling out" to the city. Spencer talked about the decision to move from Main Street to downtown:

> We moved downtown, and it was ugly, ugly, ugly, ugly. We had meetings. People screamed at us. [Gulf Pride's] original founder—his brother—showed up that year with a sign that says, "GULF PRIDE: PROFIT BEFORE PEOPLE." The criticism is that we've taken away from the gay district. Pride doesn't belong to the damn gay district. Pride is for everybody. And if you go back and look for sponsorships from businesses on Main Street in the last 20 years, you won't see it because it's super minimal or nothing at all. But one piece of feedback that we got was, "Gulf Pride was founded to fund the stores on Main Street in the slow summer months."

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[6] Let me be clear: Gulf Pride still makes hundreds of thousands of dollars in investments (See Chapter Six). However, this is small compared to bigger Prides across the country whose investments are in the millions.

Spencer highlights the sign to analyze the tension of marketing to diverse populations at the risk of "selling out." By moving downtown, the sociomaterial meanings associated with Gulf Pride change, inviting consumerism, corporatization, and backlash from queer populations who depend on Pride for a financial boost. Additionally, Spencer notes that queer support means little when the financial contributions from associated businesses are negligent, reinforcing the appeal of neoliberal branding practices.

While marketing Pride to a diverse audience ensured financial security, it created ruptures in honoring marginalized communities. In one meeting, I noted a conversation where a board member discussed the Marsha P. Johnson banquet—a fundraising event where sponsors learn about the history of the Stonewall Riots:

> The fact that it was called the Marsha P. Johnson Banquet, for me, was deeply problematic. When I first joined the board, I thought it was antithetical to what the spirit of the event was. Like if we think about what the original Stonewall was. … [The Marsha P. Johnson Banquet] is this highbrow event with very high-ticket prices. And it was for sponsors, and, you know, people or local politicians who could afford $125 a ticket. It's always at a pretty swanky venue. I think thanking sponsors is tremendously important. I'm a huge believer in giving them an awesome experience.

While the Stonewall Riots sparked the beginning of Pride, it relied on grassroots organizing that resisted monolithic forms of queerness. In comparison, this board member critiques the Marsha P. Johnson banquet as a space known for homonormativity and class privilege— 'appropriate' forms of queerness that are intersectionally privileged and economically productive (Duggan, 2002). By charging a high-ticket cost and holding the event in a luxurious venue, organizers market to a population that is simultaneously bigger than the queer communities and smaller than

what a public, accessible event would allow for, contributing to a sociomaterial dilemma questioning the ideal audience for Pride. Marketing queerness in these ways is destructive because it limits alternative, emancipatory, and equitable channels of social movement organizing.

Pride's Lost Potential

Organizers noted various problems due to the priority given to 'marketable' events, underscoring the differences between neoliberal feminist movements that provide lip service to issues regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (Rottenberg, 2014); and more meaningful forms of activism that can expand definitions of Pride. Some organizers discussed how focusing on traditional Pride events, such as Pride Weekend, overshadowed alternative forms of protest. Amara talked about what we lost when we focused on bigger, more marketable events:

> I love Pride weekend and preparing for it and all that. But there's also Trans Day of Remembrance. There're all kinds of other things throughout the year that should be acknowledged, and we should be doing as an organization to support it. That's a part of our community.

Amara identifies Pride as a significant organizational commitment, creating a vacuum of labor, time, and energy that takes away from other vital issues, such as transgender visibility. Consequently, organizers felt more like event planners than social movement organizers. Bryce—a Board Co-Vice President—said, "The community engagement piece of our organization is almost secondary to what we do," echoing sentiments that Pride in its contemporary state is more about logistical planning than envisioning equitable futures.

Another issue of marketable events was the systems of power, privilege, and oppression that rendered some individuals higher value than others. In the case of Gulf Pride, normative

systems, such as homonormativity, uplifted an ideal sexual subject (e.g., White gay men) and downplayed other forms of intersectional marginalization in the community (e.g., Black transgender women; discussed in Chapter Six). While the organization intentionally held events that targeted these communities, such as a Juneteenth celebration, individuals critiqued its impact within neoliberal conceptualizations of profit and "ROIs." Many narratives surrounding Juneteenth hoped for an event catering to the Black community, creating a space of refuge *and* critical consciousness. Isaiah—a Black board member—talked about his hopes and dreams for the Juneteenth Event:

> One of the things that I had always observed since I moved here was that Pride didn't really throw events that were geared towards people like me. So, we were very intentional about creating a space that had space for everyone but with a focus on Black and Brown LGBTQIA folks. When we did the programming, signage, and advertising— because you can't advertise to the one population you want to invite—we wanted to be aware of the cultural norms, the differences.

Isaiah constructs Juneteenth as a "safe space" for Black and Brown queer people while simultaneously catering to an outside audience. This narrative creates a contradiction of safe spaces. These sites target a marginalized community but remain open to other dominant groups by creating a "space for everyone" and advertising to other communities. While these marketing strategies acknowledge the intersectionality of events like Juneteenth, where race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexuality all intertwine, they complicate the way organizers can highlight specific forms of identity.

In some cases, advertising diverse events had unintended outcomes. Tyrique—a Black board member—discussed how appealing to race in events was often unsuccessful:

I remember saying in this meeting, "How do we market to our people?" When you put

"Black" on something, it often turns a lot of other people off. So how do we do market to

everyone? And [a Black committee member] said, "We don't market to [White people].

It's not for them." And that angered me, and I got a little snippy with them.

Tyrique argues that Juneteenth, especially within the bigger mission of Gulf Pride, is a

cultural *and* educational event from which other (White) people can learn. Another committee

member for the event disagreed, stating that Juneteenth should only advertise and include Black

Indigenous people of color (BIPOC). These conflicts split diversity initiatives between desires to

assimilate into and separate from dominant groups, creating contentious marketing strategies that

try to please everyone simultaneously. Amara—a Black board member and Entertainment

Recruiter—corroborated this tension, stating her desire for a "perfect" Pride with multiple

identities:

We did really well with bringing more Black entertainers in this year, to the point where

it was almost overkill for me. I love seeing people of color on the big stage. But I also

don't want to alienate those who aren't quite as "melanated." Like I don't want it to just be

all Black entertainers. I also don't want it to be all drag, right? In a perfect world, Pride

would have women, transgender people, Black entertainers, soul, country, techno,

electronica, classical…Because I know there's someone in the audience who is like,

"Yeah this would be great if so and so were here."

While Amara fights for racial representation in historically White spaces, she acknowledges that

organizations must cater to a diverse and often fickle audience—one that is always looking for

the absence of identity rather than the presence of what is offered.

Tensions surrounding the difference between marketable and diverse events resulted in narratives of Juneteenth as financially precarious. Renee—a White Volunteer Coordinator— summarized the organization's consensus of the Juneteenth Event:

> In previous years, there weren't as many events specifically for the Black community. There's been more deliberateness and attention paid to being more diverse with the events we put on, which I think is great. I think we need to be a bit more realistic with the budget for those things. The Juneteenth Event: It's great, it's beautiful, and it's big. We make negative money. If it were something that was sustainable, we would love that. But I don't know if it's going that way because it's a free event.

While Renee celebrates Juneteenth as a culturally successful event, she criticizes it as financially "unsustainable," which embeds the value of social movement organizing within neoliberal models of economic productivity. Others noted that events celebrating marginalized identities only made sense within certain temporal boundaries. Like heteronormative agencies that dictate when Pride should happen (i.e., June), Amara recounted how Black events were only deemed valuable if scheduled during Black History Month:

> We were talking about throwing a party for Black women and trying to move it. And the first thing [board members] said was, "Oh we can move it to February." Oh, because it's Black History Month? That feels a little off, right. And they said if we're having an event in March, we have to have an event for everyone, right?

According to Amara, a party for Black women could only garner individual support if placed within the boundaries of Black History Month, creating a conflation between neoliberal branding practices and spatiotemporal boundaries that tokenize particular identities. When placed outside of these boundaries (e.g., holding a Black event in March), organizers fear that the focus on

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marginalized identity will disrupt the economic potential of the event. As a result of homonormative ordering that prioritizes certain queer bodies over others, Gulf Pride engaged in pragmatic forms of organizing that acknowledged the shallow forms of political activism.

Pragmatic Organizing

Gulf Pride's marketable activism limited political agency, catered to a homogenous population of privileged queer people, and rendered marginalized people invisible. As a result, organizers relied on pragmatic understandings of social movements that acknowledged the material constraints of their environment (see Okamoto, 2020). Many organizers focused on what Pride *can* do regarding cultural and social change, rather than what Pride *must* do to maintain historical traditions and celebrations. Thus, individuals worked on keeping Pride afloat, underscoring a narrative of survival in a hostile geopolitical climate. Serena discussed the inevitably of Pride due to significant historical precedents: "We have always said, 'Pride is still happening. You cannot stop Pride. We are still in a safe, welcoming city. Please come and join us.' Let's not focus on legislation. Let's focus on the fact Pride is still happening." Because Pride has been happening since the 1960s, Serena understands it to be culturally and socially secure, thus, prioritizing her mission to maintain rather than transform organizational initiatives. Other organizers mirrored this sentiment. Amanda—the Board President—stated that the organization was bound to succeed despite sociomaterial threats:

> There's something almost comforting in the fact that Gulf Pride has existed for 22 years despite the dysfunction. I think the organization is successful in spite of itself, because of the underlying mission, because of it's a support of the city, because of the energy you have a product that everyone wants, right?

Here, Amanda refers to Pride as a product that transcends cultural opposition, providing organizers the security that, no matter what happens, they can and will survive.

Because of Pride's popularity, individuals focused on the mundane details of organizing that maintained events. Individuals continued to fulfill the organization's mission despite various threats, such as anti-queer legislation. Devon—the Volunteer Director—set his priorities on managing the finer details:

> If you're gonna do this work, this is the time. How do you respond to all these pressures that we got this summer, like the anti-drag legislation. I don't really care. I don't really feel like that changed anything about how I would communicate or behave. I'm caught up in the details that I need to know that are gonna help the organization directly. It's a non-issue. As an organization, does it affect us? Yes, or no? Let's talk about our contingency plans. Let's not talk about every fearful scenario.

Instead of worrying about the "what ifs" of legislation that threatened Gulf Pride's existence, Devon only worried about the interruption of his day-to-day work planning events and marketing to a diverse population. Even if a drag ban were in effect, the events rely on various entertainers, stakeholders, and sponsors, creating multiple opportunities for alternative planning.

Some organizers took pragmatic organizing to an extreme, evaluating success based on matters of life and death. In one board meeting, I noted a conflict between individuals who wondered what made Parade Weekend "successful." Some people said it was a success because no casualties occurred, which was a fear due to the hostile political *and* environmental climate (i.e., mass shootings and high heat indexes). Others criticized this statement, questioning if Gulf Pride's only success was the absence of death rather than the celebration of identity and difference. Diving deeper into conversations with board members, I realize that these statements

reflect the pragmatism informing these actions. Amanda said avoiding a mass casualty was a success: "No one died. We fucking did it! And we have money in the bank. So, we're ready to go another year and do it better." Amanda understands success in material extremes. By avoiding a mass casualty event, Pride's status as a fun and marketable event is maintained. Bryce talked about what Gulf Pride did to avoid the possibility of mass casualties:

> Two blocks away from all the partying, we have a mass casualty staging area. But no
> one's thinking about that. No one's considering that when they're having fun at a parade.
> They just want to show up and dance, right?

Bryce's statement reflects the pragmatic decisions that ensure the safety and security of Pride, allowing celebrations to continue despite concerning geopolitical trends of conservative extremism, mass shootings, and hate crimes perpetuated against the queer community.

Other board members, like Miguel, criticized pragmatist notions of success, stating that avoiding mass casualties and incidents of heat stroke was a "bare minimum obligation." Despite contestations of success, these narratives depict narrow and contextually bound forms of political agency among organizers. Up to this point, I have described numerous dilemmas that hinder Gulf Pride's political potential, such as spatiotemporal uncertainties, nonprofit sociomaterialities, and marketable forms of activism. In response to these issues, individuals engaged in unique forms of resistance, which I term malicious compliance.

Malicious Compliance

House Bill [HB] 1069: Bans instruction of sexual orientation and gender identity in public schools from Pre-K to 8th grade. Prohibits explicit discussion of pronouns and non-normative gender identities.

State Bill [SB] 254: Strips parental rights of people with transgender children. Criminalizes parties providing access to gender-affirming healthcare. Bans use of public funds for gender-affirming healthcare.

HB 1521: Prohibits gender-inclusive restrooms in public places, such as schools, jails, and community centers.

SB 1438: Conflates drag entertainers with "sexually explicit live performances," limiting their agency in public spaces.

SB 266: Bans funding of diversity, equity, and inclusion campaigns in public education systems. Prohibits the study of race, gender, sexuality, and other identities in general education curricula.

SB 1580: Allows healthcare providers to discriminate (against marginalized patients) based on moral, religious, or ethical beliefs.

SB 170: Discourages cities from passing non-discrimination ordinances.

Over the past year, state government officials have legislated violence against marginalized communities, creating an onslaught of bills that strip the autonomy, freedoms, and rights of those that defy normative systems of White supremacy, heteronormativity, and patriarchy. While judicial circuits have blocked many of these bills under the purview of constitutional infringement, governmental officials are persistent in their creation of bills that conflate queer people with inappropriate sexual behavior, the destruction of children's innocence, and the degradation of (straight, cisgender) people's right to say no to institutional requests, such as gender-affirming healthcare.

These bills had unintended consequences for organizers, who must respond not only to the cultural zeitgeist of anti-queer rhetoric but also to the sociomaterial threats that prohibit them from fighting against dominant interests. After SB 1438 passed, all of us were concerned about the future of Gulf Pride—an organization that routinely and explicitly hired drag performers as their primary form of entertainment. As I sit down for one of our board meetings, I listen to Nancy—the Executive Director—whose no-nonsense approach to these laws calms me:

> So, I was at this last-minute safety press conference with the police chief, and there were a bunch of reporters there. Most of the questions are about the drag ban legislation. The chief did not speak on it, and the police knew they weren't going to. If you all are getting media questions, our message has always been, "We have always, and will continue to, abide by the laws in our state and country, and we will not do anything to violate those laws." The reporters tried to pin me and say that we employ drag queens, and I just said, "We have live entertainment that spans all genres. We fall within all the legalities."

In these moments, I am interested in how Pride organizers bypass harmful inequality regimes—institutional systems that demand respect—while still committing to social justice initiatives (Benschop, 2021). As illustrated in the other themes from this chapter, organizers struggled to reconcile the professionalization of Pride with the desire to express personal and political identities (Burchiellaro, 2021). When combined with inequality regimes that legislate away the existence of queer people in the public sphere, organizers negotiated the dilemma of how to respond to various sociomaterial threats. In this case, anti-queer legislation mirrors the spatiotemporal uncertainties, nonprofit sociomaterialities, and marketable activism that Gulf Pride endures. While many of these dilemmas resulted in shallow and neoliberalized social justice initiatives, organizers found ways to simultaneously abide by dominant institutions and deconstruct them.

I use the term *malicious compliance* to capture the sociomaterial navigation of laws, policies, bureaucratic structures, and cultural expectations about sexuality, gender, and politics among nonprofit organizers. Malicious compliance denotes how Pride organizers obey hegemonic structures in subversive ways, creating unintended outcomes that reflect 'microphysics of power' (Foucault, 1977) and point to the absurdity of such structures. Like the concept of 'uncivil obedience,' which illustrates paradoxical outcomes from extreme law following (Bulman-Pozen & Pozen, 2015), malicious compliance grounds lawful adherence in organizational contexts, such as nonprofits. Additionally, it acknowledges the role of social *and* material structures exerting their own agencies, such as bodies, cultural narratives, textual agencies, and visual structures.

Organizers described malicious compliance when navigating the sociomaterial

threats discouraging political expression. For example, Miguel discussed how obeying the

law created a long-term commitment to political resistance:

> It's my opinion that the law is always designed to protect those that have the power. But
>
> it is the game that needs to be played. We think back to all these laws that have existed
>
> that were terrible, and then needed to be abolished, and rebelled against, right? But you
>
> also need to remember that rebellion causes issues. Perhaps it elongates the impact, and
>
> rebellion would not be possible if we would have put all of our revenue in at the very
>
> beginning. We do a good job of playing the strategic game, pushing as much as we can,
>
> without jeopardizing the entirety of the mission.

Miguel notes that traditional forms of resistance—like coalition building and civil rights

litigation—waste precious resources that a nonprofit organization needs to stay afloat. In

comparison, malicious compliance provides a political vehicle wherein resistance can weave in

and out of obedience to dominant structures.

Organizers couched malicious compliance in the need for obedience. By adhering to all

laws, the organization stayed in good standing with stakeholders, government officials, and

lawmakers who threatened its existence. At one board meeting, I noted that a board member used

obedience as an organizational response to questions about hiring drag entertainers, expressing

solidarity with the queer community, and continuing to hold a parade. They stated, "We keep

being asked like, 'Why are you defying [the law]?' But we've always been in compliance with it.

And we don't see [this law] being any different." Organizers distinguish between public

understandings of laws and concrete legal definitions. While some people argue that hiring drag

entertainers defies laws about public (in)decency, organizers ground their obedience in

ambiguous definitions of drag in the public sphere, therefore circumventing harmful discussions that stigmatize queer identity. If initiatives representing identity and difference are lawful, they cannot be challenged.

Other organizers understood obedience as a form of lip service, allowing for indirect political access. For example, one state law that banned public expressions of non-normative gender identity (e.g., chest binders, prosthetics) threatened the existence of Parade Weekend. On this site, thousands of individuals come dressed in euphoric, queer, and carnivalesque fashions. In response, the leadership team of Gulf Pride obeyed the ordinance by posting a public "health and safety page," placing the onus of decency on individual attendees rather than the entire organization. While these actions funnel compliance from dominant structures to vulnerable individuals, they shield the organization from risk and make it harder for any individual to be caught due to the massive scale of the event. In one meeting, a board member noted that by placing the responsibility on organizations and individuals instead of the city or state, it "will be interesting to see how the police department enforces any of this." In effect, the securitization of Pride (discussed in Chapter Six) acted as a performance and form of surveillance with little material consequence on attendees. The only arrests made against people during Parade Weekend were not because of non-normative gender expression but because of drunk and disorderly conduct (i.e., drunk people fist-fighting in the street).

Other forms of malicious compliance took law-following to an extreme, creating unique and humorous forms of resistance. Jason—the LGBTQ+ City Liaison—illustrated many examples the city took in tow with Gulf Pride to obey laws with unintended consequences. For example, one of the city's initiatives was to increase material markers of queer visibility. The

city wanted to install rainbow crosswalks, which were prohibited due to state and federal laws about street colors. Jason noted the hypocrisy of these laws:

> We've been pushing for rainbow crosswalks. They are actually illegal in the state. So, if you ever want to retire, get hit in a rainbow intersection in the United States. So, we came up with the plan to paint the intersection instead.

Jason goes on to describe rainbow crosswalks in other parts of the country, noting that the liability of street accidents would fall on the cities that allowed them. Therefore, Jason jokes at the possibility of a big lawsuit benefitting people in accidents on rainbow crosswalks. The city painted the entire intersection, simultaneously obeying anti-queer structures while pointing to the absurdity of such laws. Instead of painting the crosswalks at the intersection's top, bottom, left, and right, organizers filled the entire center with the mural. Figure 1 illustrates this form of malicious compliance, which obeys the textual agencies that govern cities and organizations while increasing material forms of queer visibility in the form of the Progress Flag[7].

Figure 1. Photo of intersection with painted Progress Flag. Photo provided by study participant.

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[7] This flag honors the contributions of transgender individuals, queer communities, and people of color.

In another example, Jason discussed how extreme law-following can produce opportunities for critical consciousness between conflicting parties. Efforts to light up a street bridge—one that existed at the intersection of three different counties—with rainbow colors during Pride Month were rejected until Jason asked the road regulation agency for a "concise policy," revealing inconsistencies in what colors were allowed in different jurisdictions. As a result, the state allowed Pride organizers to light up the bridge during Pride Month, illustrating how extreme obedience can expose the flawed logics of inequality regimes.

Pride organizers not only grounded malicious compliance in adherence to dominant structures but also in strategies of silence and inaction. By not responding to dominant structures, organizers can navigate paradoxes of power quietly, finding opportunities for indirect political resistance (Priola et al., 2018). Nancy talked about how remaining silent on specific issues allowed her to remain in good standing with city and state legislators, especially when hiring drag entertainers: "We were going to do drag no matter what we were going to call it when I went to the city. I said, 'We will have LGBTQ entertainers. And that's all I'm going to tell you.' Here, Nancy omits the label of "drag," instead calling them "LGBTQ entertainers" to circumvent laws that limit the agency of performers. By remaining silent about these issues, Pride organizers can fly under the radar of city and anti-queer state politics. Jason corroborated this notion, discussing what the city does when navigating anti-queer state bills.

> It's one of the things that the city has a policy where we don't comment until bills are signed. You know, we know they're hateful. But because they are modified so much until they're signed, we typically won't address them. But we know them, we're looking at them, and we do things. But publicly, we don't necessarily comment till they're passed.

Jason notes that silence protects the city from rash responses to bills that may change or never get passed. Moreover, silence allows the city to strategize covertly without needing an institutional response. The city and Gulf Pride often worked together to provide a united front of silence. Bryce—a Board Co-Vice President—discussed what the city wanted from him regarding media messaging: "There actually was not any talking point that was asked for by the city. There was, however, the need to understand the nuance and political maneuvering that we need to maintain to further the relationship and not damage it." Here, silence acts as solidarity between the two entities, allowing enough ambiguity for malicious compliance to occur.

Pride organizers also engaged in malicious compliance by simply not acting when political activism happened. While nonprofit organizations cannot endorse or denounce political candidates, they can craft spaces of democratic participation and agency, allowing for indirect political resistance. Miguel discussed the strategy of crafting spaces—like Parade Weekend—to facilitate political activism:

> I also do believe that we do a good job at giving the voice to those that are marginalized. Like, we may not be the ones making, doing the talks, but we do allow for folks to come and have space to do the conversation within the parade.

Miguel distinguishes between "doing the talks" and "having the space," which mirrors the demand to obey textual agencies to limit nonprofits while still allowing independent agents to speak up. In one board meeting, I noted an interaction where board members discussed political participation at the Pride Concert. One board member said, "We are not censoring any signage as long as it doesn't violate any laws." Another board member interjected and said, "Well it can it say 'Fuck [state governor?]'." The first board member responded, saying "Well, yes…but it can't say 'Fucking kill [state governor]'." Not intervening on behalf of political performances at the

Pride Concert still allows organizers to cultivate spaces, narratives, and embodiments of social justice. At the same time, malicious compliance requires obedience to dominant structures, such as texts prohibiting death threats against government officials.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined how Pride organizers navigate different dilemmas, such as spatiotemporal uncertainties, nonprofit sociomaterialities, and forms of marketable activism that stymied political agency. In response, I advanced the term *malicious compliance* to underscore the communicative channels organizers used to simultaneously adhere to and divest from dominant structures. Based on these dynamics, I illustrated that the effectiveness of social movements is contingent on various non(human) actors, contributing to an intra-action of political activism, queer identity, and worldmaking. In the next chapter, I discuss how organizers embody their work, explicating tumultuous politics of tokenization, emotion, and recognition/award.

CHAPTER FIVE: EMBODYING PRIDE LABOR

In efforts to promote safe spaces of diversity and education in Pride, organizers felt compelled to highlight certain intersections of their identity, prompting questions of whether their marginalization was being honored or tokenized. These dilemmas reflect historical tensions in Pride organizing, where processes of becoming the 'right' kind of diverse cause discomfort among individuals who feel marginalized (Bendl & Hoffman, 2015; Mease, 2016; Ward, 2008a). This chapter highlights a sociomaterial dilemma in which organizers negotiate the meaning of their identities despite stressful embodied states, negative emotions, and intersectional systems that affect individuals differently. I draw from literature on feminist dilemmatic theorizing, embodiment, and intersectionality to answer RQ2: "How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate the embodiment of their work?" I pay specific attention to the role of embodied experiences in qualitative research, pointing out the ways that Pride organizers are "thingified" (Barad, 2007)—or brought into a state of becoming—based on organizational expectations (Dale & Latham, 2015). In other words, I am interested in the ways that diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives use queer bodies, resulting in disparate meanings and responses among marginalized individuals. Additionally, I reflect on my own role as a lead volunteer, researcher, and White queer man, situating myself as a "body subject" worthy of examination (Barnacle, 2009).

First, this chapter articulates the basic dilemma of tokenization, illustrating politics about representation, diversity, and identity in organizational contexts. Then, I discuss how organizers ground these dilemmas in embodied accounts of work and adverse emotional climates. Finally, I

reflect on my own embodiment in Pride organizing, dissecting how bodies 'speak' to issues of identity and difference.

Dilemmas of Tokenization

As a social justice organization, Gulf Pride grappled with embodied ethics of representation, weighing the benefits of diversity against the cost of tokenizing marginalized individuals. In positive conceptualizations, representation uplifted the historical contributions of Pride, which fought for equitable access to civil rights. Serena discussed diversity as an ideal in the organization, affirming the mission of representing everyone in the community:

> I think it goes back to that intersectionality of a lot of things. My upbringing, my values—all of that is different. The consensus is that we care about people in the community that aren't the norm. And they want to see themselves or find themselves even thrusted into that community. And they want safe space—that inviting space for them. So, we are very people centric. And I think our backgrounds reflect that from Bryce with his education and work, to Tyrique and what he does culturally with our community, to Spencer being an older gay man through history, to Tiffany's international background, to Eden being a straight White woman. I feel like we're so much more diverse.

Serena highlights identity categories among different organizers, using descriptions of occupation, education, age, sexuality, and race to emphasize the diversity of Gulf Pride. In this case, simplistic notions of identity provide a cultural currency that renders the organization reputable and aligned with its mission of creating safe spaces. Additionally, organizers pointed to Pride being "known" for diversity, facilitating higher attention to different identity categories. Amara discussed the pressure to be seen as equitable when planning for Pride:

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We're all about diversity and encompassing everyone and including everyone. Whereas in an average show, you may not really be thinking about that. So, I think that's where the difference is. You know, like for us, we try to make sure we include non-binary and trans and multiracial [people]. In a "non-Pride" organization or "non-Pride" event, you're not quite as concerned.

Amara distinguishes between Pride and "non-Pride" events to discuss how identity is center stage in the day-to-day work of social movements, prompting specific caricatures of race, gender, and sexuality.

Amara continued to discuss the importance of representation—especially when it comes to including every category in organizational leadership. Multiple board members pointed to the lack of transgender representation as an indicator of organizational dysfunction. Amara discussed how specific identities must be present for organizations to 'become diverse':

There's not as much support for trans and non-binary identity as there should be, because I don't think we really have the representation of that on the board. So that's where it's lacking…By making a woman the board president, by making the Executive Director a woman, you know, by having two Black vice presidents. I think trying to mix up the power structure within our organization is how we address what the world sees as powerful in our organization.

Amara talks about presence and absence as forms of power in the organization. Not having particular identities on the Board of Directors results in a lack of diversity that could harm the organization's mission. Placing marginalized people in leadership acts as an embodied form of diversity, facilitating organizational growth, transformation, and activism.

Other organizers questioned the conflation between representation and expertise. Devon noted that framing diversity as a solution can be problematic:

When people are not wanting to step into roles because they don't identify with the people or the event, and they say they can't accurately represent them, that doesn't make any sense. I will never be a woman, but it doesn't mean that I can't have some sense of understanding of emotion or ask my friends what else I could do.

He went on to critique the "jargon of DEI and other dangerous nonsense" when discussing initiatives that aim for representation metrics on the Board of Directors. These arguments deny the connections between identity, expertise, and ethics that characterize many initiatives touting diversity's importance. Buzzanell (2019) mirrors this notion, stating that missions to "fix the culture" assume equal standpoint, lived experience, and background between similar identities (e.g., women). By stating that categories such as race, (trans)gender identity, and education illustrate the expertise of Gulf Pride, organizers run the risk of ignoring how these identities intersect, diverge, and contribute to unforeseen inequalities. For example, Serena noted that simplistic categorizations of Pride made her feel ambiguous as a mixed-race woman. By constantly highlighting Blackness and Whiteness as a racial binary, strategizing diversity became confusing: "I've always been in a weird space. Where do I belong? Do I have the right to weigh in?" Serena's mixed-race identity acts as an ambiguous category of diversity, causing anxiety about when her input matters during discussions between dominant (White) and non-dominant (Black) group members.

These models of representation contributed to anxieties about what diversity is 'supposed' to feel and look like. Serena traced the need for representation to insecurity:

Whether it's power, whether is race, whatever it is—it's insecurity at the root. Whether

it's insecurity about not being feeling heard as a Black man, or on [a White board

member's] end, also not feeling heard or valued, but for a different reason. I think it

ultimately boils down to insecurities and lack of understanding of each other, you know?

In this case, championing diversity in organizational contexts does not account for the

sociomaterial reality of not being heard. While being heard and validated are universal values,

they do not address the nuance of how 'recognition' is rendered inequitable along the lines of

race, gender, and social class. Consequently, organizers use diversity as a 'catch-all' reaction to

mend inequity without accounting fully for the nuances of representation.

In these cases, diversity is not an objective reality that can be "counted," which was

evident in contradictions regarding what representation looks like among organizers.

Additionally, it is not purely constitutive because it denies humans as the sole arbiters of culture,

meaning, language, etc. Instead, agentic constructions of organizations—such as Gulf Pride—

extend beyond diverse individuals and implicate embodied sensations, feelings, and

organizational agencies. Due to dilemmas of tokenization, organizers recounted how they

embody the 'hard' work and emotions associated with Pride.

Hard Work and Emotional Turmoil in Pride Organizing

Embodied Classes

Despite the diversity of people, roles, and commitments, all Pride organizers had to

participate in 'hard' work. These expectations grounded dilemmas of tokenization in manual,

burdensome, and stressful experiences. Marvin (1994) discusses the role of embodiment in

meanings about work, differentiating between text and body classes. *Text classes* privilege

contemporary formations of white-collar work, such as literacy, technology, and formal

communication channels. Text classes are disembodied, maintaining high social status. In comparison, *body classes* rely on manual labor, undesirable (i.e., dirty) jobs, and informal communication channels, resulting in lower social status. Just as Gist-Mackey and Dougherty (2021) discuss the fluid interplay between text and body classes, I argue that organizers make sense of their work by jumping between different classes. In other words, organizers noted that while Pride should confer text class—in the rhetorical positioning of queer visibility in the public sphere—it reaffirms body class due to surprising forms of 'hard work.'

Organizers navigated embodied tensions, analyzing the differences between paid and unpaid forms of work. In these cases, individuals experienced turmoil based on economic systems that split them between textual jobs and embodied acts of nonprofit labor. For example, many organizers existed within different social class identities, creating discourses about how much time is 'enough' in volunteer work. Bryce—a Board Co-Vice President—discussed the differences between organizers regarding social class:

> We have a lot of class difference. And I think that doesn't land for people. Some board members are not working and have spouses to support them to be able to do these things, right? And then you have [board member], whose only day off is on Wednesday. So, when people say, "Let's do something in the middle of the day," I'm like, "We are fucking working." Not only do I work a full-time job, but I also run a consulting firm full-time by myself, and I am volunteering at multiple places. So, I don't have the same freedom as other people.

Here, social class—designated by people's paid jobs and access to capital (e.g., spouses)—creates disparities in how much time organizers can commit to Gulf Pride. Additionally, this narrative asserts that nonprofit labor ignores the embodied reality of people navigating economic

pressures. Eden (board member) went further in this indictment, detailing how she struggled to balance nonprofit tasks and extenuating responsibilities:

> I have a full-time job, and I'm full-time for an elderly person with a disability. I have children that need me. I have a husband. I have a household. And I have this volunteer work, right? It's like, I cannot give this 40 hours a week. And I am grateful that some volunteers can, but my expectation was never for you to give that up.

Eden articulates all her responsibilities that conflict with the ideal of rigorous commitment to nonprofit labor—a struggle that exists specifically within marginalized social classes.

Often, social class organized the nature of nonprofit work. Amanda—the Board President—discussed how some organizers are recruited based on their financial contribution instead of their dedication to Pride's mission:

> I was told the value that [a board member] would bring would be money, which we needed. We need volunteers and access to wealthy people, and [board member] had all these connections with people who are going to volunteer with a can-do attitude. And I was like, I don't think that's enough.

While Amanda disagrees with the politics resulting in this person being brought on to the Board of Directors, she identifies a privileged social class as an advantage to Pride organizing. In this case, textual capital (Marvin, 1994) associated with higher social classes maintains the nonprofit channels of free labor and sponsorship that keep Gulf Pride afloat.

Beyond social class, individuals often noted that coordinating events involved uniquely disparaging forms of embodied participation compared to other nonprofit organizations. For example, board members often labeled themselves as a "working board," delineating their roles

as "hands-on" compared to other nonprofits with "hands-off" advisory boards. Serena—a Board

Co-Vice President—described what went into hosting Pride, underscoring significant stress:

> There's an immense amount of physical, emotional, and psychological effort that goes
>
> into planning one of the largest Pride celebrations in the country. And it is incredibly
>
> taxing and rewarding at the same time. The people involved are truly passionate about the
>
> LGBTQ community, no matter what their personal hopes and intentions are. We want to
>
> make an experience that is enlightening, fun, exciting, and purposeful, both for the
>
> community and for us.

Serena frames the labor of Pride as joyful, however, she argues that working in these conditions

is incredibly stressful and notes the material effects on her body and mind.

> While Gulf Pride touted the importance of a "working board," volunteers made up most

of the manual labor, such as transporting materials, talking to the public about goods and

services, and cleaning up after the events. People higher up in the organization (i.e., board

members) were often responsible for coordinating and maintaining the integrity of events. When

events ran smoothly, board members distanced themselves from volunteers, resulting in varied

responses to power. Renee—a Volunteer Coordinator—recalled a time when the distance

between volunteers and board members created feelings of animosity:

> I think you and I were both watching when everyone was just like taking pictures
>
> randomly, like in the middle of a crowd and I was like—the volunteers were just like
>
> dying and doing stuff. And it was just interesting to see the dissonance between those two
>
> parties.

Renee and I talked about the first time we met during Pride Kickoff Day. While handling an

endless line of people buying t-shirts in the merchandise tent, we noticed that board members

rarely participated. Instead of assisting volunteers with the hard work of handling the public, board members often focused on the optics of Gulf Pride, such as taking pictures and networking with stakeholders. Renee uses the term "dying" to denote the embodied strain of volunteers. Additionally, "dissonance" points to the division between text and body classes in Pride organizing, conferring status to people higher up in the organization's hierarchical structure (i.e., board members).

While hierarchy and status often shielded privileged organizational members from greater degrees of hard work, others felt burdened by their status. Some board members, such as those responsible for recruiting entertainers and volunteers, routinely commented on the severity of their workload compared to other board members whose roles were more relaxed, ceremonial, or nonexistent. In comparison, my lived experience as a volunteer included long days, physically strenuous tasks, and a commitment to being "exhausted all of June," which reflects a culmination of material agencies in organizing.

…

Rrrrrrzzz—

Rrrrcckkzzzz—

Rrrrrrrrrrffffff—

"Oh no, are you kidding me?"

My back aches as I bend over to shine my phone flashlight on the golf cart's power outlet. Tyrique fiddles with the ignition, trying to jumpstart the engine.

RRRRRRRRRR—

Shit, it is totally dead.

"How long has the golf cart been charging?" I ask.

Tyrique wipes the sweat from his brow, "For the last few hours. This is one of the only golf carts left over here." While the walk between Victory Park and Strong Park is only 15 minutes, the idea of heading to the volunteer tent on foot sends ringing pain from the top of my neck to the bottom of my feet. I look down at my Apple watch: 22,000 steps. *I really need to get home to take my heart medication*. Tyrique laughs, "Let's try one more time…" *Rrrrrrrdumdumdumdum……*

"Oh, thank god." I jump on the golf cart.

Tyrique floors the gas, and the golf cart barely creeps forward. "Oh shoot, someone may have to push it to get started…"

Fine, I will do it.

After I hop back on the golf cart, I am relieved to feel the breeze on my face as we zip forward, weaving our way through crowds of attendees dressed in rainbow tutus, leather gear, and Gulf Pride merchandise. At 2 AM, I recall the events of the day:

6 AM: Report to Strong Park for a volunteer safety meeting.

7 AM: Setup key meeting areas for organizers (e.g., information booth, volunteer tent)

8 AM: Install 25 vendor canopy tents, each with a release trigger that only someone with my height can reach.

9 AM: Notice the heat rash developing on the chest, arms, and legs. Put on more sunscreen.

10 AM: Manage zoning of 30 food trucks in the main field. Divert excess food trucks to Victory Park when necessary.

11 AM: Parade float registration begins. Use color-coded cards to organize parade floats by check-in time and attendee type (e.g., marchers, floats, accessory vehicles).

12 PM: Avoid having a mental breakdown when the color code system does not work and no one shows up during their designated time.

1 PM: Note intake of water. 160 ounces. Note the lack of urgency to pee.

3 PM: Move to Aldridge Airfield for the beginning of the parade. Clean up the Gulf Pride trailer and proceed to the front of the procession.

5 PM: Parade begins. Muster up the energy to smile and wave with the other board members on golf carts.

5:**15 PM**: Reach the end of the parade. Disembark the golf cart and report back to Aldridge Airfield for cleanup.

6 PM: Complete cleanup of Aldridge Airfield. Manually push dead golf carts into pickup position. Note heart palpitations.

7 PM: Report to Victory Park. Eat. Look out at the water. Breathe.

9 PM: Begin cleanup of Victory Park.

11 PM: Move to the main field for vendor exit and cleanup.

12:30 AM: Report to Victory Park to help Tyrique with the remaining entertainers and golf carts.

2:**15 AM**: Return to the main field. Note heart rate. Note the severity of heat rash on the face, hands, chest, trunk, hands, and legs. Report to Devon to sign out.

<div align="center">…</div>

As the previous vignette illustrates, I put my body on the line when working for Gulf Pride, underscoring the types of hard work that were not socially desirable compared to the images and discourses surrounding charitable organizations (e.g., banquets and philanthropic advertisements). While discourses of Pride often focus on the visual components of the parade,

such as rainbow iconography, euphoric forms of gender expression, and organized spaces of celebration (e.g., bars, food trucks, retail vendors), my lived experience illustrates the often mundane, boring, and physically demanding labor that these events require. Other organizers described the physical toll of handling such huge events. Spencer—a long-standing board member of 20 years—recounted how he saw people handle the labor of Pride organizing:

> I try and tell you what it's like, right, but there's no way I can tell you till I'm blue in the face. Until you actually do it right. You're never gonna get it. And it'll break some people. I mean, it clearly broke some people. But we made it. And I got very emotional, but I was just talking to another board member, and I said "Look at what we did! Look at *this."*

Spencer distances his labor from public understanding, stating that the embodied experience of his labor is unseen until done by another person, reflecting an urge for empathy. Even with the demanding nature of Pride labor, Spencer finds meaning in his role, relishing the product of "*this*" fun celebration. Some organizers noted the dangerous implications of this work, citing health issues in the wake of celebrating—especially outside in record heat and humidity. Renee recalled a time when she was injured due to Pride organizing:

> Like last year I did the parade on Saturday and the city market on Sunday—like 13-hour days each. I did wear sunscreen. I didn't wear a hat. I got a sunburn on my eyes, which I didn't even know was a thing. And I work from home. So, I had to keep my computer brightness on the lowest setting. It hurt to keep my eyes open.

Renee emphasizes the physical risk of burning her eyes, prompting serious reflection on what organizing takes.

Individuals often reframed the risk of embodied work within bigger pictures of altruism and volunteerism. Just as some organizers pointed to the title of a "working board," others noted

the mission of nonprofits and service as a positive goal, no matter how burdensome. Isaiah—a board member—calls back to servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019) when discussing the responsibilities of Pride organizers:

> You give a lot of your time, your personal life, in some instances, with money. You know, hopefully you do it. You do it from a personal place of wanting to serve. You're not just a board member. You are a servant. We are here to serve our community.

Here, Isaiah rejects the status afforded to people higher up in Gulf Pride's structure and points to service as an ideal that should motivate everyone, especially if the work is demanding. Tyrique—a board member—corroborated this notion, critiquing Pride parades as sites of superficial entertainment: "We're in it for the right reasons. We're completely self-service, you know what I mean? It's not like any glitz and glamour." While Tyrique manages many of the entertainers, such as drag performers, singers, and dancers, he does not view the labor as having "glitz and glamour." Instead, he recognizes the hard work that necessitates coordinating and planning such events. Other organizers questioned the long-term commitment to service, especially for members who have coordinated the parade for multiple years. Serena summarized the discussion of a board meeting, discussing the stamina required to commit to the organization long-term:

> And I was very vocal about that in our last strategic meeting as well because I'm like, "This is not sustainable. Like you are going to literally run through board members if we think that this is going to work." So, I would say the parts of the organization that are limiting is the lack of staff fueled by the lack of funds. How do we get another full-time body? So, we've spent a lot of time talking about that to take the burden off of the board.

Serena critiques the notion that board members must always be in service positions and encourages the organization to invest in more paid positions (from one part-time person to two). In doing so, Gulf Pride can mitigate the material harm caused by Pride labor.

In summary, upholding diversity as an organizational ideal does not account for the ways Pride organizers make sense of their embodied work, illustrating disparities between social classes and organizational structures. Not only did organizers navigate the embodied experiences of organizing but also the materialization of emotions.

Materializing Emotional Turmoil

"CAN YOU *LISTEN* TO ME FOR **ONE** SECOND?"

"I *NEED* YOU TO CALM DOWN. **I DIDN'T HEAR YOU**."

"**WE NEED TO CLEAR A WAY FOR THE FIRE TRUCKS!**"

"WELL, WHAT DO YOU WANT *ME* TO *DO*?"

"I NEED ALL HANDS ON DECK."

"**FINE!** JUST TELL ME WHERE TO GO!"

I watch as two board members—Devon and Bryce—run away from our parade float minutes before the start time. While the city was scheduled to start the parade, they arrived late. Consequently, hundreds of floats block city marshals on fire trucks from the front of the line.

The Executive Director's spouse chuckles from the front of the golf cart we are sitting in, "I'm impressed. Usually, people start screaming at each other way earlier."

"It got pretty tense at float registration. Devon went full military mode, and other volunteers were not having it." I say.

The spouse looks toward the empty street—one that would be littered with bubbles, beads, and streamers minutes from now, "It's not for the faint of heart."

Over the past few weeks, board members quickly reminded each other to be patient and empathetic on Parade Day. The most chaotic of the events, Parade Day tests the organization's efficacy in handling multiple agencies, unforeseen circumstances, and conflicting personalities. As a result, emotion materialized in the lives of organizers, shaping discussions about how Gulf Pride could succeed in short—and long-term planning.

…

Pride organizers acknowledged their hard work materialized in various emotional responses. Cooren (2018) coins *materialization* to showcase the connection between social and material worlds, stating that some phenomena can "materialize" from discursive features, such as affective states. Serena recounted the negative emotions that shaped the organization's culture: "I don't think people would disagree, but there's sort of this poor outlook, sort of this black cloud thing happening." Serena refers to the materiality of emotion as a "dark cloud" that colors the communication of organizing, which is understandable given hostile spatiotemporal uncertainties and nonprofit sociomaterialities (see Chapter Four). This "dark cloud" refers to the embodied experiences of hard work among organizers, such as long hours, uncomfortable working conditions (e.g., extreme heat), and a lack of organizational infrastructure.

Other organizers critiqued negative emotional outbursts. Bryce stated that much of work involved is thankless:

No one's doing this to get a gold star. I'm not like sitting in meetings pouting. Like y'all don't know that I talked to like three drag queens and listened to them bitch and moan for two hours. Like, where's my cookie? Like, no one fucking cares. So, we should just understand that we're all doing something right. Did the thing that we actually need to get done, get done? So that was a big kerfuffle this year.

Even though he does challenging work, such as negotiating the conflict among various stakeholders (i.e., drag entertainers), he does not see it as a reason to contribute negatively to the organization's structure. During one meeting, I noted a conversation where board members reflected on the hostile emotional climate of Gulf Pride, discussing best practices for next year. In one comment, I noted organizers vowing a "mutual commitment to each other," promising not to "be nasty, snippy, or blame each other during tense moments." In this case, negative emotional climates bar organizers from being effective in their social mission, calling into question what means justify the ends of creating "safe spaces."

While the emotional consequences of Pride labor can be severe, many individuals were happy to work, seeing the positive impact of their efforts override the strain associated with nonprofit labor. Amara—a board member—told me the story of when a child approached her to thank her:

> I asked the parent, "Can I hug him?" And it's those messages that make it worth it, because after an exhausting weekend, right, you're like, on your last drain of energy. It is like drops left to keep going. And then that person comes and says that to you and you're like, okay, never mind, I'm good.

Being thanked for doing an excellent job reaffirms Amara's mission: to provide an educational, safe, and liberatory space for queer people—including children.

While the materialization of Pride labor carried positive and negative connotations, it also acted as a site of critical reflection. Spencer contextualized the role of emotional turmoil within the fight for political agency:

> Gay men and women…we're dramatic. We're a dramatic group of people. You'd almost have to take the emotion out of it. And I don't see how you can …that's the whole idea of

Pride and what it's about. The attacks, the attacks on the community, the tax on medical

care, the attacks on the kids, and the attacks on the drag community You know, we're all

gonna get worked up, right?

While Spencer essentializes the role of emotional turmoil among queer people, he also

foregrounds the importance of political, cultural, and historical context. "Drama," as an

emotional propensity, underscores the tension, labor, and fighting that produces contemporary

approaches to queer organizing—specifically Pride. Organizers dealt with the dilemma of

finding meaning in their work due to hard work and difficult emotions, which caused cascading

effects on the organization due to intersectional differences. In the next section, I highlight how

my positionality in Pride organizing showcased the intersectional politics driving dilemmas of

embodiment, work, and emotion.

Awarding (Privileged) Identity: Intersectional Reflexivity and Hindsight

Before volunteering, I had many ideas about what working for a nonprofit organization

would look like. I imagined people coming together, donating their time and expertise for a

greater cause. I was confident that political agency and diversity would take center stage in Pride

organizing. *Surely, Gulf Pride knows what it is doing. They have been around forever. They hold*

one of the biggest parades in the country. I bet they would welcome a researcher who wants to

know more about their work. I admit that these expectations were naïve. They were based on

hope, visualizing an organization not tethered to neoliberal feminist movements (Rottenberg,

2014)—initiatives that espouse equitable values while simultaneously reinforcing capitalist

modes of production. I did not consider that much of nonprofit work is wrapped in bureaucracy,

mundane details, and event planning that appears disconnected from larger cultural values, such

as queer civil rights. Additionally, I did not consider that my presence would further disrupt an

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unstable organization. My vision of engaged scholarship ignored the sociomaterial consequences of organizing around identity and difference, resulting in a series of personal shocks and surprises while assimilating into Gulf Pride's culture.

Negotiating a relationship with the organization caused unease, troubling the relationship between the research*er* and research*ed*, which is indicative of engaged scholarship (Dempsey & Barge, 2014). While some board members were excited to have me participate, others reacted to my presence with apathy, confusion, or silence. I noted that a board member asked me, "What are you doing here?" multiple times, even though I had explained my goals during a meeting, gained permission from the Executive Director and Volunteer Director, and attended almost every event.

Some individuals saw my expertise as an extension of their own motives in the organization. Devon—the Volunteer Director—was kind enough to integrate me into every meeting, explaining why I was there and what I could do for events, subcommittees, etc. Even with Devon's 'blessing,' most organizers felt constrained by the spatiotemporal uncertainties, nonprofit sociomaterialities, and embodied work of Pride to take me on. In their eyes, I imagine I was another task added to an insurmountable schedule of events. Who would want to have a researcher shadow all their tasks—especially when this person is a first-year volunteer?

Consequently, I ended Pride season with an understanding that engaged work does not happen within the traditional timeline of a Ph.D. One year of working with Gulf Pride may be enough to gather data. However, more work is needed to secure meaningful, deep, and elucidatory relationships that extend beyond a semi-structured interview guide.

Just as organizers dealt with the emotional difficulties of labor, I ended the season feeling like a lousy researcher and person. I looked back at every decision and dissected it, worried that I

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had made up process consent (Ellis, 2007) in my mind, that I had been disingenuous and fake in the interactions between myself and board members, volunteers, and community stakeholders. In retrospect, none of these anxieties are grounded in reality, but the emotional turmoil highlights the attention paid to compassion, ethics, and care in autoethnographic research. I *cared* about my work, and I wanted to make sure that the people around me *accurately* perceived that. These tensions came to life in conversations with Tim—a Volunteer Coordinator—and an award ceremony at the Volunteer Banquet—an event dedicated to celebrating Gulf Pride's volunteer pool at the end of Pride Month.

…

My phone rings. The screen lists an unknown number, but I recognize the local area code. "Hello?"

"Hey David, it's Tim!" *Oh! Tim, one of the Volunteer Coordinators. Why is he calling?*

"Hey Tim, what's up?"

"Oh, nothing much. Hey—I wanted to check in with you. I know you're doing research for the Board of Directors, and that's all good and fun. I've also noticed you've been hanging around some of the same people during events. I've done research as well for other organizations, and I just want to make sure you're getting the whole picture. You feel me?"

Uhm, what the hell? Have I done something wrong? Is he referring to Devon? Have others been talking about me?

"I'm happy to talk more about this with you! I'm really thankful that Devon has included me in a lot of the events, but my research is not reflective of just him and his perspective. I'm also conducting interviews with the entire board and some volunteers, including you. I was going to text you to get something set up. It's my goal to hear from everyone. I apologize if it's looked

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like something else entirely." I'm pacing around my room, eyes darting in multiple directions as I build contingency plans. *Have I entirely messed this up?*

"Oh good…good, I just wanted to make sure. I know you mentioned your goals at the beginning of the season. I was worried that *someone* had given you an impression of Gulf Pride that isn't entirely accurate. I think you and I both know what that's about. Anyway, I won't bother you. I'll see you at the shuffleboard club!" *Click.*

I put down my phone as I feel my heart rate falling, letting out a sigh of relief. *What prompted that phone call? What do other people think about Devon? Have I made a wrong impression by working with him during the events?*

…

"Hey, we're about to do the award ceremony. Can you, Renee, and Tim stand up with me while we present?" Devon asks.

He looks so much more relaxed. The past few weeks have been hard on everyone, but the Volunteer Banquet has a markedly different vibe from the other events I have attended. In the shuffleboard club, cue sticks have wiped away Pride season's emotional turmoil, filling the air with clinking glasses, jubilant laughter, and the absence of urgency or scheduling.

I walk up to the front of the room, looking down at my feet. *I bet some people still do not know what I am doing here. What makes me different from the other volunteers who have attended other events?*

Devon begins his speech by thanking the room of over 75 volunteers for their hard work this season, especially in the hostile political climate. He turns to Renee and Tim and thanks each of them for assisting him in recruiting, coordinating, and training volunteers. Finally, Devon cocks his head over to me. *Oh god, what is he going to say?*

Devon smiles, "Finally, we would like to thank someone special for all the hard work they've been doing this season. This is David Dooling. He has been at almost all our events and committee meetings, personally helping us to identify ways that Gulf Pride can be even better for next year. We want to give him a little something special…"

I feel a tap on my back. Turning around, I am shocked to see Spencer—a board member—while he hugs me, putting an object in my hands. Looking down, I glance at the plaque (Figure 2) before Devon announces that I have been given the Pride Hero Award. "Let's all give David a round of applause for his hard work!"

Noise erupts from the room as I shrivel deep inside myself. *I do not deserve this at all. Much of what I did was for my own interests. Should that be considered altruistic?* I do not have time to consider the ethics of being given an award before two other board members enter the room, holding another plaque in their hands.

Miguel—a board member—steps beside Devon, waiting for the murmuring in the room to die down, "Hello, everyone! We couldn't end the ceremony without thanking Devon for his time, labor, and massive planning this season. Devon, we would also like to present you with this Pride Hero Award as a board member for Gulf Pride! We couldn't do it without you!"

Applause erupts from volunteers as I hug Devon, "You totally deserved this! Thank you for helping me navigate the organization."

Devon glows with his recognition, "Thank you! I'm honored."

I walk away toward the open bar, smiling at Tyler—one of the volunteers I had made friends with—while we giggle at the insinuation that *I* got an award.
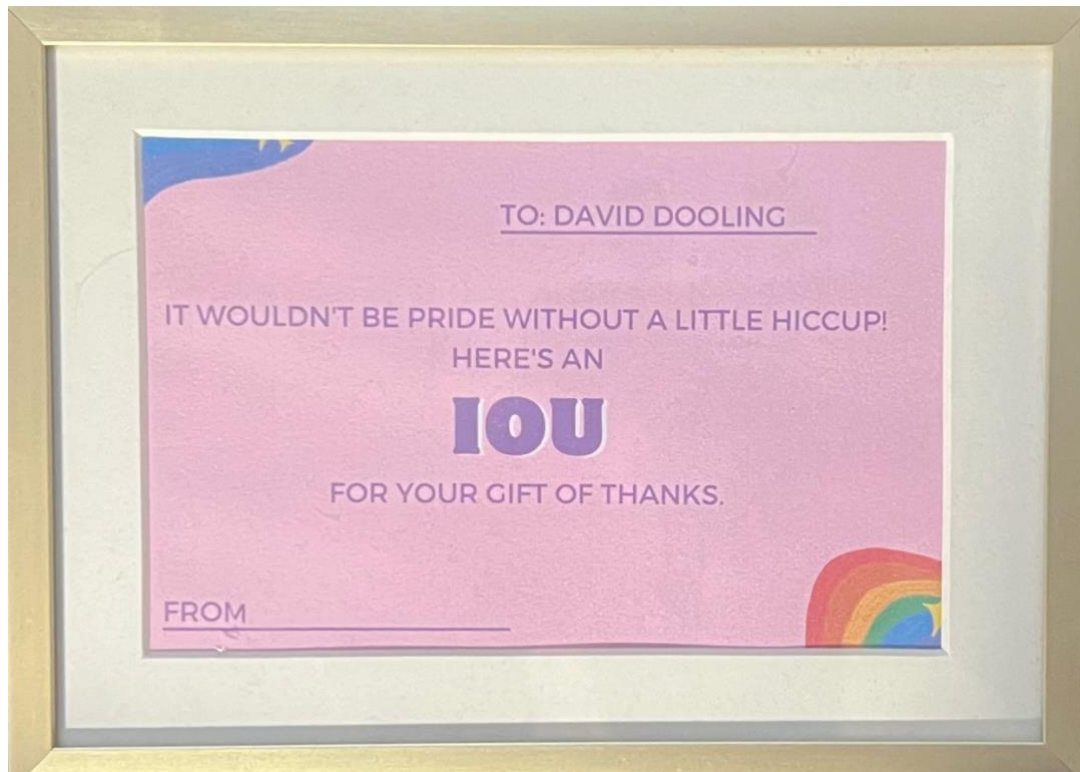
Figure 2. Photo of "IOU" Pride Hero Award. Photographed by author (edited to omit organization's name).

Tyler looks dumbfounded at the plaque, "Wait, why is yours different from the glass one Devon got."

Before I can say anything, Miguel walks up to me with his hands up in surrender, "Okay, so the trophy place totally fucked up. They spelled your last name wrong ('Dooley'), but once it's corrected, we will totally get you the glass plaque you deserve."

I hug Miguel, feeling like my efforts to finally assimilate into the organization have succeeded, "Thank you! I'm in total shock that I got this."

Amanda—the Board President—chuckles from behind Miguel, "I'm not. We decided that you deserved it. You're amazing."

As I leave that night, I cannot help but feel relieved. This award reflects the physical, social, and methodological labor I put into Gulf Pride. *I must have done something right if I got an award for it*.

…

It was not until weeks later that I became familiar with those awards' tumultuous, contentious, and hegemonic politics. I am brought up to speed as I sit with Miguel in the shaded grove outside a coffee shop. The awards given to Devon and me were not appointed based on consensus from the Board of Directors. Instead, three board members came together to surprise whom they deemed "hard-working," causing rifts between board members who believed it was genuine and others who argued that it echoed a historical privileging of White gay men (Bruce, 2016). Miguel—a White Latino man—discusses the fallout between board members after the Volunteer Banquet:

> I'll take full ownership of [the awards] because it was my idea. And it was my duty. I used the wrong language. And at the end of the day when I came to Amanda and Serena with the idea—in retrospect—*Bryce* should have been part of that conversation. I did not include Bryce, because it became very clear that he had another agenda.

Here, Miguel notes that Bryce—a Black board member—has a hidden agenda of becoming the next President of the Board of Directors. In this case, awarding Devon threatens other board members vying for social and organizational support. Additionally, it casts Bryce's efforts to achieve notoriety in the organization as a Black board member "hidden," eliciting problematic narratives about which races can navigate organizational politics in a morally upstanding manner.

Other Pride organizers contextualized the identity politics of the awards ceremony. Eden—a White board member—recalled what happened when Bryce asserted his dissatisfaction to other board members (of color):

Bryce called Raphael and said, "What do you think?" And of course, if Raphael had no information, he's all of a sudden going to have a bias. He's gonna say, "Oh, so they've given [Devon] this award, and they didn't ask the rest of us? I'm going in with a bad feeling." Rather than go up the chain or whatever, Raphael calls me. But maybe I had also heard Miguel say, "Hey, I think it'd be really nice to honor all of [Devon's] hard work." And I'm like, "Yeah, I think you're right. How lucky are we that he doesn't have a job right now? And he busted his ass. He was a terrific volunteer." I have no emotional attachment. I don't need an award. It doesn't bother me that somebody else gets an award. I don't feel slighted. Now, it should have been a process, but it wasn't bypassed in a malicious way.

Eden points to the back-channeling that resulted in a faction of the Board of Directors critiquing the award based on a lack of communication and attention paid to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, Eden defends the use of the award based on the hard work that Devon committed to, even if a more professional process (of consensus from the board) is bypassed along the way. Isaiah—a Black board member—articulated the hurt caused by awarding Devon haphazardly:

We were not involved in that decision. I know that Devon worked his butt off. I did not personally take offense. Maybe I raised my eyebrows and processed, like, "How did this happen?" I didn't like the way that it happened. But I certainly did not have an issue with him being recognized.

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In this case, Isaiah did not critique the award itself due to the hard work exhibited by Devon but instead questioned the process that granted him recognition so quickly. These organizational channels illustrate the organizing features of race in Pride organizing.

…

Narratives about race, recognition, and power at the awards ceremony spoke to more significant discussions about identity in Pride spaces. Many organizers discussed the racialized forms of hard work that carried different meanings. Scholars couch Pride organizing in systems of White supremacy, arguing that trends in queer civil rights leadership ignore the intersectional implications of race (DeFilippis, 2019; Ghaziani et al., 2016). In the case of Gulf Pride, race was simultaneously ignored and targeted as an ideal of diversity for the organization. Eden recalled the history of the organization's racism:

> There was some chatter in the community that the [Gulf Pride] board had become very, very White…And there were some events that took place, and people were like, "Well, that's a really great event for *that* population, or *that* event is welcome or encouraged." And it just reinforced our issue with the board. We don't have a transaction… we're just missing everything.

Eden summarizes that the makeup is primarily White, resulting in critiques from community stakeholders. In response, Gulf Pride works to hold "certain" events for diverse populations, hinting at race with the emphasis on "that." Other individuals saw Whiteness as historically situated in material struggle, not racism. Jason—a White queer man and the LGBTQ+ City Liaison—discussed his issues with labeling Gulf Pride as "too White":

> Cisgender White guys of my age group get all the blame, but we were all fighting our own fight at the time. I always get frustrated when I hear the argument that we didn't do

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enough to elevate people, but a lot of people don't realize we were dying. For many years

fight or flight.

Jason calls Pride organizing back to the material threats of the AIDS epidemic, creating a shift in the social movement's priorities (Ghaziani & Baldassarri, 2011). In effect, Jason critiques race based on feelings of White fragility. DiAngelo (2011) notes that White people are insulated from uncomfortable discussions, thus lowering their ability to tolerate race-related stress. Jason's "frustration" stems from discourses about Whiteness in Pride organizing, obfuscating uncomfortable conversations about power, control, and privilege.

This phenomenon was evident in some interactions between White and Black board members with narratives that highlighted the "vulnerability" of White people and the "aggressiveness" of Black people. In one meeting, conversations about diversity occurred between a faction of Black board members and a White board member—Devon—resulting in the latter person packing up and refusing to contribute to the discussion out of defensiveness. Miguel contextualized racialized discourses by emphasizing the dynamic relationship between different intersections of identity: "White men fear being treated the way they've treated other queer folks in this space. It's the same thing as your community has been oppressed, but you're oppressing a different community." Miguel notes that White queer people exist in an intersection where they are oppressed based on sexuality and privileged based on race, resulting in ironic expressions of White fragility. White queer men fear the consequences of their own racialized actions despite existing in a marginalized community.

Consequently, organizers of color resisted systems of Whiteness, calling out hypocrisies and emotional dilemmas regarding what counts as racial diversity. Amara—a board member— noted an instance where someone questioned her credibility as a Black woman:

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I think it was Street Festival. Tyrique [a Black board member], myself, and Matthew [a White board member] were walking up and down the strip. And someone came over to ask a question, and they looked directly at Matthew. All three of us had on yellow board member shirts. But when the question was addressed, they were more comfortable talking to Matthew rather than myself. I love that our board has a pretty nice mix of races. But, if someone were to walk up to our entire board and they were to try and guess who would be the board, they might look at Matthew.

She articulates how the image of a "leader" is raced under White supremacist logic, rendering Matthew more capable than Tyrique or her. These narratives discredit the status shared by board members, resulting in more emotional labor for organizers of color.

While I noted routine discussions of addressing race in leadership, some organizers questioned such motives of diversity and inclusion. Isaiah stated: "And even if we have diversity, just because you may look like me does not mean you necessarily represent me, so that's a whole 'nother conversation." Isaiah underscores the phenomenological differences that intersectional identities espouse. Blackness is not a monolithic experience due to other intersections of identity, such as gender and social class. Therefore, Isaiah does not see quotas of representation as a one-size-fits-all solution to the White supremacist logics at Gulf Pride.

In some cases, organizers noted that their intersectional identities exacerbated racial dilemmas. Miguel noted that the Board of Directors used his Latino identity to "do the Spanish interviews" for media outlets. While Miguel is happy to contribute, he struggles with the insinuation that he is the only person who can handle such tasks, resulting in anxiety about speaking for an entire population. Racial politics within Gulf Pride reflect one intersection of difference shaping organizers' embodied dilemmas.

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Race was not the sole organizing feature in Pride. When applied to the award ceremony, other individuals were ready to point to the intersectional implications of awarding someone who is both White and a man. Amanda—a White woman—critiqued the uproar about the reward being inequitable:

> The award thing is kind of a perfect example. There seems to be a fragmented view of what is inclusion, right? I mean, can you imagine any one of the women on the board taking objection to anyone else getting an award?

Amanda says the idea of women being awarded would not cause such an uproar, citing the "male ego" as a hegemonic identity that causes drama. In this case, race backgrounds the gendered politics contextualizing the need for competition, recognition, and reward for hard work.

While some organizers pointed to the award ceremony as a case study for race, gender, and work, others had more pragmatic explanations, citing what value can add to an organization that runs on free labor. Eden offered her view of the awards and why people were upset:

> And it's funny because, to me, it was never an award that said, "You're the best board member ever." And at the Volunteer Banquet, I remember saying to Raphael at one point, "There are people who need reinforcement. There are people who thrive on recognition. And I get it, you're not one of them. I'm not one of them. I could never get an award for the rest of my life, and I will be just fine. And you are a person with enough self-confidence, and you don't need it. But if this is an acknowledgment from somebody that they will value, what does that take from you?" … It was literally this little plaque, right? 50 bucks.

Here, Eden recalls that, in conversations with other board members, the issue is not of identity but of how people make meaning of recognition. Additionally, the emphasis on the plaque being an inconsequential amount of money reflects a downplaying of material impact, even if the symbolic and cultural effects of awards are much greater. As I wrapped up interviews with each of the board members, I could not help but feel complicit in the award ceremony, being attached to a figure who embodied harmful narratives of White supremacy and toxic masculinity.

…

"Baby, can you grab my yoga mat? I'm going to meet Miguel in the parking lot to grab my award." I start to unlock the car door as I look back at Omar.

Omar smiles as he removes his seatbelt, "Weren't you supposed to have that months ago?"

I shiver as I open the door, feeling the mix of December air and drizzling rain hit my skin. I see Miguel from across the parking lot, waving his hand as I skip over puddles and potholes.

Miguel opens his trunk and hands me a heavy box, "I'm so sorry it took this long. It's literally been in my trunk for months. I've never done yoga here at this location before. I'll have to join you sometime."

"LOL, it's totally okay. If I'm being honest, I forgot it existed." *I thought you all forgot about reordering a replacement trophy*.

Miguel and I chat about our days before heading our separate ways. As I lie down on my mat in *Savasana*, I think back to the intersectional politics that made my body worthy of "Pride Heroism."

…

Later that night, I opened the box, revealing a beautiful plaque (Figure 3) engraved with my name. The glass captures my reflection, mirroring my face within the borders of the award's curved edges. I contemplate the image of my body in the boundaries of organizational recognition. As a White queer man, my participation in Pride organizing is historically privileged and communicatively reinforced (Bruce, 2016). Hindsight (Freeman, 2010) allows me to look back at my time with Gulf Pride, revealing more significant systems of power that I initially missed. I can critically reflect on how my assimilation into the organization emboldened systems of Whiteness, masculinity, and hierarchy. While many Pride organizers pointed to Devon as an embodiment of systemic privilege and entitlement, my association with him created further rifts, highlighting the hidden politics that Tim had hinted at in our phone call.

When I first met with Devon, I was surprised by his refreshing take on the organizational culture: "I'm gonna be real with you. This organization is a fucking mess." I took his cynicism as a sign of organizational transformation and growth. It was not until the end of Pride season that I recognized the toxic emotional climate materializing from Devon's attitudes about labor and validation, ultimately contributing to the "black cloud" hanging above Pride organizers. Undoubtedly, Devon contributed most of his time to the organization, but he routinely commented that no one else was meeting his standards. Consequently, other organizers noted negative interactions with Devon based on apprehension, fear, and anger about his expectations. While many organizers pointed to Pride as a fun and casual space for celebrating identity, Devon treated it like a regimented event with clear-cut expectations, schedules, and rules, which alienated other individuals.

Figure 3. Photo of the official Pride Hero Award. Photographed by author (edited to omit organization's name).

When Devon introduced me to the Board of Directors as a researcher who would assist and shadow others, I thanked him for the introduction. I felt secure in the idea that all

stakeholders perceived my participation warmly. It was not until I started talking with people individually, such as Tim, that I understood the bigger picture: Some people saw me as Devon's "puppet," using my title as a researcher to gather information and cause drama. Thankfully, individual meetings allowed me to change the reputation I had cultivated in association with Devon. When Devon ensured I was comfortable at community events with VIP tickets, free merchandise, and flexible rules about volunteer shifts, I felt like an organizational insider. After talking to other board members, I am embarrassed to admit that I should have worked more diligently to prove myself deserving of such privileges.

When I interviewed Devon at the end of Pride's season, I was shocked to hear that he would be quitting, confused at how he could put in all this work and quit. After talking to others, I recognize the severity of his actions, the degree to which he alienated others, and the irony of how "Pride Heroism" can often embolden the righteousness of White men.

Ultimately, my focus on Devon does not act as a condemnation of "one bad apple," which would reinforce a simplistic correspondent model of communication (Harris, 2019). This judgment would ignore systemic issues of power, identity, and culture. In connection with Devon, I hold myself accountable as an arbiter of White masculine privilege in Pride spaces, ashamed of the idea that, in association with others, I contributed to an adverse emotional climate and dysfunctional organizational structure. Committed to intersectional reflexivity (Hummel, 2020; Jones Jr., 2010), I take this narrative as a lesson that speaks to the contentious nature of engaged scholarship, emphasizing how specific and ambiguous situations (especially in community spaces like Pride) reveal intersectional issues of privilege and oppression (Yep, 2016).

As illustrated, Pride organizers encountered embodied dilemmas of tokenization, creating uncomfortable situations highlighting the disparate meanings assigned to work, emotion, and intersectional recognition in organizational contexts. Ultimately, this chapter argues that attempts at creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive organizations fail to account for embodied and intersectional differences, which fragment taken-for-granted structures of hierarchy, status, and recognition/award. Just as a "Pride Hero" award split Gulf Pride along intersections of race, gender, and organizational status, identity is rife with tension in organizational contexts, making it impossible to quantify in progressive agendas. In the next chapter, I discuss how Pride organizers navigate systems of sexual normativity, whereby 'ideal' forms of citizenship govern the boundaries of social movement organizing.

CHAPTER SIX: CRAFTING SEXUAL CITIZENSHIP IN PRIDE SPACES

The Marsha P. Johnson banquet is a significant fundraising opportunity for Gulf Pride. This year's theme is "resilience," tapping into the historical perseverance of queer civil rights and emphasizing the dire need for community support. In a year of unprecedented political extremism and institutional backlash from local and state lawmakers, the banquet invites donations from various community stakeholders, conflating economic investment in Gulf Pride with queer social activism.

My job at the event is to check people in by asking their names and crossing them off a list, ensuring a division between people who have paid to be a part of the event and the "general public" who walk by the art museum without access. In most of my roles as a volunteer, I find myself with little to do. Outside of Parade Weekend— a celebration with hundreds of volunteers—ancillary events like this one are often overstaffed, leaving many volunteers to go home early or act as attendees. Coordinators place the remaining volunteers in every possible location. Before getting to my station, attendees must park their cars with a complimentary valet, walk through a security checkpoint, scan their tickets with door attendants, and grab a Gulf Pride magazine from the front desk. When people do make it to my station, my job is interrupted by Renee—a Volunteer Coordinator—whose memorization of the list renders me all but unnecessary.

There are a few moments that stump me. In multiple cases, individuals walk in without a ticket or spot on the list. Before we can ask more questions, the individual often scans the room, looking for a board member to bail them out. While the boundaries separating the event from the

public are concrete and secure, individuals can still bypass them by fluidly organizing around social class, using the capital accrued by knowing 'certain' board members as a form of entry into a prestigious and highly coveted event. When applied to queer spaces, this communicative maneuvering in tickets, checkpoints, and capital embodies homonormativity—the privileging of White, upper-class, able-bodied queer bodies in social movements (Duggan, 2002; 2012). Furthermore, this event appears to cater to such norms with most attendants being White and upper-class, which reflect the target audience of philanthropic events writ large.

As check-in winds down, I stroll through the crowd's tuxedos, ball gowns, and androgynous attire that make me feel run-down in a thrifted sweater and palazzo pants. I see different board members peak out from the crowd, instructed to dress "as wild as possible" to showcase the bright, carnivalesque, and euphoric expressions of queerness that drew me to Pride in the first place. Nancy—the Executive Director—ushers employees from a local hospital toward an open bar. Her black ball gown glitters with embroidered crystals and feathers, trailing up her neck and braided hair as she walks away to network, ensuring the continuation of a title sponsorship. Bryce—a Board Co-Vice President—walks in with a fabulous pink suit, holding an expensive Louis Vuitton bag as he takes selfies with attendees. And then there is "Deva" — the drag queen persona of Devon—the Volunteer Director. As a co-host for the event, Deva will walk attendees through the history of the Stonewall Riots, a pivotal moment in the queer civil rights movement that propelled queer identity into the public sphere. In between historical facts and figures, Deva will invite stakeholders to present, illustrating the balance between queer visibility and capitalist profit in the organization's work.

As board members move me from the check-in station to the hundreds of champagne flutes that need to be handed out in the auditorium, I am most interested in what Mayor Lorne

has to say. His association with the queer community and the city is a point of ambiguity for Gulf Pride. The previous mayor codified queer civil rights in an official proclamation, popularized Pride as a significant site for tourism in the city, and ardently attended Parade Weekend. In comparison, the mayor's platform focused primarily on racial justice, responding to the cultural discourses and disparities manifesting from the Black Lives Matter movement. In response, many Pride organizers expressed their anxiety about a mayor who did not carry the same enthusiasm for queer civil rights, destabilizing the mutually beneficial relationship that kept our organization afloat. Serena—a Board Co-Vice President and the other co-host of the event—stands at the podium, pausing during the applause of a slam poetry session before introducing the next speaker, "In our beautiful city, we are so very fortunate for the support of our local politicians and police departments. Our next speaker is a second-generation politician, a change-maker, and an advocate for Gulf Pride. We proudly welcome Mayor Lorne."

Applause erupts as I look up from the woman scrutinizing me as I hand her a champagne flute. The mayor glides up to the stage, waving at the crowd as he pulls out his script. His speech is beautiful and articulate.

"Thank you to the Gulf Pride committee for hosting this remarkable event and for your dedication to organizing an incredible group of events throughout this Pride Month. And especially during this unprecedented time in our nation. These times are a challenge. It's maddening. It's frightening, is surreal. You sometimes wake up and ask yourself, "What nation am I living in when entire groups of people can be removed, from having conversations, when books are banned, history is rewritten, and rights are rescinded." But despite all those challenges and others, I believe that they are actually creating a great opportunity for change in our nation during a time when so many in power seek to divide and to objectify. We are, in this city, a

shining beacon of light for those who are—in many cases—desperate for hope. Those who have been targeted, dismissed, discriminated against, and in some cases, physically attacked. And some have even had their lives taken away because of who they are, because of the color of their skin, who they loved, and how they identified. But here in this city, we are standing together for truth, for equality, and for justice."

The mayor's words take me aback. This speech articulates the material threats that destabilize queer communities, paying specific attention to feminist dilemmas that limit Gulf Pride's efficacy. I am curious about the relationship that the mayor draws between our organization and the city as "a beacon of light" for marginalized community members, especially when the room is swimming in social class privilege. *What "city" is he referring to?* His speech continues.

"Despite all the craziness around us, that's why this Pride is so important this year. For every member of the LGBTQ+ community, for every queer or questioning person, for every trans individual, we are standing, not for political gain or publicity, but simply because it's the right thing to do. It is the human thing to do. It is the patriotic thing to do. We're not gonna take our words back now. It is the **patriotic** thing to do."

I grapple with the insinuation that marginalization aligns with national identity. Both categories overlap, but the speech constructs them in a way where patriotism directly benefits from "particular" identities, implicating politics of tokenization, representation, and exploitation. While Mayor Lorne disavows any political agendas motivating him to speak here, I am critical of the construction of a banquet as a neoliberal device for social activism. Because the banquet is a fundraiser, it relies on channels of social and economic capital to maintain the mission of Gulf Pride, which erodes public interests in grassroots activism (Rottenberg, 2014). Simultaneously,

Mayor Lorne's audience reinforces his message within a robust network of community stakeholders that politically galvanizes his campaign and title. By conflating patriotism and queerness together, I worry that Gulf Pride is being used as a puppet for grander political machinations. As the applause between statements rhythmically falls, I look back at the mayor.

"So here in this city, during Pride Month—and every day of the year—we will continue to stand to be that beacon of light and hope. We are a place where everyone is respected, where we will proudly display the Pride flag, where we will uphold the ideals of freedom and liberty upon which this nation was founded. Now, we know this won't be easy, but I'm kind of in a fighting movement. We know the struggle is real. But as Dr. Martin Luther King said, it's precisely in these times of challenge that the measure of our worth is determined and is most vital to our nation's progress. And you all know the late Congressman John Lewis said we must be courageous enough to sometimes embrace trouble…good trouble…necessary trouble. And President Barack Obama said that quote, 'The arc of the moral universe may bend toward justice, but it doesn't bend alone. To secure the gains this country has made requires constant vigilance.' I know we're all committed to this work. And I'll believe that if we persevere—if we do not waver or falter in the face of hate, lies and injustice, if we remain, yes…awake—then we will push the moral arc of our nation toward that justice. I could not be more proud to stand with you as mayor of this city. We see the world through Pride in this city."

The room erupts as people give Mayor Lorne a standing ovation. As I join the other volunteers in the corner of the room, I feel my curiosity morph into suspicion. While I appreciate the mayor's political statements that fight against institutional violence and injustice, I note that every sentence spins queer activism into a tool that advances the city's (and nation's) initiatives. Embedding issues of queerness in "freedom" and "liberty" undoubtedly align with the fight for

civil rights more generally. However, placing Pride within traditional models of citizenship ignores the alternative, subversive, and sensorial manifestations of queerness that deny dominant structures. Bryce approaches the volunteers and me, handing us champagne flutes, "During this next part, you're going to spread throughout the room and start the toast when the time is right."

Serena and Deva end the night with a call to action. Serena starts, "That was absolutely incredible. Thank you. On May 23rd, 2023, President Biden issued a press release proclamation on LGBTQI+ Pride Month. Let us share two paragraphs from that release." She proceeds to read the proclamation, published by the presidential administration:

> Today, our Nation faces another inflection point. In 2023 alone, State and local legislatures have already introduced over 600 hateful laws targeting the LGBTQI+ community. Books about LGBTQI+ people are being banned from libraries. Transgender youth in over a dozen States have had their medically necessary health care banned. Homophobic and transphobic vitriol spewed online has spilled over into real life, as armed hate groups intimidate people at Pride marches and drag performances, and threaten doctors' offices and children's hospitals that offer care to the LGBTQI+ community. Our hearts are heavy with grief for the loved ones we have lost to anti-LGBTQI+ violence. Despite these attacks, the LGBTQI+ community remains resilient. LGBTQI+ Americans are defiantly and unapologetically proud. Youth leaders are organizing walkouts at high schools and colleges across the country to protest discriminatory laws. LGBTQI+ young people and their parents are demonstrating unimaginable courage by testifying in State capitols in defense of their basic rights. (The White House, 2023, pp. 3-4)

Bryce waves us to different corners of the room while Deva raises her glass. I note that the use of

Biden's speech is strategic, contributing to homonationalist rhetoric that uses queer

progressivism as a tool, identifying the U.S. as a globally "woke" superpower, thus masking

many of extremist and supremacist discourses that Gulf Pride navigates daily (Puar, 2013; 2018).

Deva sounds excited as she builds suspense in the room.

"There's so much going on in the world. We appreciate you taking the time to be here

with us tonight, to represent this community, to be involved with Gulf Pride. We thank you for

being here. There are QR codes that have on your table all night tonight. This year—with the

current legislation—we had many of our sponsors decrease the amount of funds they donated.

They feared being aligned with an LGBTQ+ organization. This is not the time to fear it. This is

the time to support it. We need you to show up. We need visibility to be the face of this—not

run, relocate, or hide from this. This is the time to show up more than ever. So please consider

donating to Gulf Pride so we can continue not only events like this but also support the

community. We are now going to ask you to stand for our champagne toast. This is not just a

toast but also an agreement to stand with our community. We're going to ask you to repeat after

us…"

I WILL SUPPORT MY LOCAL COMMUNITY…

BY VOLUNTEERING, ADVOCATING, DONATING, AND PROVIDING…

A SAFE SPACE FOR EVERYONE…

CHEERS!

…

I leave the event tonight feeling mindful of the way that queer social movements align

themselves with dominant interests. As Chapter Four illustrates, Gulf Pride relies on various

stakeholders to financially support its mission, placing contradictory and contentious demands above radical, emancipatory politics. Many of these entities require 'particular' experiences (e.g., parties, celebrations) rooted in beliefs about social class, professionalism, and normativity. Just as the Marsha P. Johnson banquet reaffirms the division between influential stakeholders with money and marginalized populations without access, the organization navigates the construction of queer identities in a network of contractual agreements. Serena and Deva's toast clearly illustrates a fundamental contract between stakeholders: By financially contributing to Gulf Pride, the organization will continue to hold safe spaces that ironically cater to privileged stakeholders.

Additionally, this event illustrates the use of queer progressivism as a puppet for municipal, state, and national agendas, upholding the image of an ideal citizen in Pride spaces. Only when I finish my fieldwork and begin exploring the relationships between organizers and outside stakeholders do I understand the complexity of these relationships more deeply.

…

This chapter grapples with the construction of sexual citizenship in Pride spaces, resulting in tumultuous landscapes of power that pit organizers against dominant interests. Sexual citizenship is defined as a co-constructed system of meaning that aligns queer civil rights with fundamental human rights, assimilating queer subjects into democratic models of lawfulness, social status, and mainstream cultural rituals (e.g., marriage; Richardson, 2017; Weeks, 1998). I draw from literature on co-sexuality, sexual citizenship, and sociomateriality to answer RQ3: "How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate systems of sexual normativity?" I argue that by partnering with dominant interests (e.g., the city), Pride organizers craft an ideological body (Pineau, 2002) of queerness that upholds and challenges nuanced

systems of power simultaneously (Lamusse, 2016). While the previous chapter grapples with the

sociomaterial threats that dampen Gulf Pride's political activism, this chapter discusses the

communicative relationships that inform civil liberties among queer people. Specifically, the

organization's mutually beneficial relationship with various stakeholders maps a communicative

blueprint for sexual citizenship that embodies homonormativity and homonationalism. These

systems reward 'particular' queer bodies with intersectional privileges—such as wealth, national

identity, Whiteness, and ability—and demonize those who fit within constructed boundaries of

'Otherness' (Bruce, 2016; Duggan, 2012; Puar, 2018; Weiss, 2018). As illustrated in the

previous vignette, Pride organizers benefit from the construction of civil rights in tandem with

the proliferation of the city, state, and nation, pushing an agenda that uplifts queerness and

government systems simultaneously.

Pride organizers respond to systems of sexual citizenship by engaging in what I call

homoventriloquism—a sociomaterial strategy that filters queerness between different bodies,

structures, and identities. I coin homoventriloquism to illustrate how queerness as an identity and

social movement is passed between various stakeholders, challenging discourses of "*who* is

speaking in the name of justice, commonsense, or freedom [emphasis added]" (Cooren, 2013, p.

263).

In this chapter, I begin by outlining the contract of sexual citizenship between dominant

interests and Pride organizers. Then, I analyze how sexual citizenship is achieved vis-à-vis the

economization and securitization of Pride spaces. Finally, I discuss how Pride organizers respond

to logics of sexual citizenship by engaging in homoventriloquism.

Visibility is a Contract, not a Virtue: Defining Sexual Citizenship

Pride organizers constructed the need for queer visibility by establishing formal and informal contracts with various stakeholders. These agreements facilitated a mutually beneficial relationship, maintaining the mission of Gulf Pride and upholding the status of local entertainers, businesses, governments, and national organizations. As discussed in the previous chapter, Pride organizers grappled with the boundary disputes indicative of a stakeholder organization, engaging in 'marketable' forms of activism that limited the political agency of queerness in the public sphere. Neoliberal branding practices (Branton & Compton, 2021) that appeal to straight and queer populations simultaneously entrenched Gulf Pride in a 'tit-for-tat' model of community engagement. Thus, social justice initiatives that emphasize the need for queer visibility were only accomplished when they also benefited other partners. This section elaborates on such relationships, emphasizing how civil rights among queer people are contingent on transactional interactions with different agents, upholding different 'modes of governance' that regulate social, cultural, and political expressions of identity (Foucault, 2007).

Organizers routinely noted that stakeholder relationships defended them, and queer individuals more broadly, from discrimination and violence. Tyrique—a board member— discussed his vision of Pride:

> What does Pride mean to me? Pride is the one month where I can truly love myself, unconditionally, like I have that permission. I can just celebrate myself. Even in the city, it's going to be pretty liberal and accepting. But I still don't feel comfortable walking down the street, holding my fiancé's hand. But during the month of Pride, I just feel like I have that permission. I love that. And for me, also, like, hospitality is in my blood. It's all

about making people feel something and being able to do that, for 350,000 people, that's

pretty awesome.

Tyrique's ability to assimilate into social models of citizenship—whereby individuals feel like

they have rights to basic welfare (safety) and participation in society (Dwyer, 2010) ——is only

available in the spatiotemporal boundaries of Pride. Additionally, Tyrique aligns human rights

("Love myself, unconditionally") with the obligation of hosting a celebration for 350,000 people.

This motivation is double-edged: It showcases the cultural impact of Pride to a broad audience,

and it entrenches notions of queer visibility within metrics of representation. In other words,

Pride insulates people from heteronormative expectations *if* it garners a large enough crowd,

which aligns with homonormative constructions of queerness that privilege specific

intersectional identities (e.g., social class, Whiteness, cosmopolitanism; Duggan, 2002).

Networks of Sexual Citizenship

Sexual citizenship in Pride spaces pervaded micro-, meso- and macro-levels of analysis.

In interpersonal interactions, organizers conceptualized the importance of queerness in line with

economic contracts that benefitted their mission to support marginalized communities. During

Gulf Pride's retreat, I noted an interaction where a board member called attention to a struggling

community member—a drag entertainer who performed at many of the events. This person lost

their full-time job and needed aid. The Board of Directors discussed their responsibility in taking

care of this person. On one hand, Gulf Pride contracted this person as a seasonal worker,

justifying an extra 'bonus' that would keep them financially afloat. On the other hand, asking for

additional money put stress on an organization that struggled to achieve financial stability. In

many conversations, the Executive Director and board members noted that putting on big events

resulted in "breaking even" each year. In this case, helping a community member required "a

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return on investment" for the organization. One board member asked if the person would agree to get an "advance" for performing at the organization's Halloween event. While the Board of Directors agreed to support this person, it relied on a contract of citizenship that defers aid to individuals who prove themselves with (promised) performances of labor. Instead of donating money outright in an act of community engagement, organizers requested the promise of future work, benefiting from the "productive value of queer labor" (Burchiellaro, 2021, p. 765).

Definitions of sexual citizenship included not only micro-level interactions but also meso-level relationships between vendors, organizations, and government systems. Various stakeholders emphasized the importance of Pride—not based on its cultural, social, or political impact, but instead—on how it benefits them. Spencer—a board member with 20 years of experience—recounted the transition of the parade from Main Street (a historically gay neighborhood) to downtown:

> When we moved downtown, we had a meeting with some people from [Main Street]. And we said, "Look, we want to move the parade downtown for safety, because the numbers are too big. But we'll leave the Street Festival on [Main Street]." And one business owner said to us, "We tolerate your Street Festival because we want the parade." So, do you imagine my love for [Main Street] is growing at this point?

Here, Spencer conceptualizes the mission of Gulf Pride within a network of community stakeholders that benefit from the parade's impact, visibility, and stimulation of the economy. While Parade Weekend is split between Parade Day on Saturday and the Street Festival on Sunday, business owners criticize the move downtown because it threatens their profit-earning potential. These rationales pit queer safety as a fundamental human right against contracts that benefit businesses. In this case, business owners prioritize the economic potential of Pride over

the safety of queer bodies, especially since Main Street has many points of entry that make securing it difficult. Further, this quote indicates the limits of public support for Pride. When Pride events are less profitable, LGBTQ+ bodies and celebrations are merely "tolerate[d]" by local businesses.

In addition to business owners, the city government conceptualized Pride within definitions of tourism and progressivism. The city benefitted from Pride because it bolstered a 'pink economy' of queer consumers and its marketability as an 'LGBTQ+-friendly city'[8] (Weiss, 2018). One hallmark of LGBTQ+ progressivism is the Human Rights Campaign's (2023) Municipality Equality Index (MEI), which "examines how inclusive municipal laws, policies, and services are of LGBTQ+ people…Cities are rated based on non-discrimination laws, the municipality as an employer, municipal services, law enforcement and leadership on LGBTQ+ equality" (p. 1). The city's relationship with Pride facilitated a high MEI score, creating a positive relationship where both parties emphasize the need for queer civil liberties. Bryce—a Board Co-Vice President—dissected the importance of the city's relationship with Gulf Pride:

> The city shows up to the things that we need them to show up for. They're able to clear the path. They're able to make security things available to us. And we continue to talk very positively about the city, which is helpful for them, and how they engage with the Human Rights Campaign for surveys that go out. When you see those articles that say, "The city is the number one place to live in for queer people," you get on those lists with the City Liaison, your relationship with Pride, and how the city behaves.

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[8] While I use the term 'queer' to describe an ontological response to systems of sexual normativity, organizers often used the label of an 'LGBTQ+-friendly' city to align with professional discourses about sexual and gender identity.

Bryce notes that the city fights for LGBTQ+ progressivism in tandem with Gulf Pride to achieve the status of being a "number one place to live" for queer people. These definitions entangle civil liberties with economic agendas of marketability and profitability. Often, these relationships spurred social justice initiatives with ulterior motives. For example, Jason—the LGBTQ+ City Liaison—talked about how some actions rated the city higher on the MEI index: "Raising the pride flag when we first sponsored Gulf Pride…moved us quickly into a perfect score." Jason centers on raising the Pride flag at city hall as a metric of inclusion that created a perfect score, conflating marketable gain with the symbolic act of queer visibility.

Entangling definitions of sexual citizenship within interpersonal interactions and organizational relationships had broad-sweeping impacts. Part of Pride's visibility was contingent on collecting notable press coverage among state and national syndicates, which brought more attention to stakeholders, such as local businesses, the city government, etc. During the organizational retreat, I noted a conversation from a board member summarizing these relationships. In agreeing to a live stream of the event, people from all over the country watched Parade Weekend, resulting in "8400 individual views with an average of 46 minutes watched," which was considered "very good." The board member then discussed these figures as a justification for a more significant subsidy from the city. Much of our revenue went back to the city, covering the costs of police, infrastructure, and the operational expenses of events, resulting in the organization "breaking even" at the end of the financial year. However, the city often reduced its bill by subsidizing the cultural and economic impact that Pride brings to the city. Publicizing Gulf Pride on a national stage brought greater attention to stakeholders, justifying a higher subsidy that made organizers' jobs easier. This board member compared the subsidy to other high-impact events, "That was always the reason the city gives more money to the Grand

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Prix. The city subsidized nearly $200,000 to build [the track]. It's gonna be difficult for us to come anywhere near their televised number." By comparing the publicity of Gulf Pride to a mainstream cultural event, such as a drag races, organizers bring attention to the contracts of visibility that allow Pride to fight for civil rights while bolstering the benefits to other stakeholders. Additionally, it reaffirms systems of sexual normativity because it distinguishes between homonormative (Pride as a product) and heteronormative (gender normative events like the Grand Prix being more popular) axioms. These definitions of what makes an event "valuable" extend beyond micro- and meso-levels of analysis and include grander cultural discourses on how marketable queerness can be. Together, these frames of analysis bound queer bodies to the 'safe space' of an 'LGBTQ+-friendly' city.

Constructing an LGBTQ+-Friendly City

Networks of sexual citizenship assimilated queer bodies into normative structures of living (e.g., civic participation, ability to navigate public spaces freely), creating an 'LGBTQ+-friendly' city that disavowed harmful rhetoric and limited queer agency simultaneously. Queer bodies 'bought' into an LGBTQ+-friendly city by extending definitions of Pride into the surrounding community. Serena—a Board Co-Vice-President—talked about her definitions of Pride and identity concerning the local environment: "I think Pride both in the word and in the sense of community, space…I think of so many different elements." For Serena and many others, Pride is hard to describe because it encapsulates the materialization of emotion (pride), organizational responses to cis- and hetero-normativity (Pride), and the community spaces that allow expressions of identity and difference to exist civilly (the LGBTQ+-friendly city). Miguel—a board member and White Latino man—corroborated this notion, discussing what Pride means when negotiated by the people and places around him:

I want to see a Pride that welcomes everyone. And I want to see a Pride that challenges

White cis gay men, to remember that although they carried the party, it is no longer about

the party. It's really hard for me when I talk to old White cis gay men when they say, "I

just want to have my ass hang out and have sex on the floor." All of these things are

great, but can we please acknowledge how far we've come as a community. And there

are families, and I want my kids to experience that. I want my grandparents to experience

that. I do believe that sexual liberation and sex positivity are a part of our queer culture,

and there's also all these other societal things that we need to acknowledge. We need to

understand it's not just about us. Find a space where you can go be sex positive, and let

the community come together. Like, it doesn't have to be just those things anymore.

Miguel's definition of Pride constructs queerness within civil and appropriate channels, stressing

the importance of diverse constituents (i.e., families). In comparison, historical threads of

queerness, such as Whiteness and sex liberation, are rendered 'inappropriate.' By contextualizing

Pride within a diverse community space, organizers construct a standard of living that

simultaneously uplifts queer identity and constrains it within homonormative ontologies of

palatability.

These sentiments mirrored those of other organizers, grounding Pride's aspirations in

concrete strategies. Jason discussed his strategic plan when he took over as the LGBTQ+ City

Liaison, which was "…based on four pillars of focus: tourism, relocation, business development,

and community development." Jason's construction of 'LGBTQ+ friendliness' reaffirms the

conflation between civil liberties (community development vis-à-vis Pride) and the economic

advancement of stakeholders (tourism, relocation, and business development).

These strategies facilitated the discursive construction of a city where businesses served the needs of queer citizens. Often, this process involved tense discussions between organizers and other citizens who resisted the neoliberal branding practices that pandered to all audiences simultaneously. For example, Nancy—the Executive Director—discussed interactions between Gulf Pride and constituents of a councilwoman who helped hand out Pride flags to 'friendly' businesses:

> A city councilwoman delivered flags with us June 1st, and people posted all over her social media. Her constituents were like, "What is *this*?" And she said "This *is* the city. You should get used to it." There was a comment where she said, "This is what we *should* be doing."

Nancy's summary of the councilwoman's arguments highlights the relationship between voting constituents, patrons, and government officials who co-construct LGBTQ+-friendliness. By standing up for the visibility of Pride flags in local businesses, the councilwoman defines citizenship in the political symbolism that portrays businesses as diverse, equitable, and inclusive. In this case, having citizenship in this city requires the acknowledgement of all constituents, showcasing different bodies, identities, and positionalities. Other city officials emphasized the importance of having businesses that were adamant in their support of queer people. Jason discussed the expectations for businesses in an LGBTQ+-friendly city, illustrating informal and formal networks of power:

> When we had new businesses open, we let them know that there was a level of expectation of being inclusive and being supportive. I always joke when I was at the Welcome Center when people said, "Where do you go?" You go everywhere. You don't

just have to go to Main Street. It's all of the city. And that's why we have these hybrid

bars that everyone goes to.

Here, Jason notes that by fielding the cultural values of businesses, the entire city can act as a

space of belonging for queer people. Jason highlights "hybrid bars" that cater to straight and

queer people simultaneously, which ironically reaffirms post-gay attitudes that assume sexuality

and gender are no longer salient categories of difference (Kampler & Connell, 2018; Ghaziani,

2011). If they were, they would necessitate the need for unique spaces (e.g., gay bars), which

have been in perpetual decline in the past decade (see Branton & Compton, 2021). Regardless,

Jason points to these ambiguous ("hybrid") spaces to justify the label of LGBTQ+-friendliness,

adding to the city's credibility.

Performances characterizing LGBTQ+-friendliness included not only businesses

adhering to specific markers of inclusivity but also open declarations of representation among

local government officials. Organizers pointed to the mayor as an embodied symbol for queer

social justice initiatives. As previously illustrated in the beginning of the chapter, Mayor Lorne

asserted the importance of creating an inclusive city for queer individuals. In his published

proclamation of Pride Month, Lorne codifies friendliness in tow with civil liberties and economic

productivity:

WHEREAS, [the city] has a diverse Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and

Questioning (LGBTQ) community and is committed to supporting intentional equity for

all people throughout our city; and

WHEREAS, many of the residents, students, city employees, and business owners within

[the city] who contribute to enrichment of our City are a part of the LGBTQ community;

and

WHEREAS, it is our vision that [the city] will be a diverse, vibrant city guided by

principled progress and intentional inclusivity, where innovation, partnerships, and

ingenuity create opportunities for all, and

WHEREAS, this year, we celebrate the 21st anniversary of Gulf Pride, [State's] largest

ride Parade and Festival, and recognize the substantial economic impact that an event of

this size has had on [city] and the surrounding eras; and

WHEREAS, we partner with our neighboring cities and cities across the United States to

recognize and celebrate June as LGBTQ Pride Month. (Organizational documents)

Lorne protects Pride within a greater matrix of LGBTQ+ friendliness by acknowledging the

city's diverse constituents, dedication to inclusivity as a marketable civil liberty, and economic

impact that keeps Pride in popular standing with the community. Additionally, Mayor Lorne's

proclamation extends the definition of sexual citizenship to a national stage, crafting an image of

queer progressivism that characterizes the 'friendliness' of certain cities throughout the United

States.

While these sentiments appeared genuine, organizers critiqued the mayor's office,

questioning its motivations for queer progressivism. Nancy discussed her anxieties about a

mayor who prioritized race over sexual and gender identity:

When Mayor Lorne came on, nobody knew what to expect. He wasn't as involved. He

was harder to get in touch with. Our board was concerned. But really, it was his first year.

Like, it was like the first six months of his administration. And he did not run on a

platform that was for LGBTQ [people]. He ran a platform supporting Black rights.

Because the mayor's platform focused on race, organizers worried about the intersectional

implications of protecting queer inclusivity. In this case, organizers pit race and sexuality/gender

against one another, prioritizing the construction of an LGBTQ+-friendly city over a racially inclusive one. These associations deny the linkages that produce unified liberation along all lines of marginalization.

Finally, Pride organizers extended sexual citizenship into the surrounding community by emphasizing the importance of patriotism. While this year's Pride theme was "resilience," organizers discussed the possibility of next year's theme: "Pride as patriotic." Eden—a board member—noted the ramifications of portraying Pride in line with patriotism:

> It's a year of voting. We are in fact putting a target on ourselves. That could get tricky. We're talking about all the ways we're going to be very positive about this, and we want to emphasize the fact that the LGBTQ community are Americans. We are proud Americans. We love our country. We love our community. We love our neighbors, and we are here to support.

Eden acknowledges the nonprofit sociomaterialities that make political participation in Pride spaces problematic. However, she pushes for it by conflating national identity ("Americans") with sexuality/gender ("LGBTQ community"), arguing that these identities inform one another and provide beneficial sites of democracy for the city, state, and nation. Additionally, these sentiments push for an *enthusiastic* queer patriot—one that supports its nation's initiatives ("We love our country.") despite concerning trends of commodification, commercialization, and oppression in such spaces. Ultimately, these rationales embed queer identity in definitions of community stakeholdership, municipality, and national discourses of belonging, which dichotomizes queer subjects between appropriate and palatable citizens and inappropriate, radical Others. Hence, sexual citizenship upholds normative definitions of sexuality and gender

in relational contracts between various actors. Organizers described two processes underpinning sexual citizenship in Pride spaces: economization and securitization.

The Rainbow Tax: Pride's Economic Relationships

At every board meeting, Spencer—the Board Treasurer—flicks through his notepad and starts listing off the status of the organization's finances…

Checking account: Headed safely towards the organization's goal of one million dollars, growing with each additional sponsor and registration fee for Parade Weekend.

Savings account: A nest egg. It is significant but smaller than in years past. COVID-19's interruption of 2020's Pride Month nearly bankrupted Gulf Pride.

Accounts receivable: Endless lists of "IOUs," notes, and emails about what organizations owe to Gulf Pride, such as renewed sponsorships, access to privileged spaces for vendors, and charitable pledges that require follow-up.

Accounts payable: Bills from the city, police, production company, and event venues.

He ends his time speaking by articulating the importance of frugality. While the Board of Directors may have many ideas of how Pride could be better, he stresses that unforeseen expenses can threaten the organization's existence. In addition, remaining vigilant of the financial status allows organizers to "give back" to the community with strategic donations to mutually aligned organizations, a bonus for the Executive Director, and the promise of a bigger and better Pride next year. Before volunteering with this organization, I was critical of Pride's commercialization, privileging the economic potential of queer people over the alternative, radical, and sensorial politics that I desire in social movements. Now, I am more mindful of the reality nonprofits navigate: To commit to any social good; organizations must establish economic relationships with dominant interests, embedding political participation in nuanced

contracts of power. Moments like this illustrate the dynamic interplay between power and resistance, problematizing monolithic stances among critical researchers like myself. Being critical of Pride does not mean ruthlessly dissecting any failure among Pride organizers. Instead, it involves recognizing the constrained decision-making that produces contemporary social movements.

…

Organizers bound themselves to neoliberalized frameworks of feminism—initiatives that espouse equitable values while simultaneously profiting from the trendiness of queerness. These models economize queer subjects, constructing civil rights and Pride as products that can be marketed, sold, and profited from. Additionally, establishing an economic relationship with queerness upholds homonormative rhetoric that conflates sexuality with access to public channels of citizenship, such as consumerism and assembly in public spaces (Chavez, 2013; Grosser & McCarthy, 2019; Prugl, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014). In the case of Gulf Pride, organizers understood sexual citizenship as a product that various stakeholders economically secured. In return, they incurred 'taxes' or expenses that negotiated the value of queer labor in progressive marketplaces.

Many organizers justified the existence of Gulf Pride based on its financial impact on the city and surrounding community. Jason—the LGBTQ+ City Liaison—stated, "Pride is the largest economic event in the city, generating over $67 million. It's a month-long festival." Jason underscores the importance of Pride based on the money it generates, indirectly stimulating businesses, vendors, and tourism economies. Additionally, "$67 million" was a repeated figure from 2022 that did not account for current trends. As an LGBTQ+-friendly city, the organization saw "a 26% increase" in economic impact in 2023. While concrete figures were unavailable,

most people agreed that Gulf Pride was an "economic powerhouse" (Devon—the Volunteer Director).

Organizers acknowledged that being economically powerful protected the existence of queerness in the public sphere. Tyrique—a board member—noted that economic impact insulated Gulf Pride from cultural backlash: "And those that aren't with [Pride], they still respect it. We're a huge part of the culture here." Tyrique's understanding of civil rights associates citizenship with economic impact, stating that respect depends on how much money is generated. Other organizers stated that generating profit for an LGBTQ+-friendly city fostered a positive relationship, ensuring the continuation of Pride events in the future. Miguel—a board member—stated, "And at the end of the day, I think that we as an organization, have delivered positive and strong economic impact to the city for them to know that they need us." Here, economic productivity reaffirms a mutually beneficial relationship where Pride and the city both flourish. To Miguel, holding Pride communicates a "need" for LGBTQ+-friendly events, resulting in supply and demand channels from the city. Isaiah—a board member—pointed to the agency of money as a primary value for Pride organizing: "This area is a magnet for the LGBTQIA community. It makes it so that the city cannot ignore us. When we look at the amount of money that Pride generates, money talks." Here, Isaiah gives money the agency of protecting queer civil rights, acting as a nonhuman influence that makes it impossible for dominant interests to "ignore us."

The Communicative Cost of Pride

While Gulf Pride's economic impact was significant, organizers noted that it only eased a pre-existing, tenuous relationship with the city. Bryce discussed the expectations of holding

Pride in an LGBTQ+-friendly city and what it costs the organization: "Even though we bring in $67 million, the city still charges us as if we're an external vendor. Like, what the hell? Whatever…it's very much a dance. They know how much we bring in. Give us a discount." As previously described, the city subsidizes its bill for operational costs based on how impactful the event is. Nancy—the Executive Director—noted that these charges totaled "$180,000" and comprised a primary expense for the organization. These figures resulted from a complicated relationship whereby the city dictates how valuable Pride is based on specific contractual agreements. Amanda—the Board President—discussed one metric from the city's contract:

> Originally, I wanted to Pride to be a month of celebration. It was a different angle from a marketing standpoint, but also because of our relationship with [the city], and the money that they're investing. If we can be month long, it's a whole month for us to fill hotel beds, which is what in part dictates how much money we get.

By extending the events from one weekend to the entire month, organizers can justify more significant subsidies from the city based on how many "beds," or sites of tourism, are satisfied. Bryce explained this relationship further based on the favors the city and Gulf Pride exchanged with one another:

> As part of our contractual agreement, we will have a Pride parade. We will have an event on Main Street. They, in return, give us a discount on services offered, such as closing the streets, giving police officers access to the parks. So, every weekend in the month of June, we have the first right of refusal of every park in downtown. So, we only use the parks on one weekend, but we have access to all of them in case of other events.

Bryce argues that access to civil liberties (i.e., assembly, access to parks) are more readily available when negotiating with the city on particular types of queer visibility, such as parades

and festivals in historically gay neighborhoods (Main Street). Bryce went on to discuss how maintaining a relationship with the city was necessary because it allowed for an informal network of communication where the organization could make preferential requests. By "playing nicely with the city," Gulf Pride often bypassed pesky bureaucratic structures, such as venue requests, permits, etc.

Economic contracts with the city dispersed the value of Pride to paid workers, such as city employees and police officers. Nancy recalled an interaction with Parks and Recreation workers who handled the parking for Parade Weekend:

> I was out in the parking lot chatting with the Parks and Rec guys, and I was like, "Are you all getting overtime," and they said, "Double time today!" It's hot, but they're sitting out there, and they were cool.

While Nancy points to the exhausting nature of Pride labor, the Parks and Recreation workers defended their work due to the economic benefits of "double time," which reaffirms the economic relationship that costs Pride thousands of dollars. Other individuals discussed how other forms of paid labor were simply transactional. Amanda noted that the city bill included the service of police officers: "Their fee is $70,000. That's not bad change. In the crassest sense, it's like we're a well-paying client." By embodying the role of a "client," Amanda asserts that police presence is not conducted out of universal values for safety and security but rather a desire to be paid (a concept described later). While these relationships underscore mundane acts of financial exchange, they reflect a neoliberal ordering of social justice that feigns the importance of queer visibility while demanding an economic benefit or 'bottom line.' In other words, the organization pays into structures that care only about the concrete details of who is getting paid and in what context.

Organizers often questioned the goodwill of the city and other stakeholders regarding subsidies. Renee—a Volunteer Coordinator—stated, "The city wants to work together. I hate to say it…but I don't think a lot of them give a shit about queer people." While Renee goes onto to emphasize the economic impact, she wonders about the motivations underlying these contractual relationships.

In totality, Gulf Pride's economic contracts with powerful stakeholders incurred many symbolic and material costs. While these processes crafted the ideal image of queer sexual citizens within threads of capital, wealth, and privilege, they also conferred organizers with the power and agency to distinguish between powerful economic allies and disingenuous, problematic entities.

Sanctioning Models of Queer Professionalism

"Wasn't the show supposed to start an hour ago?"

Renee looks down at her clipboard as she reviews the eight-hour timeline for our Juneteenth Event, which celebrates the contributions of Black and Brown queer folks in our community. The lineup is stacked and leaves little room for error: a cocktail hour, live radio show, interview with Black business owners, panel with Black transgender women, slam poetry competition, and after-party with a ballroom extravaganza. Two hours into the event, the live radio show has yet to begin. People walk around the venue aimlessly, and I see concern erupting from board members' faces.

"Yeah, we're waiting on the main talent for tonight, Audrey Sterling[9]. I guess there was some trouble with her and the hotel room." Renee says. Behind her, contestants peek out from backstage, eyeing the antsy crowds.

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[9] Pseudonym

Devon walks up to us with a microphone, "I'm going to ask a board member to stall for a little bit and get the crowd going. The hotel denied Audrey's entry because she's trans, and Nancy is handling it now. It's ridiculous. David, can you go back to the spotlight? Make sure you're tracking whoever is on stage."

When Audrey does show up, she appears unfazed by the interruption, dazzling the crowd with stories about her celebrity encounters, challenges faced as a Black transgender woman, and witty comedy that adds a genuine and light-hearted texture to the ballroom extravaganza. She effortlessly combines multiple events, switching between hosts, business owners, and panelists, allowing Gulf Pride to stay on schedule.

Throughout the night, I note my gratitude for events that challenge my positionality as a White queer man. The ballroom extravaganza—a competition that showcases the creative performances of Black queer people—not only speaks back against intersectional systems of White supremacy, cisnormativity, and heteronormativity but also illustrates the resilient bonds that bring people together. I shine the spotlight down the middle of the room, splitting the crowd in two as the M.C. shouts above the cheers, hoops, snaps, and claps: "CATEGORY IS…EVERYDAY REALNESS." Realness evaluates success based on "adherence to certain performances, self-presentations, and embodiments that are believed to capture the authenticity [or 'realness'] of particular gender and sexual identities" (Bailey, 2011, p. 377). By adding the adjective "everyday," the M.C. specializes in a form of realness that is mundane, suburban, or "unclockable" to the naked eye. A judge yells out from the table on stage, "GIVE US A STROLL IN YOUR LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD!"

A performer slides out from the crowd, strutting toward my spotlight with astounding confidence, blinding the room with their sequin top and waving their legs around with perfectly

tailored bell-bottom jeans. The crowd erupts, filling the air with claps, wagging fingers, and snaps. The performer pivots on their wedges, gliding toward the stage where the judges yell, "IS SHE REAL?! IS SHE REAL THOUGH?!" The performer's afro puffs bounce as security lifts her on stage. The judges scan her body up and down as she leans over the table. *I cannot take my eyes off of her.*

In these moments, I think about the material impacts of 'realness' for transgender individuals who must prove their identities in public settings (i.e., the act of 'passing.'). Realness serves as a reminder of the consequences that befell individuals who fail to enact their gender identity 'correctly.' For the Black community, passing as cisgender takes on an additional stress when considering the discriminatory and violent systems that police Black transgender women more harshly compared to their White masculine counterparts. I worry about Audrey—a Black transgender woman—whose visibility in Pride spaces depends on her negotiation of safety in heteronormative spaces, such as the hotel. While I am critical of Pride events and their affinity in catering to White, economically 'productive' populations, I am grateful for the way that moments like these give me pause, allowing me to see the necessity of such spaces for the good of the community, city, and nation that utilizes Pride for queer visibility.

…

At the board meeting following the Juneteenth Event, I listen to organizers discuss the successes and failures of the night. While it was my favorite event from the entire season, other board members critiqued the unprofessional behavior of stakeholders at the event. Bryce speaks up during the Zoom call, "The mayor's office and his team want to follow up with the hotel that Audrey was in. They have a 'Bad Johns' list. I'm sure she wasn't prepared to get misgendered at a hotel. On another note, I want to share with you all some other complaints we got about the bar

staff at the venue. The young man I saw was incredibly rude, specifically during the slam poetry session. I heard he was misgendering others. I'm following up with the venue team. I just wanted to give you all a heads up."

This conversation is the first I am hearing about the details concerning Audrey's hotel stay. My ears turn up at a "Bad John's" list that hints at a system of punishment blocklisting unfriendly businesses. In this case, Bryce's evaluation of both the hotel and the venue's bar staff threatens economic sanctions, allowing Gulf Pride to exert agency on who is monetarily rewarded within the construction of an LGBTQ+-friendly city.

After the meeting, I talked to organizers who discussed the details of Audrey's exclusion from the hotel, outlining the economic sanctions befalling stakeholders who were neither professional nor pro-queer. Isaiah recalled the details leading up to the Juneteenth Event's delay:

> Before Audrey came, she recently had her name legally changed. And when she checked into her hotel, her credit cards had not been switched over yet. She checked in the night before and did not have any issues. The next day, she decided she was going to extend her stay and stay a couple of extra days. And she called down to the desk, and there was a lady who answered the phone. She misgendered her and made some statements, assuming that there was some fraud. Audrey went down to the desk and escalated. The lady was very disrespectful, and Audrey became irate. And Nancy was with her going off…saying let's get another hotel room. Some other folks and I picked her and her team up to move, and it caused a big delay.

In Audrey's case, transitioning to a passing identity failed due to inconsistent paperwork, flagging her credibility as a fraudulent guest. Organizers responded to this insult by moving Audrey and her team to another hotel, which explains the delay in the Juneteenth Event.

In another meeting, I noted that a board member questioned Nancy's actions because they reflected the professionalism of Gulf Pride. They said that by "going off," Nancy's emotional outburst about the hotel's transphobia harmed the credibility of the organization. Just as notions of professionalism force Pride to assimilate into channels of appropriate and permissible appearance (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Ward, 2008b; Weber, 1978), organizers wondered whether their efforts to remain civil kept them in good standing with the city's economic demands.

Organizers discussed the politics of professionalism underpinning Pride's economic impact. On the one hand, Gulf Pride's mission upholds the celebratory nature of queer spaces, challenging heteronormative models of professionalism. On the other hand, Pride's association with the city acted as a mode of surveillance that resulted in internalized attitudes, values, and rules about appropriate and permissible conduct. For example, I noted many instances where board members drank alcohol at events but hid cans and glasses in photos, illustrating the differences between having fun at Pride and coordinating it within public funding channels from the city. Additionally, a board member outlined his fear about being considered unprofessional based on the idea that "somehow [organizers] are going out to steak dinners with the money that [they] raise." Miguel is pragmatic in his understanding of professionalism, tying assimilation into bureaucratic structures with bigger and better Prides: "I've met with a lot of different organizers. And something I noticed between the great Prides here and the average Prides was assigned goals and deliverables. [Great Prides] were very much organizations. It's a company structure." Miguel notes that a "Great Pride" networks within dominant structures, highlighting the importance of deliverables that help stakeholders, such as the city.

In contrast, Bryce noted that the economic relationship with the city allowed organizers to assess the professionalism of other businesses, stripping them of Pride's financial benefits based on politics of friendliness, allyship, etc. Bryce talked about the ramifications facing the hotel that insulted Audrey:

> The situation with Audrey was problematic as it was happening, but it created more issues on the back end. It is based on how we work with the city and how we work with other trans activists to make sure there's a Bad John list.

By contributing to the administration's Bad John list, Bryce can blocklist organizations, vendors, and stakeholders from beneficial economic contracts, barring them from all other city events—not just Pride. Gulf Pride and the city agreed the hotel would no longer be recommended to other entertainers. These sanctions are significant and point to the cultural capital of Pride organizers who can territorialize standards of citizenship. Economically sanctioning businesses inscribes boundaries between entities that belong and those that are excluded, challenging social and economic models of citizenship.

Organizers noted other cases where the economic relationship with the city bolstered their ability to reject problematic stakeholders. Just as the previous chapter discussed Gulf Pride's mission holding firm despite challenging stakeholders, organizers also relied on the economic impact of Pride to wield power in progressive marketplaces. Nancy talked about firing a title sponsor based on city support:

> I have had situations where I've had to tell sponsors that we didn't want them back this year. We had a sponsor who gave us a decent amount of money but treated everybody like shit. Every volunteer who came to help them was like, "Do you know who I am? I'm the title sponsor. I want to do things this way." She was basically verbally abusive. And

so, I said that this isn't a good fit. She called the city because we were being

discriminatory. And the city called me and was I like, "I can show you the emails where

we told them to behave."

While the city could have intervened on behalf of the title sponsor, they deferred to Gulf Pride

for a justification, conferring agency to the organization. Ironically, these processes bypass

bureaucratic structures and ordinances stressing non-discrimination, allowing the organization to

establish dominance over businesses and sponsorship stakeholders.

In summary, Gulf Pride's economic contracts with the city constructed a system of

rewards and punishments for various stakeholders, upholding territories of (un)belonging. These

systems provided organizers with the agency to determine who is privileged and oppressed

within greater models of social, economic, and political citizenship—albeit at the cost of

assimilating into dominant conceptualizations of sexuality and gender. Pride organizers noted not

only the economization of Pride spaces but also how dominant interests secured these assets.

Securing the Assets of Pride

I call Devon—the Volunteer Director—on his phone, "Hey, can you come outside and

find me? I'm having trouble finding the right building."

"Sure, I got you!" *Click.*

Devon finds me a block from the venue, strolling down the cobblestone-lined streets of

my university's satellite campus. *I've lived here for four years, and I've never been over here.*

We walk into the building holding the Gulf Pride Pageant—a competition determining

the season's Mr., Mrs., and Mx. Gulf Pride 2023[10]. I take off my bag, place my cell phone on a

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[10] Drag pageants are modeled after traditional beauty pageants, (de)constructing the art of
performance within the queer community. This pageant has three categories for male (Mr.),
female (Mrs.), and nonbinary (Mx.) entertainers. Winners of the Gulf Pride Pageant served as

table nearby, and walk through the makeshift security checkpoint. One individual stops me and waves me with a metal detector wand. City police officers and campus security personnel are scattered on the ground floor. Upstairs, a private security team hired by Gulf Pride stands at one end of the atrium. Devon rounds me up with the other volunteers, walking us through crucial staging areas, "So you'll see our security right over there. They are in front of *that* door to stop people from bothering the contestants and M.C.'s." I am placed by the security team with Renee—a Volunteer Coordinator—and Mikaela—a volunteer dressed in rainbow ribbons, glittering jewelry, and a Halloween Pride t-shirt from last year's season.

As attendees trickle through the atrium, I look at the security team. Dressed in beige khakis and tucked-in polos, they pace around aimlessly. I peek at their holstered guns. While the layers of security at this event initially surprised me, I must remember that the geopolitical climate surrounding this event threatens the lives of queer people—especially those who do not fit into homonormative constructions of identity. People like me may be tolerated in public, but a space like a pageant—where drag performers, impersonators, and entertainers poke fun at politics of sexuality and gender—garners little sympathy in a conservative state with a history of anti-queer terrorism.

Mikaela leans over, crinkling her eyes as she tries to make small talk with the security team, "I'm sure you've never worked at an event like *this* before."

The tallest man grabs his belt with both hands, thrusting his hips out as he laughs, "And you'd be right!" The other officers snicker, looking around at the booths that hand out pamphlets

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honorary marshals for the organization, performing at all major events. Winning the Gulf Pride Pageant provided individuals with additional financial security because the organization would hire them as seasonal entertainers during Pride Month.

advertising PrEP, discussing HIV/AIDs awareness, and bringing attention to queer homelessness. "Say, there is one thing I don't understand."

Renee shares a glance with me before stepping in, "Yeah?"

The officer pauses, seemingly trying to read the look of curiosity on our faces, "What the hell is a 'Mx.'?"

I hold my breath as I anticipate the endless directions this conversation could go in. While Mx. is a common term denoting nonbinary identity in academic and queer spaces, I don't expect a straight security officer to know what the term means. *Maybe he is being genuine.*

"Mx. —said like 'Mix'—it refers to people who don't identify as men or women. We use it as a category for performers who may be nonbinary or don't feel like they belong in the Mr. or Mrs. Category." Renee's nonchalant tone suggests that this conversation should be mundane, normal—not indicative of the heteronormativity that leeches into the walls of this event.

All three officers laugh. *Laugh.* "Oh, well that's um, well that's interesting isn't it. I've never understood any of that mumbo jumbo."

I feel my body tense up instinctively when I hear their comments, which I take to be microaggressions. My jaw clenches, and my pulse quickens. My knees lock, and I find myself frozen, unable to act. I let my eyes glaze over as I consider my response. *I am still new to the organization. I do not want to jeopardize my position here by saying something flippant. But are we just going to say nothing and let them spew this transphobic nonsense? Did the organization vet these people before hiring them?*

Before I can do anything, a campus security officer runs up the stairs. He points at the security team, "Hey, can one of you help us with check-in? Everyone came at once, and we need

to open another metal detector line." The men dissipate, avoiding further uncomfortable

conversations.

<div align="center">…</div>

Later that night, I told Devon what happened. I told him how I felt uncomfortable about

how the private security team handled discussions of queer identity. He listened intently, shaking

his head as he typed important details on his phone. In later conversations with board members, I

discovered that this incident reflected a more significant pattern of problematic behavior

throughout the night. The private security team continued to make ignorant comments to

performers, attendees, and other board members. Nancy—the Executive Director—responded by

firing them, emphasizing her disappointment in how they showed no sensitivity toward the

clients they were serving.

In comparison, organizers applauded the city police and campus security who did not

hesitate to treat the pageant like any other event. I pay particular attention to the normalization of

security in Pride spaces, noting that organizers construct an environment that reinforces our

reliance on stakeholders who protect us from violence and discrimination. In effect, these

security measures maintain harsh boundaries between secluded 'safe spaces' for queer people

and normative public spaces where organizing is rendered potentially dangerous.

<div align="center">…</div>

By partnering with dominant stakeholders, Pride organizers entered contracts where

assets must be "secured," relying on disciplinary agents, such as police officers and private

security personnel. Foucault (1977) coins disciplinary power to describe the surveillance,

observation, and normalization of structures and discourses that control others. Historical threads

of queer organizing (e.g., the Stonewall Riots) resisted disciplinary agents that pathologized

queerness in the public sphere (Bruce, 2016; Luibheid, 2022). However, growing associations with governmental systems and commercial interests have normalized them. Disciplinary agents defend their presence due to the constant threat of violence and hate crimes. I argue that the securitization of Pride reflects systems of sexual citizenship that 'protect' queer civil rights in tow with the economic assets that Pride generates. Just as Pride exerts power based on its economic impact, it also relies on hegemonic structures to ensure that the 'product' of queer visibility is delivered safely to various stakeholders. Next, I discuss the extent to which Pride is controlled by disciplinary agents, the communicative funneling that internalizes discipline among organizers, and the consequences of securing Pride.

Disciplinary Agents at Pride: Public Good and Private Evil

Organizers analyzed Pride's safety based on relationships with public and private security agents. Public security infrastructure—such as police officers, city employees (e.g., sanitation workers, Parks and Recreation employees), and the FBI—worked intimately with Gulf Pride to ensure significant events were protected from unknown threats. In a logistics walkthrough for Parade Weekend, I noted multiple safety measures, such as secure entry points, bomb sweeps along the parade route, blocking off side streets with garbage trucks[11], and discussions of covert operations by government authorities. Nancy noted how the presence of public security infrastructure was commonplace in significant events like Pride:

We are the largest event in [the city] for cultural events. We're the largest Pride in the

Southeast. Like for [the police] not to do their due diligence would be silly. They do the

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[11]Organizers often discussed the historical tensions underpinning the presence of police officers at Pride. Instead of placing police cars at entry points, Nancy—the Executive Director—collaborated with the city and offered the role to sanitation workers. By blocking the street with garbage trucks, organizers politically resisted the visual symbols of police at Pride.

same thing for every event. It's not as intense, because who really cares about [other

events]. Nobody's sending threats to NASCAR or whatever. But they do their due

diligence. I don't know how they handle—I don't want to know what they do as long as

they consider it handled and no longer a threat to us.

While Nancy says that Pride receives equal attention from public security agents compared to

other events, the controversy surrounding the queer community still raises the stakes. Thus, Pride

organizers submitted to additional measures of security that escape transparency. For example, I

noted a conversation during a logistics walkthrough where the FBI planned to walk around in

"plain clothes," conducting "secret safety operations." Just as Nancy states that she does not

"want to know" about security operations, public agents can avoid accountability in their

measures to surveil, observe, and 'protect' Gulf Pride's events.

Organizers understood these issues yet welcomed the presence of public security agents.

Due to the relationship with the city that profited from performances of LGBTQ+-friendliness,

public officers acted as positive stakeholders in Pride spaces. Amara—a board member—talked

about her perceptions of police officers: "I felt very safe. And I think we make sure that our

attendees feel that same sense of safety. The city's police department is pretty good about having

a good number of people on staff to take care of events." Tyrique—a board member—felt

similarly about campus police from a public university hosting the Gulf Pride Pageant. When

state legislation changed laws regarding the presence of drag in 'children's spaces,' the

university made the event 21+. Despite these changes, Tyrique acknowledged how nice the

police were: "But when [a campus police officer] spoke to us, he was so compassionate. He was

like, 'This sucks. I don't think you should be having to do this, but you have to.'" In these cases,

Amara and Tyrique emphasize the safety of Pride using public funding channels, such as police departments and campus security, which bolsters the construction of LGBTQ+-friendly cities.

While organizers talked positively about public security agents, some stakeholders criticized their presence. Renee discussed an interaction she had with a family while selling Gulf Pride merchandise:

> This kid was maybe seven or eight, and they bought a t-shirt. And she had some pocket money and she wanted to put a dollar in [the donation box]. And the dad said, "Yeah, it's good to support this. We live in a fascist police state.

While this stakeholder donates to Gulf Pride assuming it resists disciplinary agents (i.e., "fascist police states"), the organization ironically pays for this system to exist, aligning itself with public structures of security and surveillance.

Organizers rationalized public security presence due to its perceived effectiveness. Nancy discussed the results of having numerous safety measures:

> But there were two arrests outside of the park: One for disorderly conduct and one for something else. There was a fight if I recall, but not inside the park. And then security confiscated 15 or 17 weapons, like knives. And they turned away at least 15 people with guns who didn't want to hand over their weapons. So, we did the right thing.

Nancy points to arrests and confiscating weapons to justify public security presence at Pride. Additionally, Nancy argues that arrests neither occurred within the boundaries of Pride Weekend (i.e., "not inside" the parks) nor resulted from anti-queer laws. In another board meeting, I noted a discussion summarizing findings from FBI agents who found "credible threats," conferring more authority to public security agents.

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In comparison, Pride organizers had negative interactions with private security agents. After firing the first security team based on anti-queer remarks, Gulf Pride hired another company. Board organizers initially felt confident in this company because it was a "lesbian-owned, Black-owned business" (Tyrique). Amara argued that having a security company aligned with the queer community was beneficial: "We definitely have representation with the security company we use because they were definitely about their business, and they were also very, very gay." As discussed in the previous chapter, Pride organizers grapple with the politics of tokenization, highlighting particular facets of identity to create safe spaces for queer communities. In this case, organizers uplift security agents that tout representation of race ("Black-owned") and sexuality/gender ("lesbian-owned"), hoping for an alternative to public agents that may receive scrutiny or criticism.

While organizers rendered the private security company progressive, they criticized its ability to protect queer citizens adequately. During Parade Weekend, the company oversold its potential in handling secure entryways and conducting sweeps of the parks. While the company promised significant staff, only 13 personnel attended, causing delays among attendees trying to enter the park through secured entryways. Renee recalled an incident in Victory Park where staffing issues illustrated the differences between public and private security agents:

> [Security] was a little different this year, which threw a lot of participants. It could have been executed a little bit better, especially with since we were doing wanded entry at every point. We needed more people. We had one person…it was one person—private security—and then we had a couple officers, but they didn't have wands. And I was running [the private security person] water. I was like, "Are you okay? Is someone gonna come help you?" They were having a heat stroke.

Here, she points to the lack of private security staff as a problem, bottlenecking crowds to one person overwhelmed by the heat. While public officers were present, she does not blame them because of the separation in role responsibilities. Public officers were not supposed to wand participants while private security personnel were.

Discourses comparing "good" public agents to "bad" private ones reflected increased associations with state interests and failed attempts at building coalitions prioritizing queer welfare. On the one hand, constructing positive relationships with police officers and city employees affirms contracts of sexual citizenship, advancing homonationalist agendas (Puar, 2013). When organizers assimilate into public security systems, they submit to disciplinary structures that protect queer citizens and avoid transparent metrics of accountability. Additionally, public agents prove sexual citizens worthy in greater conceptualizations of national security, conflating queer civil rights with "domesticity and consumption" in Pride spaces (DeFilippis, 2019, p. 99; Luibheid, 2023). On the other hand, attempts at escaping this model of public security resulted in dilemmas of tokenization—whereby private companies pander to identity politics—and uncertainties regarding how effective a company can be without institutional, state, and national support. Narratives about the private security's "failures" are not universal. However, they do illustrate the drawbacks of working with unregulated agencies. In these cases, organizers are persuaded to contract with public agents, sacrificing parts of themselves, or they can align themselves with politically similar stakeholders and risk additional protection.

Organizers' relationships with disciplinary agents resulted in internalized attitudes about protection, safety, and security.

Neoliberal Governmentality and Responsibilization

At Children's Day, an event celebrating queer children and their parents, Pride organizers take additional measures to protect attendees from political extremism. As I transfer cases of alcohol, soda, and juice from the vendor's truck to the coolers in our concessions tent, I look out to the border of Strong Park. A production company is installing a ten-foot barricade, and private security personnel are briefing volunteers about the metal detector by the entrance. The barrier will block views of the event from the outside, separating attendees from potentially dangerous people, such as protestors or hecklers. The entrance is the only way to access Children's Day, forcing attendees to submit to security checks. While these measures relieve some of my anxiety, I am still worried about the possibility of violence. This event speaks back to state legislation protecting 'parental rights[12],' stripping the autonomy and rights of queer youth. In response, I wonder what other measures Gulf Pride has taken to deter people who oppose our organization's commitment to celebrating avenues of sexual citizenship.

Yelling interrupts my thoughts. "**MA'AM!** YOU NEED TO CHECK IN WITH ME!" I stop what I am doing in the concessions tent and look toward the entrance where a volunteer is trailing a woman with a cooler.

The volunteer continues yelling, "STOP. *YOU'RE* NOT ALLOWED IN *HERE*!"

The woman shakes her head, stopping to look back at the volunteer "I'm just bringing in food for our station. Why are you yelling at me?"

The volunteer stops a few feet from the woman, throwing her hands up in fury, "YOU BYPASSED *OUR* SECURITY CHECKPOINT! YOU AREN'T FOLLOWING *OUR* RULES."

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[12] Legislation about 'parental rights' confines speaking about non-normative sexualities and gender to parents and families in the privacy of their homes. Consequently, these bills prohibit any discussion of identity in public institutions (e.g., schools), enable state employees to out LGBTQ+ children to their potentially abusive family members, and make any discussion of identity subject to surveillance and discipline.

Amara—one of the lead board members for the event—runs toward them, placing a hand between the volunteer and the woman, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Let's calm down. Ma'am, I'm sorry. We do need you to go through the security checkpoint. It's for everyone's safety."

The woman snaps back at Amara, "I'm not even here for the event! I'm just dropping off food for my mom who's running the station! I'll be gone in a minute!" The woman storms off, and Amara shakes her head as she guides the volunteer back to the security checkpoint.

Later that day, I check in with Amara, "Hey, I noticed you had a tense moment with that volunteer and vendor. What happened?"

Amara exhales, taking a swig of water while we cool down beneath the trees. "That was wild…that volunteer used to be a police officer, and I think she was taking her job a little too seriously. But that vendor was so rude to me! I was just trying to get her to understand our rules about security, but she stormed off. I was watching her, though. I made sure she left like she said.

In these moments, I am curious about how organizers internalize their own worries about security, especially in controversial and potentially dangerous spaces. Today, both the volunteer and Amara took on the responsibility of keeping Children's Day safe, communicating in different ways. The volunteer prioritized the division between safe insiders and unsafe outsiders, admonishing the woman who did not follow the proper safety protocols. In Amara's perspective, protection avoided overt discipline and instead involved covert observation of the vendor, ensuring she left when she promised to.

While organizers rely on a network of public and private security agents, attitudes about how to keep Pride 'safe' result in organizational tactics that ask volunteers, board members, and attendees to take on the stress of protecting the people around them. These collective tactics of

vigilance reflect concerning trends of neoliberalism, whereby the onus of safety trickles down from dominant interests (i.e., the city and state) to organizational bodies (i.e., Gulf Pride) to individuals (i.e., volunteers, board members, and attendees). Outside of Children's Day, organizers internalized the securitization of Pride and embodied problematic roles.

<p style="text-align:center">…</p>

Pride organizers' ownership of security supports Foucault's (1988; 2007) concept of neoliberal governmentality, showcasing the techniques and rationalities of power that rule societies, organizations, and individuals. Specifically, organizers engaged in responsibilization, which is "a governance praxis that operates through ascribing freedom and autonomy to individuals and agents (e.g., as autonomous 'consumers') while simultaneously appealing to individual responsibility-taking, independent self-steering and 'self-care'" (Pyysiäinen et al., 2017, p. 216). As previously illustrated in the above vignette, organizers took on the responsibility of securing Pride spaces themselves. Instead of relying on dominant interests, such as the city, individuals protected the right to sexual citizenship (or freedom) while ultimately contributing to systems of homonationalism. Just as the volunteer created a strict division between insiders and outsiders, organizers reinforced security measures in line with post-9/11 formations of security and safety, labeling outsiders as both dangerous and ill-aligned with normative U.S. values (Puar, 2013; Weiss, 2018). These systems allocate safety to queer citizens *only* if they submit to national modes of governance, such as discipline, observation, and normalization.

Organizers engaged in various behaviors that placed the onus of safety on individuals instead of dominant interests. Before the season began, Devon conducted a safety meeting for volunteers. During the presentation, I noted many discourses that focused on narratives of

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empowerment and mutual responsibility. For example, a slide about the "Buddy System" asked volunteers to "prioritize your own safety and your designated volunteer buddy," which assumes that individuals have the agentic capacity to carry out secure measures for themselves and others. Additionally, this safety meeting relied on post-9/11 rhetoric stressing hyper-vigilance, such as "See Something, Say Something." This phrase asks individuals to look for suspicious activity, often eliciting harmful stereotypes about who can be dangerous (e.g., Muslims; Kumar, 2017). In this case, the meeting warned volunteers to "make note of identifying features of the person/people that will be useful information to pass along: height, race, hair color, clothing, any visible tattoos, etc." These tactics are problematic because they ask volunteers to take on a policing role in Pride spaces, relying on biases regarding race, ethnicity, and other categories to assess which people are dangerous. Additionally, these communication channels relieve dominant interests of the responsibility for security, leaving organizers the 'freedom' to conduct safety measures without the accountability of community stakeholders.

In other instances, individuals pointed to networks of governance that threatened the organization's existence. In these cases, responsibilization was not an obligation but a requirement that held Gulf Pride liable. One situation that illustrated this dynamic was morality policing during Parade Weekend. The state passed legislation banning live entertainment that "depicts or simulates nudity, sexual conduct, sexual excitement, or specific sexual activities" in the presence of children. This bill targeted drag performers whose playful performance of sexuality and gender was rendered inappropriate. Thus, organizers collaborated with the city government to find potential solutions. To appease the state government, city officials reinstituted an ordinance mandating 'decency' for public events, prohibiting acts of nudity, sexual acts, or promiscuity in public.

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Both the bill and ordinance were ambiguous, creating anxiety among organizers who advocated for non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality, such as chest binders, midriff among 'masculine'-coded bodies, and trans-affirming prosthetics. In one meeting, I noted how Amanda—the Board President—discussed the city's expectations about the ordinance, trickling down responsibility to Gulf Pride. Based on the decency law, city police stressed that Pride organizers should do their "due diligence" in limiting non-normative expressions of sexuality and gender. Organizers responded with a plan to employ volunteers along the parade route, allowing them to intercept attendees defying the ordinance. Renee noted the consequences of attendees who did not follow these laws: "If we saw someone out as like a general participant, we could be like, 'Hey, there are t-shirts available if a police officer notices you.'" In this case, Renee states that volunteers would act as morality police, confronting individuals who do not adhere to hetero-, cis-, and homo-normative performances. Offering attendees an alternative option (i.e., covering up with a Gulf Pride t-shirt) prevents further punishment by dominant interests, such as police officers who issue citations. While organizers objected to this explicit surveillance of queer bodies ("I don't want to be a narc." — Amanda, Board President), the Police Chief of the city argued that Gulf Pride would be held liable if they did not point out every violation, holding the organization accountable to contractual agreements of sexual citizenship. These structures embed organizers in surveillance states, rendering Parade Weekend a space of contentious visibility for queer attendees.

Additionally, organizers rationalized these choices based on identity politics. If "people within the community" approached attendees, organizers thought the conversations would be more civil. These politics of tokenization were most evident on Parade Day. The Police Chief instructed all officers to covertly take photos of "suspicious outfits" once a volunteer pointed

them out. Officers would send photos to the Police Chief, who (with a representative from Gulf Pride) would negotiate the outfit's permissibility in public based on the language of the city's ordinance. Organizers wanted a representative in the room with the Police Chief, thinking that *any* queer representation might ameliorate harmful assumptions or judgments. In these cases, Pride organizers took on the burden of responsibilization, thus surveilling and disciplining members of their queer community. Consequently, police officers and city officials engaged in harmful discourses that placed blame on Gulf Pride's actions to avoid liability instead of their obligation to adhere to state legislation. Thus, dominant interests escaped accountability, dismissing structural critiques that would point out the heterosexist undertones of anti-queer laws.

While placing the burden of policing on Pride organizers, dominant interests also twisted the narrative of what the real problem was, obfuscating systems of sexual normativity. For example, Serena—a Board Co-Vice President—stated that the city's opinion about the state legislation and ordinance had little to do with sexuality and gender: "The Chief of Police said he doesn't even want to do this. He thinks it's ridiculous. His perspective is the same as ours: If it's legal on the beach, it's legal here." Serena notes that the Police Chief does not want to engage in conversations about laws, contributing to a "post-gay" ethic that renders gender and sexuality less serious ("He thinks it's ridiculous.") compared to other identities (Kampler & Connell, 2018). Serena points out that the city's response is purposefully obtuse. Conversations about the ordinance revealed a more significant issue: Promiscuity and nudity are hard to police in a city known for beachside tourism. Instead of identifying systems of sexual normativity to critique the ordinance, the city compared expression at Pride to a day at the beach, ignoring complicated discourses about performing gender and sexuality in public spaces. As I demonstrate below,

organizers' securitization of sexuality and gender in public spaces had many consequences, such as operational difficulties, a lack of sensitivity among private/public security agents, and an illusion of safety among organizers.

Illusions of Securitization

Pride organizers problematized the promises made by disciplinary agents. Because of public security agents who avoided responsibilization and private security agents who were ill-equipped to handle the intensity of events, organizers experienced many operational delays. During Parade Weekend, organizers noted that "30% of volunteers" did not show up to the Parade Weekend due to long lines at security checkpoints and a lack of staffing. Tim—a Volunteer Coordinator—talked about how increased security measures affected organizers' ability to run the event smoothly: "There's only one entrance into the park. Problem number two, there's wasn't enough security. Problem number three is that there was no security at all until start time. There were people wandering around the whole time." Here, Tim notes not only the entrance and staffing issues but also the primary flaw of private security: They are only obligated to help during scheduled times.

During my shift at Parade Weekend, civilians freely walked around the park before start time. When the event began, private security arrived and set up the secure checkpoint. This discrepancy allows countless attendees to bypass security, which causes uncertainties about safety. Additionally, many organizers pointed out that they wanted a barricade to surround the entire park for Parade Weekend. However, security agents only surrounded the front end, leaving holes that attendees could walk through. Nancy talked about unauthorized vendors who snuck in, causing concerns about safety, "liability," and "vandalism":

A policeman pulled off from the end of the street, so at least two vendors who were not registered just popped up in spots. And I found that out because on Sunday during Parade Weekend, they said, "We just popped up in a spot yesterday, and you all were fine with it." We had 200 people loading in.

Here, Nancy notes that holes in staffing and barricades facilitate unregulated activities, leading to defiant stakeholders who claim the right to queer spaces despite not registering or checking in with the organization. Thus, the securitization of queer spaces is flawed, harming the credibility of disciplinary agents who claim that contracts of sexual citizenship work for organizers.

In addition to operational difficulties, organizers also criticized the modes of governance bolstering oppressive systems, such as heteronormativity, toxic masculinity, and ableism. Nancy talked about an interaction she had with security regarding gender-neutral bathrooms: "They said, 'The all-gender bathroom signs might make straight people uncomfortable.' And somebody else went, 'Oh so it's gonna make your team uncomfortable. Then don't pee while you're here.'" Nancy admonishes flawed rhetoric among disciplinary agents that conflates inclusivity with vulnerability among dominant groups, such as straight people. These remarks indicate concerning relationships between disciplinary agents and the powerful institutions they serve— even in spaces that are labeled 'LGBTQ+-friendly.' Devon pointed out another incident with security where they harassed a woman: "This guy wanded her boobs, wanded her butt, and then patted her on the butt and said, 'Have a good night, baby!'" While Pride events are supposed to be inclusive *and* safe, Devon is horrified to discuss incidents where people are targeted for their identity and rendered unsafe because of toxically masculine agents. In addition to heteronormativity and toxic masculinity, securitization hindered the possibility of adapting to people with disabilities. Organizers noted that security measures, such as barriers, secure

entryways, and blocked-off areas disrupted accessible walkways for people with disabilities. Renee pointed out that (dis)ability is not a priority compared to security: "It felt like anything ADA [American with Disabilities Act] was just an afterthought. Rather than being like, 'Hey, there are going to be people with mobility aids…' Yeah, they aren't coming to Pride." Renee identifies disability as a secondary priority, resulting in inequitable systems barring people with mobility aids from going to Pride at all.

While some Pride organizers criticized the impacts of securitization, others are pragmatic about the reality of putting together large-scale events with layers of surveillance, discipline, and security. When discussing the result of "bad" security, Amanda made an analogy: "It's like making a cake. With enough good ingredients—even if the cake isn't perfect—it tastes good enough that people are left satisfied. And those on the inside know it could actually be a lot better." Amanda recognizes the flaws of securitization, complicating Gulf Pride's operations. However, she understands security as a means to an end, seeing the big picture of what Pride must be when coordinated among multiple agents in entangled contracts of sexual citizenship.

Ultimately, the organization's opinions on securitization illustrate the futility of efforts to completely protect people from unknown threats. Organizers argued that contracts purposefully obfuscated key details regarding safety and security. Miguel—a board member—noted that safety meetings were optional for organizers, which led to ambiguity:

I didn't know what I was supposed to say when people asked me about dogs sniffing the parks. I didn't know we had hired private security. I did not know what other precautions we had with the city. Do I believe that folks in charge of did the best that they could to ensure maximum safety? Yes, I do. But do I believe that it should have been communicated front and center? More often, yes.

Miguel notes that modes of governance that funnel responsibility from dominant agents to Gulf Pride leaders fail to provide "front-and-center" communication to everyone, threatening multiple stakeholders' safety.

Pride organizers also discussed how modes of governance and responsibilization only contributed to shallow performances of security. While the city emphasized the importance of organizers "due diligence" in policing events, public and private security agents failed to enforce laws regarding queer permissibility. Jason—the LGBTQ+ City Liaison—noted how plans to enforce the decency ordinance fell through on Parade Weekend:

> We had to have terms of agreement outside of our normal contract, just that Pride understood, you know, their responsibility based on the law. The funny thing was [the bill] got put on hold the day of Pride. So, there was no real enforcement, and no issue. But we still had to address it.

Judicial courts blocked the bill prohibiting non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality on Parade Day. However, Jason notes that Gulf Pride still feels responsible for addressing safety and security issues. Consequently, dominant interests escape accountability, resulting in no actual enforcement. Nancy provided another account about enforcement: "We did all the planning beforehand, and everything sort of landed in our favor. I think once we hit Parade Day, not a single officer is thinking [about] what people are wearing." While the blocked bill inevitably benefitted the organizational mission of providing safe spaces during Parade Weekend, these narratives articulate the responsibilization of security, conferring agency to organizers who were asked to carry out safety measures themselves.

In summary, Pride organizers submitted to contracts of sexual citizenship promising economic benefits to, and protection of, queer people. In exchange, dominant interests exploited

the value of queer visibility, funneling responsibilities to organizers and avoiding accountability. Consequently, Gulf Pride engaged in nuanced strategies that challenged who spoke in what spaces, filtering queerness between different texts, governments, organizations, and individuals.

Homoventriloquism: Dispersing Queer Agencies

Pride organizers navigated multiple levels of power, negotiating definitions of sexual citizenship among stakeholders, such as city employees, public/private security agents, organizational actors, and event attendees. Defending the rights of citizens required careful communication about what queerness meant in different contexts. For some agents (i.e., city employees), queerness was an economic product that ensured the construction of LGBTQ+-friendly marketplaces. Just as Isaiah—a board member—previously mentioned that "money talks," the cultural product of Pride animated various stakeholders to invest in the organization's mission. For disciplinary officers (i.e., police, private security), Pride was a cultural product that provided them overtime and evoked expressions of discomfort and intolerance. For others, queerness was an ontology of difference that necessitated emancipatory spaces of expression, political participation, and coalition building. Gulf Pride balanced both tensions as a nonprofit organization, negotiating financial directives *and* public social missions (Sanders, 2012).

I coin the term *homoventriloquism* to discuss the sociomaterial strategies that Pride organizers use to filter queerness between different stakeholders, strategically shaping definitions of sexual citizenship. Cooren's (2010; 2012) concept of ventriloquism argues that various nonhuman and human agents speak for one another in systems of power. For example, a bureaucratic text (ventriloquist) may speak for a spokesperson in an organization ("dummy" or figure). While the role of a ventriloquist is assumed to have more power, the dynamic produced in the relationship between agents may result in a dummy having more power. Additionally,

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ventriloquial relationships may confer more agency to the message itself, and result in an agentic text, discourse, or heuristic. In this case, I am interested in how stakeholders ventriloquize marginalized identities (the figures) to emphasize the power that queer progressivism holds. Organizers engage in homoventriloquism by allocating definitions of queerness to different agents, articulating the dilemma of speaking for others, and building contentious community partnerships.

The Utility of Queerness

Pride organizers used queerness as a figure to navigate ambiguous circumstances, ventriloquizing identities based on organizational, political, and bureaucratic obstacles. In this case, queer identity acted as a puppet that took on different meanings depending on relevant stakeholders. Nancy—the Executive Director—talked about the primary mechanism underpinning homoventriloquism, dispersing queerness to various agents:

> Allowing somebody else to speak in your space is not the same thing as you speaking, right? We can recognize people for the work that they do without it being an endorsement, without saying, "You should vote for this person."

She notes that queerness can take on multiple meanings, allowing Gulf Pride to emphasize the importance of queer visibility *without* jeopardizing the tumultuous contracts defining sexual citizenship. In Chapter Four, Pride organizers engaged in malicious compliance to produce indirect forms of resistance. Nancy articulates a different mechanism whereby homoventriloquism problematizes notions of voice, "speaking," and endorsements of cultural values. While the organization can only act in ways that uplift shallow definitions of queer progressivism (due to nonprofit status), others can speak for queer bodies, expanding notions of sexuality and gender in organizational spaces.

Homoventriloquism informed the micro-, meso-, and macro-networks of sexual citizenship discussed earlier in this chapter. In interpersonal interactions, Amara—a board member—noted that her queerness as an organizer was something she could take 'on' and 'off' depending on the situational constraints: "For people who don't know that I'm on the board, they won't know that I'm on the board. And for those that do know, they know I'm not speaking for the board. I'm speaking for myself." As discussed in Chapter Four, textual agencies and nonprofit sociomaterialities limited the free speech of Gulf Pride, which resulted in ambiguities about what organizers could and could not say. Amara responds to these tensions by compartmentalizing her identity as an organizer and filtering queerness between two ventriloquists: her personal identity and her organizational one.

Using queerness as a figure also affected political and organizational levels of sexual citizenship, redefining what civil rights are in the hands of different agents. For example, organizers noted that queerness bolstered the political capital of agents with ambiguous motives. Tyrique—a board member—talked about seeing a Muslim city councilperson at Pride wielding queerness as a positive identity:

City Council appoints someone in a seat. And I remember during this guy's appointment, there's a list of questions. And he got a lot of flak for his faith, of not being accepting of gay people, and that came up. He got the seat. But I remember being at the parade route, and he rode in the parade. And I think by him being in that position, seeing all those people—I don't know his views on LGBTQ people—but I know, because of that experience, it has changed. And not just for votes. You could see that he was like visibly happy and enjoying it.

Tyrique notes that the celebratory atmosphere of Parade Weekend changed the councilperson's mind about queerness, fostering positive attitudes. Additionally, this passage suggests that the councilperson appeals to various stakeholders by ventriloquizing queerness for political gain, tapping into the economic, political, and social capital that LGBTQ+-friendly cities generate. Other organizers noted the implications of politicians and city officials using queerness on a public stage. Nancy discussed how organizers provide different forms of access to individuals in the parade based on political motivations:

> We have a couple [of politicians] that register. They pay their way in, and that's a conversation I have with them too. If it's a campaign year, you have to pay. I can't just give you the spot, right? And they all do, it's no issue. It's funny though, because the mayor is in the parade all the time, but I don't think we think of him in the same way that we do other politicians. There are some other activists that aren't from [the city] that fought for us in [state capital] that I extended a personal invite to come down, like "Hey, thank you, you've been a great supporter. We'd love to have you if you're interested. Let me know, and you can ride with us." So, like that kind of stuff—recognition—is fine. It's saying stuff out loud that's hard.

Nancy acknowledges that nonprofit organizers are prohibited from "saying stuff out loud" or directly endorsing political candidates. In response, Gulf Pride ventriloquizes politicians, city officials, and activists to speak for them. While some politicians carry less value based on ambiguous motivation, others are "recognized" for their economic and political contributions, highlighting the difference in what Pride organizers are (and are not) allowed to say themselves.

Politicians and city officials were not the only figures among Pride organizers. Individuals made sense of the sexual citizenship contracts that upheld businesses as LGBTQ+-

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friendly. Bryce—a Board Co-Vice President—discussed his role of being a "mediator" between community stakeholders and LGBTQ+-friendly businesses, managing different ventriloquial relationships:

> We had two businesses that were reported to us that were not supporting trans or drag community members. They would employ drag queens to further their profit, but they were not actively advocating for their safety or their ability to make a living. This was difficult specifically in the context of the legislation that was proposed in [the state capital] …anti-drag bills. Businesses were asking their drag queens to not be politically active or not speak about the bills themselves. And if they did speak about the bills, the businesses would no longer allow them to perform at their establishments. Some of the drag performers that we work with actually did not want us to push further. From their perspective, it would be a detriment to their livelihood.

Bryce discusses multiple layers of ventriloquism, where Gulf Pride uses businesses as a figure embodying progressive attitudes about queerness. However, these businesses refuse to let drag performers exert political agency, fearing the repercussions of city and state lawmakers. While the organization uses figures (e.g., businesses) to emphasize the social, cultural, and political benefits of queerness, these figures use queerness for economic gain, resulting in unethical sanctioning and silencing of individuals' identities. These dynamics underscore the stakes of filtering queerness through different agents, promising the rights of sexual citizenship only if they abide by mores of permissibility. In the case of drag performers, political agency and resistance defies homonormative and homonationalist conventions of civility, which stress palatable images of queerness that maintain the status quo.

Beyond interpersonal interactions and organizational relationships, Pride organizers connected queerness with macro-level discourses about citizenship. For example, state legislation that prohibited non-normative performances of gender and sexuality differed from the city's goal of collaborating with Gulf Pride. In response, city officials used an existing ordinance as a figure of compliance. Jason—the LGBTQ City Liaison—discussed the motivations underlying the city ordinance:

> The drag bills, there was nothing in that bill that wasn't new, right? In our city ordinance, as far as decency or indecency in public…it already there. And actually, it's more strict than the bill. But because it was condoned as an attack on drag, it became a drag bill. Whether or not the state has weaponized their departments…we can't control that.

He notes multiple dynamics that illustrate how ventriloquism is shared among multiple agents. According to the state, their legislation has little to do with drag performances. Instead, it protects children from sexually explicit shows at public events. However, Jason acknowledges that anti-queer sentiments ventriloquize the legislation, making it an "anti-drag bill." In response, the city reinstituted a city ordinance to appease the state's demands. The ordinance is a figure for the city, state, *and* Gulf Pride. For the city, it allows greater control of surveilling and disciplining identities without being affiliated with anti-queer rhetoric. For the state, it is a figure that illustrates their success in protecting children and silencing the agency of queer people who are deemed inappropriate and dangerous. For Gulf Pride, the ordinance maintains productive models of sexual citizenship without severe state-mandated action. Thus, Pride organizers noted that cultural discourses about queerness are distributed among various (non)human agents, such as texts, laws, businesses, governments, and individuals. These acts of homoventriloquism facilitated ethical quandaries among individuals, especially when speaking on behalf of others.

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The Ethics of Speaking for (Queer) Others

As a queer organization, individuals working for Gulf Pride encountered uncomfortable situations when speaking on behalf of marginalized populations, fostering critical discussions of homoventriloquism. Organizers often had to speak on queer civil rights issues, such as anti-drag bills, transgender healthcare, and the respectability of Pride in tandem with government structures. Many individuals felt anxiety based on what was the "right" thing to say, critically analyzing their own roles as puppets for the organization's agendas. Amanda—the Board President—expressed her fears about speaking on behalf of the organization, especially to the media:

> I feel like there should have been more training on talking points with the board as a whole so that everyone understood more about what was actually happening. And I feel that would have been beneficial so that more board members could have done interviews. I think a lot were afraid to speak because they felt like they didn't know the answer, or they weren't given the opportunity.

Amanda notes that training would have helped organizers understand their roles as spokespersons, articulating a correct kind of queerness that must represent various stakeholder interests 'accurately.' Devon—the Volunteer Director—also wondered about proper protocols when speaking for others:

> I think as an organization, there needs to be a certain level of protocol. Okay, there's always going to be something political happening. So, when these political things happen, what are the questions that we need to know? What are the plans that we come up with based on the answers that we execute? We don't *have* to get involved. It's one thing to have a position. It's another thing to be involved.

Devon notes that taking up a position requires organizational collaboration. These strategies ask organizers to articulate a unified brand of social justice, articulating queerness in ways that answer particular "questions," especially when speaking on behalf of an organization that risks nonprofit status (see Chapter Four).

Ethics of speaking for others extended beyond Gulf Pride and reflected the contracts of sexual citizenship with the city. Jason—the LGBTQ+ City Liaison—articulated his perspective on external communication:

> I don't necessarily live and work in some facets of our community that need attention. I've made sure that the alphabet soup is represented. I also understand where we're at…to open certain doors this role can open, to benefit part our community…so other people can open those doors.

Here, Jason acknowledges that his role as City Liaison creates tension. As a role that speaks on behalf of the city, Jason is a figure bridging dominant interests and the "alphabet soup" of the LGBTQ+ community. Because queerness is not monolithic, Jason's flexibility in ventriloquizing the role allows multiple discourses, communities, roles, and people to act.

One example that illustrates the ethics of homoventriloquism is the Transgender Talent Show—an event that invites transgender community members to showcase their interests and passions. Pride organizers co-hosted this event with another nonprofit focusing on transgender mental healthcare. Both Gulf Pride and this nonprofit held this event to create unique spaces for transgender people to meet one another, celebrate community excellence vis-à-vis a talent show, and speak against legislation stripping medical autonomy from transgender individuals. Bryce— a cisgender man—hosted the talent show, which resulted in discourses about *who* is entitled to

speak in *specific* cultural spaces. Bryce talked about his perspective running the Transgender

Talent Show, implicating the nuances in identity politics:

> I made a very conscious decision to actively advocate in spaces of my privilege. What I
>
> mean by that is in my cis maleness: Advocating for both trans folk and for women,
>
> actively and aggressively clearing spaces, and creating spaces to share my platforms with
>
> those people. I think that's how I ended up being the person that was the lead on [the
>
> Transgender Talent Show] this year, which I will say, I did not want this. I care deeply
>
> about the trans community and also recognize that almost all of the programs that we do
>
> for Gulf Pride are run by people that see themselves as part of a community.

Bryce recognizes that by hosting the Transgender Talent Show, he ventriloquizes the value of

transgender identity in a public space. However, he experiences tension based on his cisgender

identity, facilitating dissonance between his personal and professional roles. He goes on to

discuss dilemmas of tokenization (described in the previous chapter) that dictate "points of

contact" for each event. For example, Amara—a Black lesbian—runs an event for Black

lesbians, and Amanda—a queer parent—runs Children's Day. He continued with his

explanation, articulating how he became the point of contact for an event that did not align with

his identity:

> The problem was like, I don't have a large network of trans folks that were willing to
>
> help me do the same. And a lot of our trans community members left the state—just
>
> straight dipped. So, that was hard to build new relationships with trans folks and
>
> subsequently ask them to do a thing and hold them accountable when they didn't do a
>
> thing.

Due to legislation that threatens the existence of the transgender communities, Bryce struggles to find folks who can ventriloquize their identities for the Transgender Talent Show. Additionally, he finds that holding transgender people accountable for events feels unethical as a cisgender man.

While Bryce attempted to include transgender individuals in this event, many people refused to help. At the organizational retreat for Gulf Pride, I noted a conversation where board members discussed how it was "problematic" and "incredibly difficult" to put on the Transgender Talent Show when it feels wrong to "trespass" on behalf of transgender individuals. Simultaneously, organizers noted that community members for events often "disappear," leaving points of contact with the hard work of cleaning up events. Some people brought up the solution of having first responders (i.e., firefighters) help with breakdown, as long as "they're all gay." In these discussions, organizers grapple with the figure of identity itself, acting as a mask of credibility that can speak to issues of gender, sexuality, and power in community spaces. Additionally, organizers grapple with the embodied work of Pride that showcases identity on behalf of people without asking for their full participation (e.g., setup and breakdown). Thus, Gulf Pride acts as a community ventriloquist, holding up 'puppets' of events that cater to different individuals, causing tension among organizers who feel like their identities do not confer credibility or expertise.

Ventriloquizing Community Partnerships

Ethical dilemmas about homoventriloquism fostered various outcomes. In addition to speaking on behalf of others as a queer organization, individuals also described the social, financial, and political channels that informed community partnerships. As a nonprofit, Gulf Pride discussed how they should give back to the community, ventriloquizing money,

relationships, and presence at others' events to signify the importance of sexual citizenship networks. Nancy talked about the value of community partnerships:

> I think we can be involved in a better way. How do we become involved with other organizations and use our platform to support them to better them when we have extra dollars? How do we put that back in the community?

Nancy questions the meaning of community partnerships, focusing on the organization's financial privileges. Here, "extra dollars" signify a figure that nonprofit organizations use to galvanize the political agendas of other entities. For example, Tyrique—a Black board member—discussed the conversations that culminated in the Juneteenth Event, underscoring representations of racial identity.

> Anything Gulf Pride does automatically kind of overshadows Juneteenth because we have the budget to put on something significant. So, we invited local stakeholders of color to have the conversation like, "Okay, if we do this, what does it look like? We want to do it but don't want to compete with any of your events, right?" And they told us they wanted us to do, but they didn't want us to call it Juneteenth.

Tyrique notes that representing people of color in a Juneteenth Event ventriloquizes race, creating tensions among various stakeholders who feel "overshadowed" by Gulf Pride's financial privileges. Stakeholders resisted the label of a "Juneteenth" event because it reflects a monolithic representation of race, silencing alternative events in nonprofit marketplaces.

Often, community partnerships reflected contracts of sexual citizenship, whereby entities exchange favors with one another to showcase different forms of political activism. At the organizational retreat for Gulf Pride, I noted a conversation among board members about community outreach. Some board members desired no partnerships with other nonprofits,

holding "solo shows" that allowed Pride organizers to network with influential donors and individuals. In this case, a board member rejected his status as a "working board member" and requested fewer labor expectations during community events. Other board members rationalized this request within neoliberal relationships that boil down social justice to economic exchanges between partners. One board member said community partners needed to be more transparent about their requests for Gulf Pride, creating frustration among organizers: "What is the expectation? That we give money? That we show up? Which is it?" By providing either-or options, the organization limits its presence and defines community partnerships in extractive models of political activism. Spencer—a long-time board member—elaborated on these ideas in an interview, retelling a past Board President's ideas about donating time, energy, and money to other organizations: "She said, 'We do not partner with anybody. We do not go to anybody's events unless we get something out of the event.' But it's another gay organization. Half the board went, and the other half stayed." Many of these sentiments of going to events for something in return rely on economized models of sexual citizenship, which created a "bad look for Gulf Pride" (Spencer)—an organization that touts diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, these dynamics create the conditions for hostile ventriloquisms of queerness, whereby Gulf Pride has the privilege to define what queerness is by isolating events, community partnerships, and representations of identity.

While some organizers viewed community partnerships as extractive, others noted positive forms of ventriloquism that honored queer bodies. Nancy noted that collaborating with corporations may appear problematic due to the conflation between economic productivity and queer identity. However, it ultimately asked the "queer people in that organization where we want them to put their money." Here, Nancy points to the ethical dilemmas of ventriloquizing

queerness in organizational contexts. She defends representations of queerness because she is "working with the people who [in the city], who are gay," which aligns particularized identities (ventriloquists) with organizational platforms (figures). These sentiments extended to dominant interests, such as police officers, who helped Gulf Pride based on shared identities. Miguel—a board member—described how queerness acted as a figure to hide the consequences of backing disciplinary agents, such as police officers:

> I have a Black daughter, and I'm a Hispanic man. I'm supposed to trust the police? At the
> end of the day, it's the closest thing to like authority and protection that I can imagine.
> And I don't think everybody's gonna be happy. You can't please everyone. And if that
> means that we have the privilege of having a gay chief of police, then we lean on our
> Police Department. Are they racist and homophobic? Probably, 100%. But is their Chief
> gay? Yes, so the likelihood of that happening is a little less.

Miguel notes that queerness acts as a shield that obfuscates problematic community partnerships with police. While securitization often relies on discriminatory systems targeting people of color, Miguel states that the likelihood of violence is less when considering the identity of the Police Chief.

In summary, homoventriloquism acts as a sociomaterial strategy filtering queerness between different ventriloquists, such as texts, individuals, governments, and organizations. These acts afford agents the ambiguity of defining identity and difference in any way they want, upholding the value of queer progressivism based on myriad motivations, values, and organizational boundaries. These strategies reflect broader contracts of sexual citizenships that protect and benefit from queer visibility if it enables problematic modes of governance. As a

result, Pride organizers rendered queer bodies palatable, constructing a patriotic and privileged

subject worthy of celebration and political agency.

CHAPTER SEVEN: QUEER ORGANIZATIONAL WORLDMAKING, REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation project analyzed the communicative strategies of Pride organizers—individuals who create, coordinate, and conceptualize the celebration of queer identity in the public sphere. Grounded in historical constructions of queer civil rights, Pride challenges normative sexual systems such as cis- and heteronormativity. However, historical trends of commercialization, globalization, and capitalism obfuscate radical forms of political activism. When I first attended Pride at 17 years old, I was surprised to see the mundane, sanitized, and organizational constructions of sexuality and gender. Where I expected to see radical political demonstrations with lively crowds, I encountered a peaceful town square, lined with booths from different vendors. The bodies around me challenged my biases about what queerness *should* look like. As a White, rurally bound man in the Midwest, it was shocking to see that sexuality and gender appeared so…normal. *Was Pride not supposed to be crazy? Was it not supposed to make me feel like I belong?* I left Pride that day wondering what the point of it all was.

It was not until years later that I began to reflect on these moments. Learning about organizational communication and autoethnography in graduate school gave me the tools to understand the politics of identity and difference that resulted in the negative feelings that day. Furthermore, my cynicism of Pride was no longer shallow. It is now complicated, multifaceted, and passionate based on my critical commitments to social justice. Pride appears so normal because it was deliberately organized that way, reaffirming nuanced systems of sexual normativity and shallow forms of political activism. I turned my gaze outward, away from just

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my queer identity and toward the external structures, discourses, and people that make Pride happen.

This dissertation is a passion project addressing the communicative questions that drive my investigation of sexuality, gender, and social justice in a rapidly shifting society. To answer these research questions, I engaged in a queer organizational autoethnography of Gulf Pride. This approach was enriching and gave me many unique experiences which illustrated key organizational mechanics of queer civil rights movements.

I identified several themes within my data analysis. In response to RQ1— "How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate sociomaterial dilemmas in queer politics?"—I analyzed the various agencies shaping power in Gulf Pride, such as spatiotemporal uncertainties, nonprofit sociomaterialities, and marketable forms of activism that limited political potential. Pride organizers engaged in malicious compliance to yield to and divest from these dilemmas simultaneously. *Malicious compliance* acts as a sociomaterial strategy that obeys various (non)human agencies and simultaneously practices indirect, paradoxical, and absurd forms of resistance.

In response to RQ2— "How do Pride organizers How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate the embodiment of their work?"—I outlined the embodiment of organizers' labor, resulting in tokenization, emotional turmoil, and problematic systems of organizational recognition.

In response to RQ3— "How do Pride organizers communicatively navigate systems of sexual normativity?"—I argued that organizers committed to contracts of sexual citizenship, securing queer civil rights at the cost of 'selling' Pride labor within capitalist and secured marketplaces. Organizers utilized homoventriloquism as a sociomaterial strategy to disperse

queerness between different agents. *Homoventriloquism* uses queerness as a puppet, which confers credibility and flexibility to a variety of organizers in Pride spaces.

In this chapter, I reflect on this dissertation's communicative, theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. Additionally, I write about my time participating in Pride organizing, which interrogates taken-for-granted relationships between researchers and the people with whom we work. First, I outline this project's contributions to the communication field more broadly. Second, I talk about theoretical and methodological contributions. Next, I discuss practical applications for Pride stakeholders (i.e., organizers, government officials, sponsors). I conclude the chapter by talking about the hope of *queer organizational worldmaking,* a term I use to describe the uncertain future of social movements addressing sexuality and gender in the public sphere.

Pride and Communication

My investigation of Pride elicits multiple findings bout communication, the very process that illuminates the nature of organizing, sociomaterial phenomena, and queerness. First, Pride organizing challenges the boundaries of what organizational communication can be. This project articulates not only the ephemeral boundaries surrounding nonprofit structures (organizations), but also the actions underpinning social justice movements (organizing) and the degree to which Pride can be a 'professional' entity (organizationally) despite the fluidity and uncertainty of queer identity (Putnam et al., 1999; Schoenborn et al., 2019; Wilhoit, 2016). By articulating Pride's structures, discourses, and meanings, I outline the organizational functions of social movements, dissecting the drawback of exercising political activism in tandem with nonprofit, stakeholder, and governmental systems (Ganesh et al., 2005). Additionally, by developing terms that articulate subversive communicative maneuvers (e.g., malicious compliance and

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homoventriloquism), I situate organizational communication in discursive sites of meaning-making wherein individuals can discover small spaces of resistance, underscoring the dynamic interplay between power, control, and identity (Linabary et al., 2021).

Second, I highlight my commitments to sociomaterial investigations of organizational contexts. Pride organizers undoubtedly situate queerness in the co-construction of social *and* material worlds (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Kuhn et al., 2017; Orlikowski, 2007). Celebrating Pride includes both discourses about sexuality and gender in the public sphere as well as material configurations of bodies, texts, structures, emotions, histories, and spaces. Attending to sociomateriality reveals the connection between social justice organizing and queer (in)visibility. For instance, in Chapter Four, multiple (non)human agencies (i.e., financial capital, spatiotemporal agencies, nonprofit texts, and neoliberal branding practices) rendered Pride a valuable cultural product—one that is exchanged in mutually beneficial (and contentious) relationships with influential stakeholders. Additionally, in Chapter Five, organizers navigated embodied dilemmas, materializing complex emotional responses to their work (Cooren, 2018). These sociomaterial configurations limit the political agency of Pride organizers and place them in situations where their celebrations must be both profitable and secure to succeed. Additionally, sociomateriality affords organizers unique strategies of resistance that trouble human agency, such as malicious compliance and homoventriloquism. Malicious compliance acknowledges nonhuman agencies (e.g., texts, laws, policies, and legislation) that demand obedience, yet illustrates how resistance is still possible. Homoventriloquism filters queerness between various agents, and, in doing so, affords voice to nonhuman structures (e.g., organizations and governments).

Third and finally, organizers' strategies also highlight differences between queer *identity* and queer *theory*, illuminating harmful systems of normativity and subversive political communication. Queer identity refers to various marginalized positionalities tied to sexuality and gender, and queer theory couches marginalized identity in academic critiques of identity and difference. As I have discussed in previous chapters, a queer approach to communication posits identity as anti-normative, fluid, and politically minded (McDonald, 2015; Sedgewick, 2008; Yep, 2014), and this project situates Pride in contextually bound performances of difference, assimilating queerness into dominant structures. For instance, in Chapter Six, organizers were permitted to fight for the visibility of queerness *if* it conferred channels of professionalism and credibility, with the aim being to render queerness palatable, permissible, and appropriate in the public sphere. These strategies ironically deny queer theory's axioms of radical, embodied representation. Instead, they tokenized 'discursive accomplishments' of static categories (e.g., sexuality, gender, race) that advance the progressive agendas of Pride (Love, 2011; McDonald, 2015). Organizers inevitably operate within dominant systems, such as capitalist marketplaces, resulting in politically subversive performances that simultaneously acknowledge and subvert normative expectations about identity (e.g., malicious compliance, homoventriloquism; Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Compton & Dougherty, 2017). Next, I outline the critical theoretical implications of this dissertation.

Theoretical Implications

This dissertation employs tension-centered approaches to organizational communication, sociomaterial theorizing, and co-sexuality to understand the communicative strategies of Pride organizing. Together, these theoretical domains unravel the contentious space of organizing, and highlight the power-laden dynamics which are embedded within celebrations of sexuality and

gender in interpersonal interactions, organizational responses to normative sexual systems, and structural discourses regarding the permissibility of queerness in the public sphere. In doing so, I expand on (a) tension-centered approaches to communication vis-à-vis the conceptualization of malicious compliance, underscoring unique paradoxical forms of resistance; (b) sociomateriality with discussions about limited political agency, embodiment, intersectional identity, and homoventriloquism; and (c) frameworks of co-sexuality by delineating the influence of sexual citizenship in Pride spaces.

Tension-Centered Approaches to Pride Organizing

First, this dissertation contributes to a nuanced understanding of tension in organizational communication, which is illustrated in my development of the term malicious compliance. Tension-centered approaches outline the structures, messages, and values endemic to Pride organizers, revealing complicated negotiations of power. Structural tensions demand credibility from organizers based on mores of professionalism, legality, and inclusivity. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) articulate the relationship between mores of professionalism and individual agency, noting the privilege conferred to individuals and organizations who prove themselves as 'experts.' Similarly, Pride organizers engaged in various behaviors vying for "collective social mobility" (MacDonald, 1995, p. 51). For example, organizers in Chapter Six constructed queer inclusivity in tandem with economic productivity, which grants organizational credibility and mobility. Gulf Pride engaged in complicated discourses about professionalism, highlighting behaviors that maintain mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders and stigmatizing ones that threaten the organization's existence. Often, these behaviors align with hierarchical systems, effectively granting the privilege of professionalism to dominant groups at the expense of

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marginalized others (e.g., lower-class individuals, organizers of color; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Ferguson Jr. & Dougherty, 2022; McDonald, 2015).

These tensions not only reflect hegemonic structures, but also the legal boundaries that surround what a nonprofit can or cannot do. Gulf Pride undoubtedly existed within nonprofit boundaries, which pulls organizers between financial directives and beneficial social missions (Sanders, 2012). In Chapter Four, organizers negotiated various stakeholders, textual agencies about nonprofit politics, and uncertainties about what political strategies are considered marketable. These dynamics speak to interdisciplinary scholarship about how rapidly shifting marketplaces grant privileges to nonprofits if they showcase the 'right' kind of diversity (Branton & Compton, 2021; D'Enbeau & Buzzanell, 2013; Ward, 2008a). This dissertation expands on nonprofits' communicative politics, arguing that diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in organizational contexts reify dominant interests.

Indeed, organizers engaged in unique forms of political communication due to demands of inclusivity, which siphoned particular identity categories (e.g., Black people, transgender people) into problematic caricatures of diversity, equity, and inclusion, thus, reinforcing essentialism and tokenization (Bendl & Hoffman, 2015). Many individuals in this organization pointed to their identities as being valuable products that can be 'used' to advance organizational agendas, which rendered activism a form of marketing that appealed to a generic stakeholder population (Branton & Compton, 2021). These strategies illustrate the illusion of diversity in 'progressive organizations,' abandoning organizational transformation for neoliberal capitalist agendas (Burchiellaro, 2021). Beyond structural tensions, organizers sifted between competing messages characterizing what a queer civil rights movement should be.

Messages about Pride reflect contentious communication among and between organizers. In many cases, organizers' close relationships with influential stakeholders (e.g., city officials, police, community sponsors) transformed Gulf Pride into a celebratory parade rather than a political protest (Bruce, 2016; Lewis & Hermann, 2022). While Pride is historically rooted in *gay power* activism—a movement fighting hegemonic systems, such as capitalism and state-sanctioned control—Gulf Pride often elected for *gay pride* activism—a movement vying for cultural visibility in tandem with profitable partnerships (Holmes, 2022). Thus, organizers debated whether their social justice initiatives were serious when several agencies limited their political potential, resulting in pragmatic forms of organizing (Okamoto, 2020) that recognize the limits of what Pride can do. In effect, this dissertation illustrates the product of contemporary social movement organizing where individuals engage in shallow celebrations of identity and difference, which simultaneously appease dominant interests and marginalized populations.

Competing messages also reflect intersectional identities, and highlight the ways in which lived experience helps people make sense of queer civil rights movements. Pride organizers outlined the organizational features of social class, race, and gender. Similarly, communication scholars note that identities in queer-oriented organizations are never simple, monolithic, or stable (Hearn, 1998; Parker & McDonald, 2019). Diverse individuals argued about how to 'accurately' represent themselves in Pride organizing, often electing for single-identity events that essentialized and tokenized people along the lines of social class (e.g., philanthropic events, banquets), race (e.g., Juneteenth), and gender (e.g., women's night). These strategies ultimately deny the importance of intersectionality and posit the profitability of neatly packaged identity for various stakeholders.

Chapter Five draws out the importance of intersectionality in spaces that stress the cohesion of the queer community. While contemporary formations of queer identity posit a "quasi-ethnic" identity (Epstein, 1987, p. 12), the LGBTQ+ community is diverse, rife with conflict, and fragmented based on irreconcilable intersectionalities (e.g., race, social class). Based on these tensions, Pride organizers communicated differently about the value of cultural events. For example, many organizers pointed to intersectionalities of race, sexuality, and gender to bolster the importance of queer BIPOC, which facilitated specific celebrations (e.g., the Juneteenth Event). However, organizers met obstacles couching said events in neoliberal models of profit. Some organizers perceived the Juneteenth Event as unsuccessful due to a lack of profit, which reflects historical struggles in coordinating unified goals due to systems of privilege and oppression that uphold normative events while silencing 'unpopular' others (DeFilippis, 2019; Ghaziani et al., 2016; Mumford, 2019).

Pride organizers, at once, navigated complicated structures and messages as well as paradoxes about Pride's values. Often, Pride's celebration of identity and difference in the public sphere must exist simultaneously with expectations about respectability, professionalism, and permissibility. Organizers often internalized paradoxical values about Pride, such as a need to be both genuine *and* professional. For instance, in Chapter Six, I illustrate how Gulf Pride policed its own community based on what various stakeholders valued in public spaces, resulting in harmful structures of economization and securitization. Similarly, queer organizations may urge us to express our freedoms as sexual citizens while also constraining their identities within structures, policies, and behaviors that reinforce hegemonic systems (Burchiellaro, 2021; Priola et al., 2018). This issue shows how the notion of progressivism in organizations fails to account for paradoxical representations of structure and spontaneity. In other words, this dissertation

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articulates the mechanisms by which diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizational contexts fail to account for paradoxical embodiments of identity and difference.

Additionally, organizers identified spatiotemporal uncertainties that hindered their political potential. In Chapter Four, hostile political spaces that threatened queer identity (e.g., the Southeastern United States) and temporalities that allocated little time for political participation (e.g., Pride Month) produced paradoxical values, pushing for equitable responses but only in specific circumstances (Ghaziani et al., 2016; Kaygalak-Celebi et al., 2020). These seemingly incommensurable values stymied the authentic representations of queer identity in the public sphere (see Kates & Belk, 2001), and forced organizers into ambiguous situations where responses were politically charged.

A key contribution of this research is the development of the term "malicious compliance" to show how individuals can respond to various tensions in organizational contexts. In this study, Pride organizers responded to political tensions through subversive responses. While communications scholars note that paradoxes often result in silence and inaction among marginalized populations (Priola et al., 2018), these organizers engaged in malicious compliance to navigate paradoxes that demand bureaucratic adherence *and* political transformation. Malicious compliance articulates the possibilities of subversive political strategizing, and offers opportunities for strategic visions, cognitive complexity, and humor (Berti & Simpson, 2021; Hargrave & van de Ven, 2017). For example, organizers' narrative sensemaking on the task of painting an entire intersection with rainbow iconography—instead of just painting the crosswalks—illustrated adherence to hegemonic structures that forbid political activism (i.e., no painting on crosswalks) *and* humorous solutions showcasing the absurdity of such laws (i.e., painting in the entire intersection instead; see Chapter Four). By outlining malicious compliance,

I illuminate a nuanced form of political resistance that is organizationally driven and sociomaterial (described in the next section). These strategies showcase the complicated terrains of power that organizational members must navigate in the process of weaving in and out of contradictory, paradoxical, and incommensurable discourses. Additionally, this concept can translate to several contexts, illustrating political resistance in other social movements, organizations, and individual responses to discrimination and normativity. For example, aid organizations (e.g., homeless shelters) may engage in forms of malicious compliance to bypass neoliberal formations of state aid, bureaucracy, etc. For Pride organizers, malicious compliance provided a strategy that is both "revolutionary and assimilationist." Consequently, it illustrates small but admirable forms of resistance in an otherwise dominated marketplace of neoliberal social movements (Thompson, 2018, p. 69).

Sociomaterial Theorizing and Political Activism

Sociomaterial theorizing builds from tension-centered approaches to organizational communication, interrogating discursive and tangible worldmaking among and by Pride organizers. Specifically, I use feminist dilemmatic theorizing to challenge social constructionist models in tension-centered approaches, which assume discourses, narratives, and messages are solely responsible for the construction of social movements. Instead of viewing tensions as a trap, dilemmas allow for fruitful insights among scholars, practitioners, and social justice activists (Buzzanell, 2021; Harris, 2016). This dissertation builds on multiple sociomaterial dilemmas in feminist organizing, dissecting intra-actions (Barad, 2007) of political (in)visibility in queer spaces. Most importantly, I argue that an emphasis on safe spaces reflects a greater dilemma about the various agencies characterizing inclusivity, safety, and political activism in Pride. Bruce (2016) differentiates between social justice initiatives that educate communities

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versus platforms that vie for structural transformation. Similarly, Pride organizers debated what a safe space was, oscillating between environments of solidarity for marginalized populations and neoliberal branding practices (Branton & Compton, 2021) which simultaneously appealed to a generic, universal population. These dilemmas indicate a dichotomy between correspondent models of communication that 'observe' (or educate) on social justice initiatives and social constructionism frameworks that assume human agency and interaction are solely responsible for the tumultuous landscape of queer civil rights (Harris, 2016; 2019). Instead, this project asserts that a variety of (non)human agents shape what Pride is, and is not, effectively implicating not only the power of various influences (e.g., nonprofit texts, stakeholders, structures) but also the materializations of embodied work and emotional displays. At stake in these analyses is how we frame social justice movements: Without a multifaceted sociomaterial consideration of feminist organizing, we ignore the constrained, embodied, and tangible phenomena that shape issues of (in)equity and (in)justice.

Feminist analyses of Pride organizing reveal the impact of dominant systems in social justice organizing, such as tokenization, underscoring the power-laden dynamics of labor and emotion. For instance, in Chapter Five, organizers' discussion of tokenization functioned as a form of neoliberal feminist organizing, whereby particular identities (i.e., race, (trans)gender, social class) are showcased at the cost of individual dignity and respect. For example, Serena's biracial identity illustrated how dichotomies of race (White—Black) produced anxiety about belonging in Pride spaces. These dilemmas illustrate the interconnected dynamics of oppression, positing feminism as a catch-all solution to issues of racism, patriarchy, and meritocracy (Buzzanell, 1994). However, neoliberal obfuscations of social movements profit from shallow representations of diversity (Grosser & McCarthy, 2019; Prugl, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014), and, as

a result, create inequality regimes (Acker, 2006; Benschop, 2021) that ground organizers' labor in fragmented accounts of work, emotion, and organizational hierarchy.

Specifically, this dissertation extends feminist dilemmatic theorizing by grounding inequitable systems of privilege and oppression in the material configuration whose bodies indicate the 'right' kind of social justice (see Buzzanell, 2019). Pride organizers noted that different bodies elicit contradictory discourses about organizational recognition (i.e., awards, status), reflecting interlinkages of White supremacy, toxic masculinity, and what is considered 'hard' work. For example, organizers criticized Bryce (a Black board member) for his covert attempts at gaining organizational recognition. In contrast, Devon (a White Board member) was applauded for his efforts, which signifies a double standard of labor based on systems of White supremacy. Thus, materializations (Cooren, 2018) of emotion and discussions of embodiment situated specific individuals in a frustrating sociomaterial entanglement: one where their identities are simultaneously cherished and used for ulterior motives. In Chapter Five, I articulate organizers' discussions of work, emotion, and identity in the fallout after an award ceremony, bolstering historical and social privileging of White gay men. By dissecting the embodied politics of being an arbiter of privilege in organizing, I outline nuanced analyses of power in organizational terrains that implicate both materiality and discourse (Gist-Mackey & Dougherty, 2021). While some sociomaterial analyses argue for the importance of relationality—and the inseparability of material and social phenomena—this dissertation identifies the unique boundaries of race, gender, and social class surrounding sociomateriality, to identify different systems of oppression and privilege (Mutch, 2013).

One significant extension of sociomaterial research is my contribution of the term "homoventriloquism," which explores how queer agency is dispersed among various

(non)human agents. For example, Cooren (2010; 2012) uses ventriloquism to discuss the mechanisms whereby agents speak for each other in a given intra-action, facilitating different meanings of power, identity, and social justice. I add the prefix *homo* for two reasons. First, homoventriloquism deals specifically with neoliberal systems of progressivism that benefit from the ambiguity of queerness. Highlighting "homo" necessitates a sociomaterial investigation of sexuality and gender in organizational contexts. Thus, "homo" refers to the identities of queer people.

Second, homoventriloquism extends taxonomies of both homonormativity and homonationalism, which articulate the conditional privilege of queerness in contexts of different identities (e.g., Whiteness, social class, status) and national spaces. In other words, homoventriloquism addresses nuanced systems of sexual normativity compared to significant but one-dimensional analyses of heteronormativity. Here, "homo" acts as a taxonomical nod to existing literature. In totality, homoventriloquism provides a sociomaterial and communicative mechanism to explain the issues driving the queer civil rights movement, resulting in fluid spaces of organizing where identity is used for diverse, and often problematic purposes As Chapter Six shows, organizers, stakeholders, and disciplinary agents used queerness as a dummy to advance disparate agendas. In some cases, organizers noted that embodying different kinds of queerness, such as when Bryce, a cis man, spoke on transgender issues, was inequitable. In other cases, organizers noted that some individuals (e.g., local politicians) embodied queerness to achieve higher social status, thus, furthering neoliberal feminist agendas.

Additionally, this dissertation draws on feminist new materialism to explicate the historical, temporal, and spatial significance of Pride organizing. For instance, Chapter Four discusses the impact of spatiotemporal uncertainties, problematizing a linear approach to history

and time. Similarly, feminist new materialism asserts the asymmetry in spatiotemporal configurations, silencing hidden forms of political activism and resistance vis-à-vis stage models of social movements (e.g., feminist waves). Analyses of both sociomaterial dilemmas and labor reveal that Gulf Pride existed in ephemeral configurations of civil rights history, disconnected from alternative and radical political outlets that challenge dominant systems. I argue that contemporary social movements lack the resources, historical sensemaking, and time to think critically about their political actions, resulting in shallow and ineffective forms of activism that serve the demands of dominant interests. For example, organizers noted that thorough moments of sensemaking and reflection were unavailable due to compressed timelines, leaving individuals without valuable tools of deliberation, critique, and political strategy. These dynamics not only illustrate the sociomaterial entanglements of social movements, but also the relationships between different stakeholders that entrench organizers in normative systems of sexuality.

Co-Sexuality: Normativity and Sexual Citizenship

Co-sexuality provides an analytical framework explicating the "communicative and embodied push-and-pull" among Pride organizers, resulting in complex contracts of citizenship (Compton & Dougherty, 2017, p. 875). While much research discusses individual responses to heteronormativity (Bie & Tang, 2016; Branton & Compton, 2021; Camara et al., 2012; Fox & Warber, 2015; Rudnick & Munz, 2022), this dissertation builds on concepts of homonormativity and homonationalism (Duggan, 2002; Puar, 2013) to discuss the ways queer individuals respond to nuanced sexual normativities. Ultimately, contemporary organizers no longer deal with *just* threats of anti-queer violence and discrimination, but also post-gay conceptualizations of identity that benefit from the trendiness of particular performances of sexuality and gender in the public sphere. My analysis from Chapter Six shows how organizers often assimilated into dominant

systems, forming complex contracts that uplift queer identity as profitable, patriotic, and privileged. While these agreements to defend queer civil rights appear socially just, a queer theoretical perspective problematizes static notions of identity which vie for "absolute recognition" (McDonald, 2015, p. 320), critiquing constructions of "LGBTQ+-friendliness." To be considered credible citizens in the eyes of the city, state, and nation, queer people must submit to disciplinary structures that reflect certain kinds of queerness, which deny fluid definitions of identity, the interlinkages of other intersections (e.g., race, gender), and resistance to monolithic representations. For example, Pride organizers noted that only 'professional' images of queerness were considered reputable due to informal and formal relationships with dominant interests, which privileges White, upper-class, and organizationally recognized forms of queerness. Additionally, contractual agreements privileging Pride's organizational actions contribute to problematic systems that economize and securitize political activism, and, as a result, gatekeep emancipatory strategies among civil rights activists (Eguchi, 2021; McDonald, 2015).

Pride organizers in this study argued that the commercialization of sexuality and gender in the public sphere ensures state-mandated protection from violence and discrimination, resulting in neoliberal forms of feminism that conflate inclusion (assimilation into dominant institutions) with freedom (Chavez, 2013). Through conducting this research, it was apparent that organizers were not free to do as they please. Instead, they had to prove that their political initiatives were profitable to the surrounding community, which cements "the productive value of queer labor" (Burchiellaro, 2021, p. 765) in a rapidly shifting capitalist economy, generating tourism, entertainment, and prestige for communities that espouse "LGBTQ+-friendliness." For

example, organizers defended Gulf Pride as valuable because it is the city's #1 cultural event, which conflated social value with economic gain for the surrounding community.

Capitalist mechanisms ensured that Gulf Pride was a secure cultural product, engaging in various modes of governance that disciplined queer bodies vis-à-vis surveillance, observation, and the normalization of security in public and private forms (Foucault, 1977). Chapter Six discusses various forms of governance, such as legislation dictating what queer people were allowed to wear in public and organizational policies mandating what safety and security 'looked' like during public events. These systems not only reflected an Othering of queerness in public spaces but also complicated systems of responsibilization (Pyysiäinen et al., 2017), funneling safety and security concerns from apathetic dominant interests (i.e., government officials and police officers) to organizational leaders (i.e., Gulf Pride) to individual attendees and volunteers. What is most concerning are the ways safety, security, and the livelihood of queer people were promised to dominant interests but simultaneously thrown aside, leaving individuals with the burden of protecting themselves with oppressive instruments. For example, Chapter Six discusses the onus of morality policing among individual volunteers where dominant interests (e.g., city police) aimed to protect queer people, but left them with the dirty work of surveilling and discriminating against their own community. These actions, such as training volunteers to "See Something, Say Something" and differentiating between cis-normative and transphobic appearances during Parade Day, upheld privileged, clean-cut, and palatable images of queerness (i.e., homonormativity) and discriminated against marginalized, oppressed, and Othered communities based on harmful rhetoric of who is a 'deserving' citizen in public spaces (i.e., homonationalism; Bruce, 2016; D'Emilio, 1983; Harvey, 2006; Holmes, 2022; Weiss, 2018). As I have shown, this dissertation extends beyond cultural critiques of Pride and

emphasizes the communicative mechanisms whereby organizers commit to problematic systems of security, surveillance, and discipline, ultimately assimilating subjects into 'new' regimes of sexual citizenship and control.

Interestingly, this dissertation highlights ruptures in sexual normativities and, in turn, provides queer theoretical insights on resistance. While Pride organizers are confined to systems that stymie social justice and uphold privileged subjects, they do engage in subversive forms of communication that poke at, make fun of, and challenge hegemonic structures, which aligns with queer theoretical axioms of anti-normativity, fluidity, and political agency (McDonald, 2015). I have illustrated how concepts such as malicious compliance and homoventriloquism offer theoretical and pragmatic toolkits for queer theorists, helping them ground the political interrogation of sexuality and gender in organizational contexts. For example, malicious compliance offers humorous forms of queer critique (e.g., painting rainbow intersections), and homoventriloquism challenges stable notions of identity by dispersing queerness among multiple agents.

Beyond theoretical implications, this dissertation also employs queer organizational autoethnography, fostering fruitful methodological insights.

Methodological Implications

Pride is not only a cultural field worth exploring among autoethnographers but also a space where institutions (e.g., nonprofit organizations and government systems) govern the extent to which sexuality and gender are celebrated publicly. My role as a queer man elicited narratives about Pride's value based on narratives regarding authenticity, engagement, and political activism. Thus, queer organizational autoethnography provides an analytical framework capable of advocating for marginalized populations, articulating the communicative actions that

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enable and constrain individuals, and reflecting on my positionality as a generator of theory and praxis.

Autoethnography allows for exciting forms of methodological bricolage, whereby approaches, practices, and procedures can be hybridized. In my fieldwork with Gulf Pride, I analyzed organizational documents, participant observations, and ethnographic/in-depth interviews with participants. This dissertation contributes a unique approach to autoethnography by combining fieldwork methods with phronetic iterative analysis (Tracy, 2018), jumping between theory and data to produce a layered account of Pride organizing. While phronetic iterative analysis is a common process through which to code qualitative data, this dissertation offers a sample for using said analysis to include personal narratives and fieldnotes.

Additionally, my autoethnographic inquiry informs the ethical dilemmas of engaged scholarship. As illustrated in Chapter Five, my involvement with Gulf Pride resulted in conflicts about organizational entry, access, and recognition. While I entered the organization assuming that my presence was welcome, in-depth analyses of interviews, lived experience, and hindsight (Freeman, 2010) reveal discourses associating me with harmful arbiters of White supremacy, toxic masculinity, and problematic hierarchies. Thus, my association with select people in the organization troubled murky boundaries between myself as a person and myself as an ethical researcher. Queer organizational autoethnography allows me to disentangle these ethical dilemmas, identifying myself as not only a researcher but also a White queer cisgender man—a body that is historically normalized in Pride spaces (Bruce, 2016) and capable of organizational dysfunction. While I maintain ethical relationships with organizational members from Gulf Pride, I remain aware of how engaged scholarship privileges those with the power to collect data and tell stories—even ones that are uncomfortable, ambiguous, or awkward. I committed to

holistic retellings of key events throughout this analysis, showcasing multifaceted angles of conflicts, dilemmas, and power disparities.

Additionally, I argue that this work demands constant attention to relational ethics, reflexivity, and mindfulness (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011; Berry, 2013; Berry, 2021; Ellis, 2007), facilitating open conversations between ethnographers and our participants, discussions about process consent (Ellis et al., 2011), and the vulnerability to ask oneself, "What should I do now?" In my case, remaining attentive to ethics, care, and identity resulted in many uncomfortable conversations where I asked about the power of my presence, producing elucidatory insights about what I can do to make people more comfortable, at ease, and supported in my role as a researcher. While many organizational members saw me directly associated with individuals who wreaked havoc, I reiterated my mission to provide a holistic account of the organization and organizing, discussed the difference between what I saw at the time and the hindsight I developed by speaking with other people, and assured participants that they ultimately have the power in rescinding or shaping critical narratives from the data. These strategies helped change my image in the organization to try to produce mutually beneficial relationships and complex analyses of power.

There are numerous other ethical issues which, given more time, I would like to address. For example, my time with Pride organizing facilitated many thoughts about what it means to disclose certain parts of the research process, especially with critical commitments to exposing power dynamics, dominant interests, and internally 'messy' organizational communication. While I routinely disclosed my efforts to people in the form of member checking, I noted that I held reservations about discussing the theoretical underpinnings of my work, even when organizers talked plainly with me about topics such as racism, heteronormativity, etc. These

hesitations reflect greater issues in boundary-making and breaking between researchers and the people they engage with, which implicate the academy's (in)ability to create robust, readable, and translatable works (see Dempsey & Barge, 2014). I look forward to exploring these issues in future research projects.

Historical and Practical Implications

This dissertation facilitates various historical and practical implications for Pride organizers, corporate stakeholders, community partners, and government officials. First, it traces the evolution of Pride from its explosive beginning vis-à-vis the Stonewall Riots to the formation of contemporary queer civil rights movements. This document also articulates the functions, motivations behind, and obstacles facing Pride organizations. Ultimately, organizers must reconcile disparate historical threads of queer civil rights to form a cohesive social movement. As illustrated in my dissertation, organizers often oscillated between *gay power* and *gay rights* activism. These trends fight for structural transformation against oppressive institutions and assimilation into normative systems, respectively (Bruce, 2016). These initiatives are at odds with each other due to neoliberal feminist movements that discourage political agency and profit from queer visibility in rapidly shifting capitalist economies.

Thus, I recommend that organizers:

1. Engage in open forums about the role of political activism in nonprofit organizations, identifying ways that individuals can respond to, subvert, and work around hostile agencies. This dissertation reveals interesting strategies of political resistance vis-à-vis malicious compliance and homoventriloquism. Pride organizers should identify transformative practices that question the agency of dominant institutions.

2. Identify motivations behind inclusive agendas. Define organizational principles and practices that differentiate between valuing marginalized identities and dilemmas of tokenization. Conduct demographic surveys about event attendees, ask why certain people attend Pride events, and reflect on what events can serve communities better.

3. Interrogate the role of emotions in Pride organizing, finding linkages between affect, identity, power, and positionality. This dissertation links negative emotional displays to the hard work, intersectional inequities, and dilemmas of tokenization that place organizers in precarious circumstances. Organizers should have routine talks about what they are feeling and *why* to determine taken-for-granted organizational practices.

4. Consider unspoken contractual agreements between stakeholders, such as government officials, who economize and securitize social justice initiatives. Explicitly discussing assumptions behind community partnerships can illuminate the motivations of Pride organizing and produce transparency related to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

These suggestions reflect the challenges, obstacles, and solutions that organizers noted in previous chapters. In addition to the role of organizers, this dissertation also illustrates contentious communication among various stakeholders. For these entities, I recommend that they:

1. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of partnering with Pride organizations, showcasing hidden motivations, agendas, and desires. These open conversations will contribute to thorough vetting procedures between all stakeholders, ensuring equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships.

2. Commit to educational relationships with organizers and other queer organizations. Learn about the nuances of queer, transgender, and marginalized identities, know who you are working for, and avoid generalizations related to the "type of people" who go to cultural events.

3. Produce transparent ledgers related to committed staff, products, and services. Outline clear channels of accountability and contingency plans.

Together, these suggestions can produce more equitable and critically conscious forms of Pride organizing.

Conclusion

I end this chapter, and the dissertation, with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I am proud of my work in dissecting Pride organizers' communicative actions. This project provides "equipment for living" (Burke, 1974), which "makes life better" for those affected by the insidious, violent, and unconscionable measures perpetrated by anti-queer agents (Holman Jones et al., 2013, p. 35). On the other hand, autoethnographic research and writing never truly end (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Berry, 2021); as a result, I am left with the 'conclusion' of a dissertation that risks barely scraping the surface of queerness, organizing, and the uncertain future of social movements. Writing about Pride in 2024 feels like professing one's love to a ghost. I made this dissertation with delicate care, paying attention to Pride's political, social, and cultural potential while also recognizing its ephemeral quality. When I look at the future of Pride, and social movements, more broadly, I do not see stable lines, hard edges, or concrete strategies. Instead, I see a shifting, glimmering horizon. Muñoz (2019) puts it best when they say:

We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a

horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists

for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a

future. (p. 1).

Queer potentiality undoubtedly exists in tandem with organizational principles, features, and

motivations from people who are dedicated to social justice. In this last section, I want to discuss

what I consider to be *queer organizational worldmaking* — pockets of affective desire that bind

queer individuals, communities, and organizations together. While much of my work here

characterizes Pride as damaging due to its relationship with dominant structures, I use this

section to illuminate autoethnographic episodes of queer joy during Pride.

…

Crisp October air rustles through the merchandise tent as I sell the last of Gulf Pride's

2023 t-shirts to two children. One is dressed a bumblebee, and the other is a pirate. Their parents

guide the children's tiny hands filled with dollar bills to the donation pile, thanking me for

"dealing with them." As I walk back to my car after the Halloween Event, I catch a smile on my

face when I think about the children. My critical instincts acknowledge the homonormative

conventions of selling Pride gear to a prototypical family, but my gut says it is a good thing.

Anti-queer legislation relies on the heinous conflation between pedophilia and queerness, yet

today's event illustrates the opposite. Children can have fun at Pride and feel safe doing so. *Is the*

construction of sexual citizenship that bad if it helps children see the validity of their sexuality

and gender earlier in their lives? I certainly did not have that exposure until I was a teenager.

...

In 2022, my boyfriend invited me to Gulf Pride's Parade Day. His company registered to march, so we would walk in the parade as attendees. I cautiously said yes. After attending my hometown's Pride when I was 17 years old, I was incredibly cynical of queer civil rights movements, fueled by the shame of not feeling like I belonged in such environments. These sentiments are shattered as I see thousands of people cheering us on, begging for beads to be thrown at them, and smiling when they see me and my boyfriend holding hands. These moments challenge the stereotypes I had about Pride's corporatization. While walking on behalf of a company, people are not celebrating the organization itself. They were celebrating the queer people who work for them. *They are celebrating us*. This moment inspired me to dive deeper into the organizational mechanisms of Pride, ultimately bringing this project to fruition.

...

My legs dangle over a seawall that separates Victory Park from the greater bay area. A steaming bowl of karaage chicken sits on my lap, but I do not have the energy to pick up my chopsticks. At 7 PM on Parade Day, I am too tired to be hungry. A board member and volunteer lay beside me on the grass. We had been together all day, sharing stories and jokes about our romantic relationships and complaining about Gulf Pride's dysfunction. However, this was the first time we had just enjoyed each other's silence. *I am glad I made some friends during this process. For a while, it seemed like nobody really cared to know me.* The silence is occasionally interrupted by nearby sounds of an ocean wave erupting up the concrete barrier of the seawall. Looking out toward the sky, I see twilight nestling into the horizon, dancing across the water's reflections with shades of red, orange, and purple. *Today is about to end*. I think about all the effort I put into the last year, from getting access to Gulf Pride as a researcher, then attending events, and then dealing with the chaos of Parade Day. Beyond my overwhelming state of

exhaustion, this moment should feel significant. It is a symbolic conclusion to the labor I put in

and a project I am passionate about. Instead, all I feel is contentment. *I cannot wait to go to my*

next Pride.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

May 12, 2023

███████████████

Dear Mr. David Dooling:

On 5/11/2023, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY005779
Review Type:	Exempt 2
Title:	Exploring the Communicative Strategies of Pride Parade Organizers
Funding:	None
Protocol:	• Pride Protocol;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance
FWA No. 00001669
University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

Page 1 of 2

UNIVERSITY of
SOUTH FLORIDA

Sincerely,

Laura Alfonso
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

Institutional Review Boards   /   Research Integrity & Compliance
FWA No. 00001669
University of South Florida   /   3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165   /   Tampa, FL 33612   /   813-974-5638

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APPENDIX B: FIELDNOTE SAMPLE

During the Juneteenth Event, I noticed an interesting interaction between volunteers and attendees. The event had multiple entrances, and some volunteers were put in charge of "securing" the doors from "unauthorized" individuals. The front entrance led to a lobby where volunteers sold Gulf Pride merchandise to attendees, and the back entrance led directly backstage. I sat with a few volunteers near the back entrance, and we commented on the number of people moving in and out of the doors. Most of the individuals were transporting audiovisual equipment. One volunteer started talking about how confident she felt blocking people from entering based on Gulf Pride's security training, "I love being on door patrol. I dare someone to come through unannounced." The other two volunteers and I looked at each other, but we didn't say anything. Later that night, I saw the same volunteer chasing after a person with audiovisual equipment. When I asked Nancy—the Executive Director—what happened, she stated that someone came through the back doors abruptly and did not acknowledge the volunteer, which prompted an aggressive response.

In these moments, I'm really interested in the way organizers take on the responsibility of securitizing Pride spaces. It was startling to see such a huge venue not have their own security, but based on my understanding of the event, Gulf Pride saves operational costs by utilizing their own security and volunteers. These dynamics illustrate neoliberal forms of social justice where responsibility is funneled down from influential stakeholders (the venue owners) to the organization itself. Additionally, our security training *did not* ask volunteers to take on authoritative roles in defending spaces of Pride. Instead, they were just prompted to "see something, say something." While most volunteers followed this rule, it's interesting that just the presence of security discourses animated others to defend the assets of Pride in aggressive ways.

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions

1. Please choose a pseudonym. This is a made-up name we will use to refer to you in our research reports. Our research is confidential, meaning that we will not use your real name when we share your findings from this project.
2. Can you begin by telling me about of your role at Gulf Pride?
    a. How did you get involved with Gulf Pride?
    b. What has the progression of your role been like?
    c. How do you see yourself becoming involved in the organization moving forward?
3. When thinking about your time with the organization, what memories stand out to you?
    a. What positive memories do you have associated with Gulf Pride?
    b. What negative memories do you have associated with Gulf Pride?
4. What does Gulf Pride succeed at doing?
    a. What factors contribute to that success, if any?
5. What does Gulf Pride struggle to do successfully?
    a. What factors contribute to that struggle, if any?
6. In your own words, what does pride mean to you?
    a. How does the organization align with your definition of pride, if at all?
    b. How does the organization differ from your definition of pride, if at all?
7. How might your ideas about pride be like other people?
8. How might your ideas about pride be different from other people?
9. What conflicts or dilemmas do you see when trying to organize a good pride parade?

---

10. How does Gulf Pride operate in the bigger community of the city and the state?
11. What conflicts do you perceive, if any, between what the organization wants to do and what is permitted by local, state, and national laws?
12. As a nonprofit, what strengths does the organization have? Similarly, what are the organization's weaknesses?
13. What ideas do you have about how the organization can better facilitate Pride?
14. What risks are there in organizing pride in the context of this organization?
15. How does the organization respond to issues of social justice and identity?
16. Are there differences between what the organization wants to do and what the surrounding culture of the city, state, and/or nation want to do? If so, what are they?

---

17. As an organizational member, how do you navigate the culture of sexuality and gender in Gulf Pride?

18. How do you perceive the organization's navigation of sexuality and gender in line with the greater culture in the city, state, and nation?
19. How does the structure of the organization reinforce systems of power, if at all?
20. How can the structure of the organization resist systems of power, if at all?
21. In what ways do you feel free as an organizational member, if at all?
22. In what ways do you feel constrained as an organizational member, if at all?
23. What things do you consider normal in this organization?
24. What thing do you consider abnormal in the organization?

_____

25. You're the expert. What do you want people to know about organizing a pride parade?
26. Close your eyes. If you could wave a magic wand and create your ideal version of pride, what would it look like? What would it entail? Can you describe that for me?
27. What is the difference between a pride that is perfect, and a pride that is realistic?
28. How do you navigate the material parts of the organization, such as the people, structures, and symbols?
29. Follow ups: What questions have we not asked that we should have asked? What topics have we not covered that would be important to talk about? What questions have we asked that we should not have asked? Is there anything you would like to add or want me to know about your experiences?
30. Knowing the topic of this study, what kinds of findings would be useful for you to know? How would you like us to use our findings from this project?
31. Do you have questions?

Demographics Questions

1. What is your age?   _____

2. What is your gender identity? _____

3. What is your sexual orientation? _____

3. What ethnicity do you identify with? _____

5. What is your highest level of education?

1	8th grade or less
2	Some high school
3	High school diploma (including GED)
4	Some college/vocational
5	Associate degree
6	Bachelor of arts or science
7	Graduate or professional degree

6. Are you currently employed?

      1   Yes   No

7. If yes: what is your occupation and industry? _____

8. What is your religion? _____

9. What is your relationship status?

      1   Single

      2   Dating

      3   Partnered

      4   Married

      5   Divorced

      6   Widowed

10. In what state did you grow up?

11. In what city and state do you live presently?

12. Would you describe your hometown as: _____urban (midsized/large) _____rural _____suburban?

13. Would you describe your social class as: _____ lower class _____ middle class _____ upper class?

APPENDIX D: FAIR USE WORKSHEET

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

Name: **David Dooling** Date: **06-18-2024**

Class or Project: **Dissertation Project**

Title of Copyrighted Work: **Photo of intersection with painted Progress Flag**

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER OF THE USE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☑ Educational	☐ Commercial
☑ Teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use)	☐ Entertainment
☑ Research or Scholarship	☐ Bad-faith behavior
☑ Criticism, Parody, News Reporting or Comment	☐ Denying credit to original author
☑ Transformative Use (your new work relies on and adds new expression, meaning, or message to the original work)	☐ Non-transformative or exact copy
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☑ Nonprofit	☐ Profit-generating use

Overall, the purpose and character of your use ☑ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☑ Factual or nonfiction	☐ Creative or fiction
☑ Important to favored educational objectives	☐ Consumable (workbooks, tests)
☑ Published work	☐ Unpublished

Overall, the nature of the copyrighted material ☑ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

AMOUNT AND SUBSTANTIALITY OF MATERIAL USED IN RELATION TO WHOLE

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☑ Small amount (using only the amount necessary to accomplish the purpose)	☐ Large portion or whole work
☑ Amount is important to favored socially beneficial objective (i.e. educational objectives)	☐ Portion used is qualitatively substantial (i.e. it is the 'heart of the work')
☑ Lower quality from original (ex. Lower resolution or bitrate photos, video, and audio)	☐ Similar or exact quality of original work

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Overall, the amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

EFFECT ON THE MARKET FOR ORIGINAL

Likely Supports Fair Use	Likely Does Not Support Fair Use
☐ No significant effect on the market or potential market for the original	☐ Replaces sale of copyrighted work
☐ No similar product marketed by the copyright holder	☐ Significantly impairs market or potential market for the work
☐ You own a lawfully acquired copy of the material	☐ Numerous copies or repeated, long-term use
☐ The copyright holder is unidentifiable	☐ Made accessible on Web or to public
☐ Lack of licensing mechanism for the material	☐ Affordable and reasonably available permissions or licensing

Overall, the effect on the market for the original ☐ supports fair use or ☐ does not support fair use.

CONCLUSION

The combined purpose and character of the use, nature of the copyrighted material, amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole and the effect on the market for the original

☐ likely supports fair use or ☐ likely does not support fair use.

Note: Should your use of copyrighted material not support fair use, you may still be able to locate and request permissions from the copyright holder. For help on this, please feel free to contact your Copyright Librarian.

This worksheet has been adapted from:

Cornell University's Checklist for Conducting A Fair use Analysis Before Using Copyrighted Materials:
    https://copyright.cornell.edu/policies/docs/Fair_Use_Checklist.pdf
Crews, Kenneth D. (2008) Fair use Checklist. Columbia University Libraries Copyright Advisory Office.
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LeEtta Schmidt, lmschmidt@usf.edu and Drew Smith dsmith@usf.edu
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