Towards a Queerer Labor Movement: The Politics and Potential of LGBT-Labor Coalitions

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“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”
–Audre Lorde

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For Momma, my working-class hero

*

And for all the queers who make the struggle fierce

Abstract

Towards a Queerer Labor Movement: The Politics and Potential of LGBT-Labor Coalition examines the relationship between the contemporary US labor movement and LGBT workers. Through an investigation of the ways in which minoritized subjects resist injustice in our contemporary neoliberal climate, I provide a new theory social movement building. Using a combination of media analysis, ethnography, and participatory action research, I argue that the union movement is an ideal place from which to struggle for LGBT justice—through and alongside the struggle for racial and economic justice. Further, given the weakened state of organized labor in the US, I contend that labor's explicit inclusion of and attention to LGBT workers will also strengthen the union movement. In many ways, the labor movement is already doing this important work, and LGBT and labor communities are benefitting from the shift toward what some scholars and activists describe as *social movement unionism*. Rather than approaching oppression and discrimination through a single-issue lens, union members and leaders have developed campaigns, trainings, and strategies that acknowledge how the struggles faced by LGBT workers are connected to the struggles faced by the working-class more generally. More than just suggesting that these issues are interrelated, the coalitions I discuss have worked to point out that these positionalities are not mutually exclusive—unlike the mainstream gay rights movement, LGBT-union efforts center the fact that not all LGBT people are wealthy and white. However, there are still ways in which some facets of organized labor fail as a vehicle for social change, and through this critique,

I argue that a truly liberatory social movement unionism could be possible with the guidance of radical militancy and critical queer politics.

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Chapter One

Queering Labor/Laboring Queers

> *The ability to create new conceptions of organizing and union building will depend on a much more dynamic understanding of who is in the class.*
> –Amber Hollibaugh

Introduction

In a video produced by Marylanders for Marriage Equality and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local SEIU 1199 members, most of them Black, tell viewers that they are voting '*yes'* on the 2012 Maryland ballot initiative that would grant rights for same-sex couples to legally marry. Some of the featured workers are gay and lesbian[1], and others are straight allies, but all provide statements stressing the importance of equality, and many compare the discrimination of gays and lesbians to the discrimination faced by African Americans. One Black lesbian-identified worker states, "I believe in equality and fairness and standing up for what matters, because we're all in this together. That's why I'm supporting marriage equality."

SEIU, and Local 1199 in particular, has a long history of supporting progressive social justice issues. Local 1199 was one of the first integrated unions in the US and worked closely with Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Civil Rights movement (SEIU Communications, 2011). More recently, SEIU has spoken in support of immigrant rights and, in 2004, became the first international union to support marriage equality. In states where same-sex marriage has been a proposal on the ballot, most major labor unions have framed their support of same-sex marriage as

[1] I will give an explanation of my use of the terms gay, lesbian, queer, and others later in the chapter.

an extension of Civil Rights work of the past, and one that is deeply connected to racial and economic justice.

The existence of a gay-labor alliance is not an entirely new phenomenon nor is it limited to SEIU's work. One of the earliest is examples is the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union (MCS), a Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) Communist-backed labor union from the 1930s that represented servicemen on the West Coast who were often involved with dangerous work (Berube, 2011). Many of the workers in the union were gay and Black, and the MCS was known for consistent opposition to racial discrimination and as being a safe haven for gay workers.[2] In addition, the MCS was the first organization to provide worker protection against sexual discrimination, decades before any organized gay rights group attempted to advocate for gay people in the workplace. During McCarthyism, all Communist unions were purged from the CIO, and so the MCS fell apart (Berube, 2011). Decades passed before another gay-labor alliance forms.

In the late 1970s, gay activists and union workers joined together to boycott Coors Brewing Company. The boycott was in response to a worker-led strike as well as the company's reported firings of gay and lesbian employees. Leading the efforts was the Los Angeles based Coors Boycott Committee, an organization founded by gay rights activists. Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected public official, also supported and brought attention to the boycott, highlighting the interconnected struggle of the straight workers and gay and lesbian workers (Wolf, 2009).

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[2] According to Berube, enemies of the union commonly mocked them as "A third red, a third black, a third queer!" However, the MCS remained committed to a motto of its own: "Equality in hiring regardless of race, religion, national origin or political affiliation" (p. 282).

In 1978, gay and union activists worked together again to defeat California's Proposition 6. Proposition 6, also known as the Brigg's Initiative, would have made it illegal for gays and lesbians to teach in public schools. A similar alliance came together again in 1986 to organize against the La Rouche Ballot, Proposition 64, and defeated an initiative that would have quarantined people with AIDS (Sweeny, 1999). By 1994, the relationship between gay activists and unions was established enough to lay the foundation for Pride at Work (PAW), a group that organized to become "an official voice for the concerns of gay and lesbian workers in the labor movement" (Sweeny, p. 28). In 1996, gay and lesbian activists from the United Airlines flight attendant workers union formed an alliance with unions and LGBT organizations in an effort to protect domestic partner benefits (Murphy, 2012). In 1998, PAW became an official constituency group of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) (Sweeny, 1999).

Contemporary attention to the issue of same-sex marriage has been coupled with a resurgence of gay-labor alliances. The connection between marriage rights and economic benefits makes obvious the strategic logic of a coalition between unions and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. In addition, same-sex marriage cases that are discussed from the perspective of labor unions also remind the public that LGBT people are workers. In 2008, UNITE HERE, the union that represents more than 450,000 hotel, restaurant, gaming, laundry and food service workers, joined forces with the LGBT community in California to create Sleep With the Right People, a coalition that organizes on behalf of LGBT people and workers. The coalition formed in response to Proposition 8, an anti-marriage equality initiative

in California. Doug Manchester, a major financial contributor to pro-Proposition 8 organizations and the manager of the Manchester Grand Hyatt in San Diego, also, incidentally, had a record of mistreating workers and being vehemently anti-union. To counter Manchester's actions and funding, Sleep With the Right People organized countless demonstrations and actions on behalf of workers, gays, and lesbians (and those that fell into more than one of those categories).

Proposition 8's subsequent win was a major blow to the LGBT community and its allies, but the loss energized LGBT activists in other states facing gay marriage ballot initiatives. Since then, marriage equality has become first priority on the mainstream gay rights agenda, and big labor continues to make public coalitional strides towards this effort. In 2010, SEIU elected Mary Kay Henry, a lesbian and co-founder of SEIU's Lavender Caucus[3], as president of the labor union. Henry spoke openly and often about SEIU's full support of gay marriage, noting, "marriage is…a civil and economic protection that should be due all people" ("Building on 1199 Civil Rights," 2012).

Labor's support of same-sex marriage is understandable. As the history above indicates, the union movement can be a vehicle for social issues to emerge more powerfully in the public sphere. But, as I began this research, I was loath to believe that the labor movement's most important intervention into LGBT justice in the 21st century was confined to the issue of marriage equality. As numerous scholars and activists before me have argued, mainstream gay rights organizations' attention to marriage simultaneously distracts the movement and the public from concerns that

[3] The Lavendar Caucus is SEIU's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender caucus.

impact the most marginalized members of the LGBT community (Warner, 1999; Spade, 2011; Reddy, 2011). The marriage issue, Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (2004) writes, "has become the central preoccupation of a gay movement centered more on obtaining straight privilege than challenging power" (p. 1). Sycamore states bluntly, "the gay rights agenda….consistently prioritizes the most privileged while fucking over everyone else" (p. 2).

The labor movement is largely comprised of the exact people who are erased in the conversation about marriage: poor and working-class people who would not benefit economically from marriage,[4] transgender people, LGBT people who reject monogamy, as well as those in the LGBT community who are more interested in struggling for access to better wages and inclusive health care. One of the goals of this project, then, is to investigate what the labor movement is currently doing—outside of being publically supportive of marriage equality—to address LGBT workers.

I discovered that although the LGBT-labor alliance around same-sex marriage gains the most media attention, the union movement is involved in activism and campaigns that are centered on supporting LGBT membership and the LGBT population more generally. Like the gay-labor alliances of the past, LGBT and allied union members are joining together to confront injustice in a way that acknowledges the complexity of power imbalances. Rather than approaching oppression and

[4] In an article from the New York Times, Jaye Cee Whitehead (2011) explains how same-sex marriage can result in a decrease in the cost of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program: "…expanding marriage rights would send a substantial number of economically struggling couples over the eligibility thresholds, shifting the financial responsibility from the state to the couple without any actual improvement in the couple's economic well-being."

discrimination through a single-issue lens, union members and leaders have developed campaigns, trainings, and strategies that acknowledge how the struggles faced by LGBT people are interrelated to the struggles faced by poor and working-class people, by people of color, and so on. More than just suggesting that these issues are interrelated, the coalitions I discuss have worked to point out that these positionalities are not mutually exclusive—unlike the mainstream gay rights movement, LGBT-union efforts often work to center the fact that racial and economic diversity that exists amongst the LGBT population.

Through a combination of media analysis, interviews, and participatory action research, I argue that the union movement is an ideal place from which to struggle for LGBT justice—through and alongside the struggle for economic and racial justice. This counters the popular notion that "LGBT rights" should be relegated to the confines of neoliberal non-profits and the law. Further, given the state of organized labor in the US, I contend that labor's explicit inclusion of and attention to LGBT workers will also strengthen the union movement. In many ways, the labor movement is already doing this important work, and the LGBT and labor communities are benefitting from the shift toward what some scholars and activists describe as *social movement unionism* (Fletcher, Jr., 2013; Fantasia & Voss, 2004). However, there are still ways in which some facets of organized labor fails as a vehicle for social change, and through this critique, I argue social movement unionism could be even stronger with the guidance of militancy and critical queer politics.

Through the examination of the relationship between labor and LGBT people, this dissertation also investigates the ways in which minoritized subjects resist

injustice in a neoliberal climate. As a communication scholar, I'm particularly invested in working to understand how different oppressed classes articulate their subjugation, and how that compares to the ways in which media and other public entities (e.g., non-profits, corporations) articulate inequality. That these articulations are incongruent is confirmed through my examination of the mainstream gay rights movement and tells us a great deal about what is at stake for communities struggling for social change in an era of neoliberalism. Rather than relying exclusively on non-profits, policies, and the law, this dissertation argues that the labor movement can and should be the place from which to struggle for meaningful change in oppressed peoples' lives.

Admittedly, it is a bold move to argue that organized labor is a *solution* to anything. A 2012 Gallup Poll revealed that labor unions only have a 52% approval rating, which is just above the 48% all-time low rating from 2009 (Jones, 2012). This is a rather unsurprising statistic given the general discourse around unions that the current US neoliberal climate produces, and the legislation that results. In the winter of 2011 a seemingly unprecedented wave of anti-labor policy initiatives swept through states including Ohio, North Carolina, and, most notoriously, Wisconsin. The attacks on collective bargaining that have now been formalized throughout a large portion of the Midwest, and the surge of "Right to Work" states all point to a legitimate crisis in the labor movement.

The crisis of labor is in part a product of a national shift towards privatization and a neoliberal form of governance that aims to condition citizens into believing that the path to financial security is through the free-market. However, this articulation of

the state of the labor movement implies a response that is limited to economic policy. This dissertation challenges that logic by proposing an alternative possibility, one that encourages a revival of labor militancy through both economic and sociocultural means. To do so means labor must respond to crisis through a struggle against both economic *and* social injustice. Raymond William's (1989) insistence that "culture is ordinary" suggests that, in the struggle to better the lives of working people, culture should not be seen as a distraction from class struggle. For this project that means understanding that queer culture is often an element of working-class culture, and that both are important to an organized worker's struggle. Throughout this project I make clear how desire and sexual subjectivity matter to labor and economic justice.

That said, the insertion of queer culture into labor organizing is effective only insofar as these efforts also remain grounded in an economic class analysis, and that both are rooted in a commitment to militancy. To help make my argument I borrow from two theories of labor organizing. First, I draw from Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss's (2004) model of social movement unionism, which proposes that unions function as "organizational vehicles of social solidarity, so that workers will have the means for *collectively* solving the problems they face at work and in society" (p. 127). Bill Fletcher, Jr. (2013) expands on this by explaining how social movement unionism should redefine the labor movement. Specifically, Fletcher argues for the labor movement to develop beyond formal unions by organizing the working poor through worker centers. This becomes especially important in a period when laborers in especially precarious positions are prohibited from organizing formally with a

union because of Right to Work laws, citizen status, and/or other neoliberal obstacles (Yates, 2009).

Social movement unionism is a model that is grounded in an *intersectional* approach to resisting oppression. Intersectionality is a theory and method that acknowledges the reality that "interlocking systems of oppression [and] multiple axes of inequality" (Berger&Guidroz, 2009, p. 1) are most often articulated through the positionalities of gender, race and class. My project borrows heavily from the theory of intersectionality, but, as I discuss below, also seeks to expand its boundaries through the help of queer intersectional interventions. My approach to intersectionality poses a new conception of coalition politics that is rooted in militant economic intervention.

I propose a coupling of social movement unionism with economic militancy through the work of scholar activists like Joe Burns (2011) and Dana Cloud (2011). Both Burns and Cloud call on the labor movement to revive the strike and other militant forms of organizing and activism. For example, Cloud's analysis of the 1995 Boeing strike illustrates how

> [a]t the height of neoliberal pressure, an industrial workforce brought one of the largest corporations in the world economy to heel. The workers' experience of solidarity during the strike and the resulting victory shaped their consciousness of themselves as people who could fight back in their own interests. (p. 117)

\Similarly, Burns argues that for the labor movement to be effective, it must recommit to militant methods of worker solidarity and blocking production. Burns explicitly

suggests that for the labor movement to challenge the repressive conditions produced by the Taft-Hartley Act[5], workers must be willing to break the law in order to engage in general strikes.

In addition to discussing how the labor movement can help LGBT people and how LGBT people can help the labor movement, this project also confronts and challenges the mainstream gay rights movement. The "mainstream gay rights movement" refers to what has become the popular agenda for LGBT progress and the organizations that have the financial capital to center particular agenda items over others. Specifically, my critique serves as an indictment of organizations like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) whose campaigns often fail to address the unique marginality of transgender people, LGBT people of color, and poor LGBT people. I follow in the footsteps of queer scholars and activists whose academic and political work seeks to pose alternatives to the often racist, classist, "homonormative" trajectory of the HRC and other mainstream gay rights organizations (Duggan, 2004; Farrow, 2010; Willse and Spade, 2004).

My argument in this interdisciplinary project is grounded in critical queer theory and politics, and also relies on cultural studies, critical media studies, critical race theory, and labor studies. It is a project about LGBT people—some who identify as "queer," some who don't—but it is also a queer project. Like many queer theorists, I practice queer critique in a way that seeks to "highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations" (Browne&Nash, 2010, p. 4) and

[5] The Taft-Hartley Act was a bill passed 1947 limiting the types of activities in which labor unions could engage. Most significantly, the law purged Communists from labor leadership and banned solidarity strikes (Burns, 2011; Cloud, 2011).

consider it a theoretical tool that is always-already committed to political intervention. Although I am not the first to study LGBT workers, there is a noticeable lack of literature about LGBT union members, and even less that *queers* the labor movement. Below I will provide a review of literature that tackles the issue of same-sex marriage to justify why I insist that labor must go *beyond* marriage its support of the LGBT working-class. The method of critique illustrated below undergirds the theoretical framework I rely on throughout the project.

After explaining my theoretical framework, I will describe how and why I chose a mixed-methods approach to make sense of the relationship between LGBT workers and the labor movement. Finally, I will offer a brief description of the remaining five chapters of the dissertation.

First, though, I will provide an overview of my use of terms. That neither "the labor movement" nor the "LGBT community" are monoliths requires that I distinguish the ways in which I use signifiers for the complex variations of these particular groups.

What I Mean When I Say…..

"The Labor Movement"

In the context of this study, I use the term "the labor movement" to refer to the leadership and trajectory of the most dominant labor federations in the contemporary US: the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win Federation. The AFL-CIO, which began in 1955, is comprised of "57 unions representing 12 million working men and women" ("About the AFL-CIO," 2013). Change to Win split from the AFL-CIO in 2005 and is

comprised of SEIU, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), and the United Farm Workers (UFW) (Early, 2011).

I will often make a distinction between "the labor movement" and particular unions. Unions are, in a simple definition, "an organization of workers created for a specific set of objectives" (Fletcher, 2012, p. xvi). More specifically, unions seek to "build an identity of interests for workers" (Fletcher, p. xvi), based on a particular workplace, geography, or industry. "At their best, unions seek to democratize the workplace" (Fletcher, p. xvi). It is important to remember that unions are not separate from workers. Officers and staff from a union local may help workers access resources to start their organization, but unions are meant to be by and for workers themselves. Therefore, the union is not a third-party, but rather the union is the workers themselves. Because of the diversity of opinions, interests, and needs of different workplaces, there is no singular "union" platform. However, there is an identifiable "labor movement" platform, given that the leadership of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win make decisions that influence and often speak on behalf of individual labor unions throughout the country.

When I showcase things that individual unions or labor movement leaders have done well, that does not mean that those individual unions or the larger labor movement is not, at the same time, demonstrating things that fail to live up to the kind of social movement unionism I put forth. Unlike some scholars and activists who champion alternatives to the dominant labor movement through radical organizations like the International Workers of the World (IWW), I seek to make an intervention

into the federations that already maintain a great deal of power. Thus, the sometimes-radical goals I espouse through my theory of militant social movement unionism are meant to push mainstream labor organizations toward the radical potentiality present in these mass working-class formations, despite the reformist leadership and ideas that are currently dominant within them.

"The Working-Class"

Understandably, there is no universally agreed upon definition of "working-class." In social science-based reports and organizations, class status is measured by Socioeconomic Status (SES), a method that qualifies their labels based on factors such as "health, income, child care, education, transportation, adequate housing and nutrition, [and] sociolopolitical influence" (Saegert, et al., p. 1, 2006), etc. For Karl Marx (1848), the working-class, or proletariat, was any worker who sold their labor and did not own the means of production. Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) uptake of class insists that class is not a static category, but rather a product of *habitus*, or, how one performs one's positionalities through social space. Certainly some still conflate the working-class solely with "blue-collar" jobs that require manual labor. But for the majority of Americans, "working-class" appears to be defined by its absence as a term—an erasure which results in an unintelligible, and thus, powerless force.

This is an unsurprising omission given that over half of Americans identify as "middle-class," even though, as of 2010, the top 1% of households owned 35.4% of all privately held wealth, and the bottom 80% own only 11% (Domhoff, 2013). Michael Zweig (2000) explains, "classes are formed in the dynamics of power and

wealth creation and are by their nature a bit messy" (p. 28). He clarifies, "class is a matter of relationships and power, not job title" (p. 37). Demystifying systems of power is terrifying to those who possess the power; the danger of revolt comes with the emergence of class-consciousness. Thus my use of "working-class" is intentional, and meant to challenge the labor movement's frequent membership as "middle-class." I refer to all members of the labor movement as part of the working-class in an effort to reiterate the importance of class-consciousness in challenging unjust systems of power.

That said, I recognize that within the working-class are a diversity of incomes, cultural performances of class, and levels of power. The majority of the workers I discuss are in service-sector jobs (e.g. hotel cleaners, grocery store workers, flight attendants), but I also talk about union staff, who are harder to define. Further, in Chapter 5, I discuss what Eldridge Cleaver (1969), taking up Marx (1849), refers to as the "lumpen proletariat," or the group of individuals who are part of "the underground economy" (e.g., drug trade, sex work)[6]. These nuances are important to my project, most especially to differentiate between the needs of economically abject queers and wealthier LGBT people. My use of the term, coupled with the distinctions I describe throughout my analysis, is meant to both emphasize the importance of

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[6] Marx's (1849) discussion of the lumpenproletariat articulates this underground class of people as "criminal" and suggests that they are harmful rather than helpful to a revolutionary agenda. Eldridge Cleaver (1969) illustrates how Franz Fanon engages with lumpen through a lens of colonization, and suggests that Fanon's more sympathetic view of this part of the population is generative for understanding Black people in the United States. Cleaver argues that the lumpen are actually the ideal foot soldiers of the revolution.

working-class consciousness and also highlight “universality’s dependency on particularity” (Laclau, 2000, p. 207).

“Queer,” “LGBT,” and “LGB”

This is, as I discuss at length below, a “queer” project, but it is a project that is largely about self-identified “LGBT” workers. However, I also understand LGBT workers as “queer.” Using the term queer to identify the subject positions of LGBT workers suggests that they are on the margins of what is considered “normal” (see Warner, 1999; Rubin, 1984). To explain my use of queer as it pertains to this project, it is particularly helpful to draw on Alan Berube’s (2003) concept of “queer work” which he developed through his own study of gay workers. Berube writes that queer work is “work which is performed by, or has the reputation of being performed by, homosexual men or women,” and, more generally, that it is work that is stigmatized (p. 261). Using Berube’s concept liberally allows me to identify a variety of the jobs discussed in this project—hotel cleaning, flight attending, etc.—as queer, whether or not they are performed by gays and lesbians.

As UNITE HERE organizer Izzy Alvaren stated during my interview with him, “[Queer] means dealing with people who are in the margins, people who are flowing in and out of the in between spaces, and these are people who are workers; workers who are not gay fall into that.”[7] When I use “queer” to identify LGBT workers, I do so in a way that echoes Alvaran’s suggestions that queerness means marginality, and Berube’s understanding of queer work as stigmatized work.

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[7] All quotes from Alvaran are from personal communication with author on November 16, 2010.

Still, it was important to me to discuss my interviewees in the same language they use to self-identify. Thus, if a worker I talked to identified as a "lesbian," I made sure to name her as such in my description. In addition, most, but not all, of the coalitions and campaigns I discuss use "LGBT" to describe their efforts with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer workers. As with individuals, I use the terms provided by the organizations to describe their work. Finally, I will sometimes use "LGB" to differentiate campaigns, groups, or projects that benefit lesbian, gays, and (sometimes) bisexuals, but fail to address transgender people. This distinction is important to note the many problematic ways in which campaigns for "LGBT rights" often ignore the needs of transgender people.

Below, I further elaborate on my use of "queer" as a theoretical tool.

Beyond Marriage: Queer Theory and Politics

> *What does it mean to demand the rights of marriage without recognizing the role that marriage has played in the reproduction of race and gender inequalities? Under conditions of bourgeois democracy, marriage has always been a sexist, racist, and heterosexist institution that is primarily about the accumulation and distribution of property.*
> -Angela Davis

Contemporary radical queer theory and politics follow in radical gay history's footsteps, and can be applied to more than just the issue of same-sex marriage. In the introduction to the 2005 issue of *Social Text*, queer scholars David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz (2005) reflect on the question "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" Defining the emergence of the concept of queer in the 1990's as one that "challenged the normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects: male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual,

natural or perverse," (p.1) the authors suggest that the term must necessarily be connected to a critical intersectional politics. But, they clarify, we must not rely on a traditional concept of "intersectionality."

For Tavia Nyong'o (2005) "intersectionality will become positively hazardous to everyone's health if we choose to adjudicate among differences [gender, race, class, etc] rather than to nurture them all at once." Similarly, in Jaspir K. Puar's (2005) "Queer Time, Queer Assemblages," she draws on Gilles Deleuze's (1980) assemblage to offer a new way to understand intersectional identity. She suggests:

> As opposed to an intersectional model of identity, which presumes components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion—are separable analytics and can be thus disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency. (pp. 127-128).

Nyong'o and Puar's reframing of intersectionality is complemented by Roderick Ferguson's (2004) "queer of color critique." In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique,* Ferguson (2004) uses queer of color cultural productions to critique the relationship of sexuality and the nation state. This, Ferguson suggests, is where queer of color picks up from women of color feminism's approach to intersectionality: although appreciative of women of color feminism's discussion of intersectionality between gender, race and sexuality, Ferguson sees queer of color critique as a method of analysis that is also rooted in a critique of capitalism.

Complicating intersectionality through queer critique then provides a way to challenge the essentialist, single-issue approach to LGBT politics that has been most

pervasive in society since the 1980s. Rather than understanding "LGBT issues" as "problems" that are abstracted from the realities of white supremacy and global capitalism, my research demonstrates how the labor movement is a space from which to perform a queer intersectional politics. The organizing and activism I discuss throughout the project resists—sometimes explicitly, sometimes incidentally, and not always entirely—the kind of LGBT "movement" that articulates gay and lesbian identity as "a mass-mediated consumer lifestyle and embattled legal category" (Eng, Munoz, Halberstam, 2005, p.1). Eng describes this phenomenon as *queer liberalism*,

> an unsettling though perhaps not entirely unexpected attempt to reconcile the radical political aspirations of queer studies' subjectless critique with the contemporary liberal demands of a nationalist gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subject petitioning for rights and recognition before the law. (p. 10)

The current neoliberal moment enables a turn in which inclusion becomes a merger between "a certain queer consumer lifestyle….with juridical protections for gay and lesbian domesticity established by" (p. 10) *Lawrence v. Texas*[8] and the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Lisa Duggan (2004) expands on these critiques, confronting the state of gay politics in a neoliberal world. Duggan uses the term "homonormativity" to describe a politics that upholds and maintains heteronormative policies and institutions through assimilation, rather than challenging or resisting them. Homonormative gay politics offers the promise of mobilizing a depoliticized gay movement in exchange for

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[8] *Lawrence v. Texas* is the landmark Supreme Court decision that held that the sodomy law in Texas violated the Due Process Clause, and thus made legal *private* same-sex activity in Texas, and all other states in the US. *Lawrence v. Texas*, (02-102) 539 U.S. 558 (2003)

“rights” that directly favor the neoliberal agenda for privatization and free-market deregulation. Mainstream gay rights organizations that fight for marriage equality is a perfect illustration of a homonormative campaign.

Queer scholars and activists have continued to speak out against the centrality of same-sex marriage in the struggle for LGBT rights. In *Normal Life*: *Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law*, Dean Spade (2011) writes

> The framing of marriage as the most essential legal need of queer people, and as the method through which queer people can obtain key benefits in many realms, ignores how race, class, ability, indigeneity, and immigration status determine access to those benefits and reduces the gay rights agenda to a project of restoring race, class, ability and immigration status privilege to the most privileged gays and lesbians. (p. 62)

That marriage is an issue more important to the wealthy and white is echoed by grassroots organizations like Queers for Economic Justice (Q4EJ) who counter the positions of mainstream, heavily funded non-profits like the HRC. The organization Against Equality is also dedicated to critiquing the issues of the popular LGBT agenda, particularly mainstream gay rights efforts to gain marriage equality and overturn Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. The radical queer critique of these issues insists that striving to assimilate into organizations that perpetuate injustice and oppression is not the work that queers should be focused on, particularly when it’s taking valuable resources away from intersectional organizing that understands queer injustice as interrelated to economic and racial injustice.

Similarly, Jaye Cee Whitehead (2012) argues that the struggle for same-sex marriage is one that requires compliance with neoliberal governance; she argues that we ought to understand marriage "as a particular model of social care constructed along with the deconstruction of a national, public social safety net" (p. 5). A variety of factors contributed to the shift from more radical gay liberationist politics that defined LGBT social movements until the 1990s to a more reformist "movement," including "the nationalization and homogenization of gay and lesbian organizations, the political framing and resources of the religious Right, the AIDS epidemic, and the 'lesbian baby boom'" (Whitehead, 2012, p. 8). In addition, the neoliberal policies that began in the 1970s were now firmly entrenched and enabled privatized non-profits to take over social movements. The goals of these non-profits did not reflect the radical goals of gay liberationists' past; instead, the emergence of the LGBT "non-profit industrial complex"[9] brought with it a reformist articulation of gay and lesbian civil rights that relied on single-issue politics, such as access to same-sex marriage and ability to serve openly in the military.

The focus on marriage in the LGBT movement agenda reveals a great deal about the current neoliberal conjuncture. Marriage becomes the antidote to the dwindling support of the government. Whitehead (2012) argues,

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[9] According to the grassroots organization Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, the State uses non-profits to: "monitor and control social justice movements; divert public monies into private hands through foundations; allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through "philanthropic" work; encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than challenge them" (*INCITE!,* n.d.). This creates what some scholars and activists call "the non-profit industrial complex" (NPIC).

> …marriage equality activism stems from the immediate needs for gays and lesbians to gain access to a structure that acts as a gateway to laws and benefits within civil society that allow and obligate couples to manage social problems such as illness and poverty. (p. 8)

By placing the onus of health and finances on the family unit, same-sex marriage reinforces a reactionary social commitment to the structure of the nuclear family. By promoting this kind of social "progress," the mainstream gay rights movement is rejecting the politics of its past. The radical politics asserted by much of the early gay liberationist movement worked to resist the support of conservative capitalist values, not assimilate into them.

The labor movement's intervention in the fight for marriage equality somewhat complicates the binary view of gay rights past *v.* gay rights present. Consistently, press releases and media produced by labor unions articulate marriage as an economic issue—but rather than explaining the ways in which marriage leads to personal economic responsibility, unions work to make marriage another vehicle with which to hold the state accountable for benefits. For some, marriage *does* provide more benefits from the State. Thus the two renderings of marriage—one as a tool to entrench neoliberalism, one as a tool to resist it—are viable and not mutually exclusive. Unlike many radical queer critics, I do not argue for a complete dismissal of the struggle for marriage equality. It is precisely because the marriage issue is not so black and white that it is important for the labor movement to continue to be organized on behalf of its success. However, using radical queer critique as my guide, I emphasize the importance of the already established LGBT-labor coalitions that

address queer workers beyond the question of marriage benefits. Additionally, I use this method of critique to push these coalitions to embrace a more radical and militant method of engaging with social movement unionism.

Coalitional Politics and Belonging

> *Class-consciousness means that you can actually connect the dots and see what is the class-point in our struggle here….[We have to answer the questions:] Why is it important to fight for immigrant rights, why is it important to fight for queer rights?*
> –UNITE HERE organizer, Izzy Alvaran
>
> *There's nothing that unites us like the fact that our enemies hate all of us.*
> -Peggy Shorey, former Vice President of Pride at Work

Throughout my research I discovered that there are many ways that the labor movement—knowingly or not—contributes to the *queering* of LGBT politics in a way that gives rise to a promising means of coalitional politics. This intervention enables new methods of organizing—methods that resist neoliberal LGBT rights-based politics in favor of building something that reflects the more radical goals of historic LGBT liberation struggles. My research uncovers a pocket of hope for social movements trying to survive a neoliberal climate by pointing to the potentiality of labor to revive a more coalitional form of LGBT struggle.

Through this new form of coalition-building labor both coalesces groups that have in common the position of marginality and also has the opportunity to point out how this marginality is, in part, a result of their shared relationship to capital. That is, this queer coalitional belonging acknowledges how economic inequality enables the maintenance of identity-based oppression, and thus suggests that to fight against that

oppression, one must simultaneously struggle for the redistribution of wealth. Importantly, this contrasts the proposed solutions posited by the mainstream gay rights movement, whose work entrenches rather than challenges the wealth gap. Furthermore, this approach reminds the public that the LGBT people are part of the labor community and vice-versa.

In Amanda Tattersall's (2010) *Power in Coalition: Strategies for Strong Unions and Social Change,* she explores three case studies—a teacher's union contract battle in Australia, a health care workers campaign in Canada, and a living wage campaign in Chicago—to make claims about the importance of doing coalitional work within the labor movement. She posits that "[c]oalitions have the potential to be not simply a tool for advancing union goals but, more than that, a means of achieving new kinds of social change that could also contribute to the reinvention of unions" (p. 2). For Tattersall and other proponents of coalition work, there is power in bringing together ostensibly different groups under common goals.

Critiques of coalitional politics abound and scholars and activists alike have convincingly elucidated the shortcomings of the concept. Brenda Lyshaug (2006) suggests that coalitional politics "does not reconcile the claims of diversity and the need for unity in a satisfying way….It honors the claims of diversity among women while ignoring the importance of commonality" (p. 78). Aimee Carillo Rowe (2003) is more generous in her assessment of coalitional politics, but argues that most coalitional feminism fails to live up to a more expansive form of standpoint theory, or, what she terms "a politics of relation" (p. 19). For Rowe, a politics of relation encourages scholars and activists to move forward in coalitional work not simply by

acknowledging our locational positionalities, but also through the relationships we built with others. Rowe's intervention in coalitional work then is one that demands attention to affect and "be-longing."

Urvashi Vaid's (2001) critique is less about the failures of feminist theory and more about the failures of movements to remain sustainable. Vaid states,

> Creating progressive renewal will require the development of multi-issue organizations dedicated to movement building, collaboration, and information exchange; the development of a broad progressive political platform to articulate what we are fighting for; and lots more discussion and strategy development among the leaders of presently autonomous, single-issue movements so that we might come together in a new, powerful consensus. I am not talking about coalitions (which evaporate when the common goal is achieved or lost) or alliances (which imply a tactical expediency), but an organizing strategy that aims to build a common movement. I am speaking of a movement born out of the understandings of intersectionality—connections between issues, the private and the public, the racial and the gendered. Movements for race, gender, and sexual liberation have contributed these understandings to the previously straight, white, male-dominated left. (p. 239)

Vaid is describing a type of organized struggle that uphold the particular in a struggle of the universal, but suggests that "coalitions" are inherently temporary. I too concede that many forms of coalitional organizing of the past have disbanded "when the common goal is achieved or lost." However, this dissertation reveals that the collaboration between labor and LGBT working people and allies provides an

opportunity to create a more sustainable, intersectional form of coalition building that does indeed build a common movement.

My intervention through this project builds upon women of color feminist and queer articulations of coalitional politics by offering a real-life example of intersectional organizing. It is a vision not unlike Cathy J. Cohen's (1997) proposal for a revised queer politics, one in which "one's relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades" (p. 438). Cohen goes on to explain that this is a politics "where the *nonnormative* and *marginal* position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, is the basis for progressive transformative coalitional work" (p.438). Similarly, Karma R. Chavez (2010) argues for more radical forms of coalitional politics. She asserts, "if differential belonging is ever to have any policy implications, it will be in bringing people to coalition subjectivities, where they cannot help but see their oppression and privilege as inextricably bound to others" (p. 151).

I too am suggesting that this shared space of marginality is an important starting point, but to encourage the transformation of the economic conditions that maintain social injustice, the labor movement must also make apparent how this coalition need not be mutually exclusive from class struggle. Here I seek to put forth a vision of a more robust form of coalitional work and a more potent form of social movement unionism. It is a means of doing coalitional politics that is at once both affective and economic; a politics that acknowledges difference and commonality through multiple forms of oppression, whilst unapologetic in a strategy of resistance that is rooted in economic analysis. Drawing on critical queer theory and feminist

theories of coalition enables me to highlight how labor is a promising vehicle for the social justice mission of queer politics.

Methods of Inquiry

In *Female Masculinity,* Judith Halberstam (1998) describes "queer methodology" as a "scavenger method" that borrows from various fields to examine multifaceted communities (p. 13). For Halberstam, this means a mix of media analysis, participant observation, ethnography, autoethnography and archival research. I too see the value in using multiple methods to unpack a multi-layered community because it provides me a more holistic understanding of the relationship between LGBT people and the labor movement. For example, had I not engaged in some ethnographic work, I would not have had the opportunity to talk with an SEIU organizer over breakfast about their frustrations with the way the media talks about transgender health. On the other hand, had I not engaged in media analysis, I would not have been able to illustrate and analyze the discourse to which the organizer was referring.

Similarly, my methodology is also influenced by cultural studies' commitment to "forms of interdisciplinary research that don't easily fit, or can't be contained, within the confines of the existing divisions of knowledge" (Hall, 1992, p. 11). More than that, cultural studies methods are inherently and overtly political. As Gilbert B. Rodman (1997) states, "doing cultural studies" is about making the "larger world…a more just and equitable place to live" (p. 65). The project of cultural studies, Lawrence Grossberg (2010) remarks, is a way of "politicizing theory and theorizing

politics" (p. 9). Studying groups and individuals involved with social justice efforts is not necessarily cultural studies, but my blatant support of these progressive endeavors expressed through both my writing and involvement *is*. Further, this project reflects cultural studies' commitment to analyzing the economic (labor) and cultural (sexuality) not as separate but as interrelated (Williams, 1989).

This project is a result of ethnography, participatory-action research (PAR), and discursive media analysis. I conducted interviews and utilized participatory-observation/activism with LGBT-identified union members and organizers. The majority of my interviewees came from SEIU and UNITE HERE. I also interviewed and organized with members from the organization Pride at Work, a constituency group of the AFL-CIO that "works to mobilize mutual support between organized labor and the LGBT community" (prideatwork.org, 2012). I became a member of Pride at Work and attended the LGBT-Labor Leadership Training in Washington, D.C., as well as the Pride at Work Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. I conducted interviews with members at these events, and also held interviews with union organizers in San Francisco, Chicago, and Minneapolis. I was also on the organizing committee for the National Month of Action for Transgender Healthcare, which was spearheaded by Pride at Work. My involvement in LGBT-labor activism was pivotal to completing this project.

In addition to this participatory-action ethnographic work, I also conducted discursive media analyses to explore the work that is being done by and through public discourse around LGBT issues, labor issues, and LGBT labor issues. Below I

will discuss how I approached this research by explaining in more detail these three methods of inquiry.

Queer Ethnography

My approach to ethnographic work reflects my commitment to inserting queer politics throughout all aspects of the research, and takes up Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash's (2010) ways of thinking through queering social scientific research. Browne and Nash admit that defining a "queer method" is a fraught task, but affirm that while queer methods may be defined in a variety of ways, it is a methodology that rejects objectivity and creates "transformative politics through research" (p. 14).

Alison Rooke (2010) explains how queerness can contribute to the postmodern turn in anthropology and ethnography. Although she sees the benefits of Clifford Geertz's "thick description" and challenging rigid notions of "the field," Rooke says we must challenge old modes of anthropology even further. For Rooke, this means that researchers must acknowledge the intimacy that is created during research. She quotes Judith Butler to remind us that we cannot *not* be a/effected by the work we do and the relationships we build with people: "Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something," (as quoted in Rooke, 2010, p. 31). Rooke demands that we not hide from the eroticization of fieldwork, especially as queer scholars who insist that desire is integral to ways of being in the world.

Like Rooke, I find value in the affective nature of "fieldwork"—without it, this research may not have been possible. I was able to gain insight into the work of LGBT-labor activism because of my history with labor activism, and my identity as a queer woman.[10] It's certainly possible that I may have been able to attend the protests, workshops, and been a part of a Pride at Work organizing committee had I not been privy to a history of labor work and queer belonging. However, my ability to engage with these activists and workers was undoubtedly enhanced by my "insider knowledge." That manifested in different ways—both logistically and affectively. For example, my labor work meant that I had access to a numerous key figures in the labor movement, many of whom may not have responded to emails had they not been sent by labor organizers that put me in touch with them. More informally—but equally important—was my ability to be in community in queer spaces. This might have been as simple as "getting a (queer) joke" or using the queer-appropriate language, but it was clear that the individuals with whom I organized and interviewed were more comfortable and likely more willing to share their thoughts because of my level of familiarity and engagement.

In addition, like many cultural studies practitioners, rather than viewing my interviewees and activist/organizer colleagues as "subjects," I understand them as

[10] This is somewhat more complicated than I'm making it. Surely my queerness was/is important to this project, but it was also difficult to navigate "outing" myself as a queer woman in a relationship with a straight cisgender male. As many bisexuals and other queer-identified people have written about elsewhere, passing as or being read as straight can lead to isolation from queer spaces. For the most part, this was not a major issue as I didn't discuss my relationship during my interviews or organizing work. However, several of my co-researchers requested to be my Facebook friend and I had undeniable anxiety about their ability to discover that I was in a relationship with a man. I make this note only to highlight the undeniable importance of reflecting on our affective connection to research and ethnography in particular.

capable of contributing to the research as agents. Put another way, these workers and organizers could be considered co-researchers[11]. I practice grounded theory by drawing on contributions from LGBT workers themselves to craft my theoretical interjections. The interviews and conversations I had with workers, activists, and organizers were often responsible for suggesting a framework from which to view their relationship to the union. Furthermore, many of my co-researchers read drafts of my chapters and contributed to the writing process with their comments. As I discuss below, I attempted to make my relationship with them as mutually beneficial as possible.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach to study that is committed to social change. Practitioners of PAR believe that research should not be relegated to the confines of academia and instead should be a way to build bridges with the communities that exist outside the university (Greenwood and Levin, 2006). With that mission in mind, PAR works *with* the communities that are being studied and includes the voices of the research "subjects" in the analysis. The Participatory Action Research Center for Education Organizing (PARCEO) describes the following as tenets of PAR:

- *PAR* emphasizes the centrality and importance of people's and communities' own voices and leadership—rooted in our histories, cultures, wisdom, and

[11] This term could be problematized given that my interviewees do not have the formal status of "researcher" and thus none of the privileges that go along with it. That said, because they benefit from the research in ways I discuss below, and because their insights were instrumental in the design of my project, I feel it's appropriate to use that term.

experience—as we engage in research and organize collectively for social change.

- *PAR* is an interactive, respectful, and inclusive community process in which all who are engaged are teachers and learners.
- *PAR* facilitates a process of true democracy and self-determination for all communities. (“About PARCEO,” n.d.)

With these values in mind, PAR troubles traditional notions of “expert outsider” and instead encourages researchers to, as I note above, view “subjects” as “co-researchers.”

Furthermore, PAR aims to contribute to the communities being studied through the research itself. This often means that the researcher is also an activist working “‘with’ rather than doing ‘for’” (Greenwood and Levin, 2006, p. 1) the communities in question, using the research to help further a social cause related to the research topic. This approach is connected to the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who believed that education should be about “changing unjust conditions” (“About PARCEO,” n.d.). Keeping in line with these principles, PAR encourages the researcher to be self-reflexive about their role in the research and intentional about centering voices that are often erased in the process of knowledge production.

Much of my work on this project is an example of PAR and my hope is to add to the voices of other activist scholars who seek to dismantle the false divide between academics and politics, theory and practice (Young, Battaglia, Cloud, 2010; Pezzullo, 2010; Storey, 2010). As soon as I decided to investigate the relationship between the union movement and LGBT members, I became a dues paying member of Pride at Work. I attended their trainings and convention in an effort to build community with the people I was interviewing and studying. This enabled me to make connections to

other LGBT-labor organizations and provided me insider insight into the organizing being done around issues related to LGBT labor. I also helped organize around an LGBT-labor boycott against the Hyatt Hotel in San Francisco. In addition, I used my resources as an academic to contribute to the National Month of Action for Transgender Healthcare. My contribution to that project will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2. Finally, I wrote several articles for popular websites on the topic of LGBT-labor issues. By utilizing a PAR method, I was able to provide resources and support to LGBT-labor organizing throughout the course of my research. Moreover, my relationship and involvement with these groups guided my research questions and design, rather than the other way around.

Media Analysis

Mary Gray (2009) argues that mainstream media is incapable of covering queer activism that falls outside of hegemonic understandings of "LGBT issues." In her essay about the 1990s organization Queer Nation/San Francisco (QN/SF), Gray argues that their radical queer politics were never made fully coherent in the media depictions of their actions. When QN/SF did kiss-ins or disrupted suburban malls, mainstream news covered these actions as attempts at gaining "visibility" rather than any sort of critique on capitalism and consumerism. Gray asserts that the mainstream media has only the tools to articulate a gay liberal subject, which is unhelpful for groups like QN/SF when trying to form a political group identity. This Gray believes, is one reason the organization may have been so short-lived.

As I discussed earlier, it is rare to find examples in the media of the coalition between queers and unions (and queer union members) that isn't centered on marriage equality. But this absence is important. Avery Gordon (1997) describes the phenomenon of "ghostly haunting" as the process by which we are given notice that something is missing. The erasure of radical gay history haunts contemporary mediated discourse. Where are the stories about the queers that continue the legacy of a gay liberation grounded in resistance rather than assimilation? Where are the stories about coalition that go beyond the limits of the law? To answer these questions—specifically to determine why the media weren't talking about the LGBT union work that didn't center around marriage—my approach to media analysis was two-fold: analyzing what is there, and also what is missing.

Determining the absences was a result of my engagement with as many online and print publications as possible that covered anything related to LGBT labor issues. I set up a Google alert system that notified me anytime the words "queer," "labor," "LGBT," and/or "union" appeared in an online newspaper, blog, or website. I went through hundreds of articles over the course of a year and a half and looked for relevant themes. Various articles and videos that I discovered through this online tracking system contributed to my overall argument by providing explicit evidence and examples of the ways in which media framed the relationship between LGBT workers and the labor movement, or more often and importantly, when it did not do that work at all.

The other mediated text that I studied was the press and social media created by Pride at Work and other groups that are invested in LGBT-labor issues outside of

marriage equality. As I discuss in Chapter 4, this form of media activism reveals a compelling shift in social movement messaging. My analysis articulates how Pride at Work was able to rearticulate the LGBT community in a way that transcends the confines of "palatable" LGBT issues. This media illustrated the ability for those involved in various LGBT-labor activities to make their own media in an effort to reframe the discourse to center on issues that are relevant to poor and working-class LGBT people.

Preview of chapters

The dissertation provides a glimpse into the people and organizations within the US labor movement who are attempting to build coalition between those members of society that are oppressed because of their class and/or their sexuality. Further, the interviews and media analysis reveal that this work is being done in a way that acknowledges the intersections of *all* forms of oppression, including race and citizen status. This approach to coalitional politics begins from a place of understanding that identity is always already coalitional (Chavez, 2011). That is, while the US unions I examine make efforts to fight for the rights of *all* LGBT people—workers or not—they also remind the public that many workers are also LGBT. This is an immensely important shift away from the single-issue politics that has pervaded the mainstream LGBT rights movement and one that offers promising potential for the future of a social change that arises from the margins rather than corporate philanthropy or non-profits.

Chapter 2 provides insight into the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming people at work. Through my interviews with and research about transgender union members, I illustrate ways in which transgender-labor initiatives have worked to improve the lives of transgender workers. I critique the politics of anti-discrimination laws like the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), by pointing to their failure to address discriminatory practices in the workplace. I echo scholar/activists like Dean Spade who contend that formal legal equality is a largely symbolic process that attempts to address individual rather than structural problems. Whereas ENDA does nothing to challenge balances of power in the workplace, union contracts do. Through an analysis of grocery store worker Lincoln Rose's experience getting gender-neutral bathrooms in his place of employment, I demonstrate how the union became a useful tool for combating discriminatory practices.

My experience as an organizer for the National Month of Action for Transgender Healthcare (NMATH) provided me insight into how a transgender-labor campaign organized for more inclusive and accessible healthcare for transgender people. More than just addressing the economic side of healthcare, the organizing committee's approach to the month of action was rooted in a commitment to challenging the pathologizing discourse that surrounds the transgender community. To do so, organizers made sure to be strategic in their use of media, only publicizing stories about the campaign in vetted LGBT and labor publications and websites, so as to ensure that stories about the campaign would honor the self-determination of transgender individuals.

Another way NMATH and transgender union members used the labor movement to impel self-determination and transgender justice was through the use of storytelling. NMATH created a "story bank," so transgender workers could share their experiences related to accessing healthcare. These stories would be available for organizers to use for press releases and publicity. In one-on-one organizing, storytelling also became useful for building relationships that, UNITE HERE boycott coordinator Levi Pine argued, led to a stronger union movement. Pine explained that when he told his story of being a transman to the hotel cleaners he organizes, the process enabled a bond that motivated workers to push themselves to demand better working conditions through both contract negotiations and activism. The affective component emphasized during my interview with Pine revealed the ways in which story telling challenges neoliberal divisions between the public and private, and contributes to transforming the labor movement more towards social movement unionism. I conclude Chapter 2 by applying of Sara Ahmed's (2006) "queer phenomenology" to the experiences of transgender workers. I draw on Ahmed to explain how transgender workers' experiences on the job trouble conventional understandings of what does and does not constitute as a safe workspace and safe workplace activity. This queer approach to understanding the laboring body helps to make sense of the uniquely marginal positions of transgender workers.

In Chapter 3 I argue that the history and contemporary state of diversity training in the US colludes with a colorblind neoliberal approach to difference. To argue this I look specifically at the mainstream gay rights organization, the HRC and the way in which they offer diversity training as a solution to the problems faced by

LGBT employees in the workplace. Through an analysis of the HRC website, I illustrate that the HRC—and thus the mainstream gay rights "movement"—favors employers over workers by championing diversity as something to improve profitability. That the HRC's "Workplace" webpage and corresponding links are targeted towards employers is unsurprising given the HRC's relationship with private corporations who help fund their organization. When the HRC champions policies and approaches that bolster those with power and privilege, they appease their funders. This economic relationship between non-profits and private organizations has given birth to what some scholars and activists refer to as the "non-profit industrial complex" (NPIC) (INCITE, 2009). This phenomenon "redirect[s] activists energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society" (*INCITE*, n.d.). In the case of the HRC, this means appropriating LGBT liberation movements and turning them into assimilationist strategies that "manage and control dissent to make the world safe for capitalism" (*INCITE*, n.d.). By focusing on LGBT workplace issues as a matter of improving the company rather than improving the livelihood of the queer worker, HRC maintains rather than challenges systems of power.

In contrast, the Pride at Work LGBT-Labor Training that I attended in 2011 is an entirely worker-centered model. Rather than addressing diversity through an additive lens, Pride at Work's training makes explicit intersectional connections between the workers' gender, race, class, and sexuality. That is, the Pride at Work training was intentional about pointing to the ways in which the oppression experienced by a middle-class gay white man will be different from the oppression

faced by a working-class gay Black man, for example. Instead of relying on interpersonal discussions about diversity to solve structural problems, Pride at Work insists that LGBT workers must work collectively to wield more power in their workplace. This approach is much more in line with a social movement-inspired vision for change and is an important example to uphold in the face of neoliberal capitalism and the NPIC.

Chapter 4 addresses the importance of LGBT-labor coalition to improve working conditions through protest. First, I provide a history of both queer and LGBT activist and labor activism to reveal how both movements have become less radical and militant in their current forms. I argue that the militant queer tactics demonstrated by ACT UP and Queer Nation in the late 80s and early 90s can act as a guide to encourage a form of labor activism that is rooted in economic intervention. Using Joe Burn's (2011) concept of "reviving the strike," I argue that in contrast to the early 20th century labor movement, most current forms of labor activism do little to create an economic hardship on the owning classes. In order to gain power, labor activism must commit to organizing *effective* economic boycotts and industry-wide strikes, a mission that I suggest can be aided with the help of the lessons from queer activism.

Further, LGBT-labor activism reveals a promising means to *queer* labor. That is, to challenge the labor movement to scrutinize what is taken for granted as normal, and to open itself to non-normative ways of engaging politically in the public sphere. Using several examples from actions and interviews with queer union members, I highlight how camp, pleasure, and the body itself offer helpful tools in the struggle for queer *and* economic justice. For example, the unapologetically sex-positive

rhetoric of The Lusty Ladies strip club strike in San Francisco enabled workers to get a better contract because their tactics spoke to the clientele in a way that effectively deterred their patronage. Had SEIU been unwilling to allow this group of mostly queer women to use sex-explicit messaging under the banner of SEIU, the workers may not have had as much success in contract negotiations. Additionally, the viral videos of LGBT-labor actions like the "Don't Get Caught in a Bad Hotel" flashmob suggests a need for "online activism" to be additional to, not in place of, direct action tactics.

In Chapter 5, I continue to push at what would be required of truly queered, social movement unionism. Whereas much of the labor movement focuses on encouraging workers to identify with their industry, I argue that conflating workers to industries obscures the ability for a progressive union movement to resist injustice in all forms. To make this point, I point to the examples of police and prisons to illustrate how these two union-dense industries are instruments of state violence, particularly against the same LGBT people I've been addressing throughout the dissertation. I draw on Rod Ferguson's (2004) "queer of color critique" and Dean Spade's (2011) "critical trans politics" to make clear the imperative of viewing LGBT violence through an intersectional lens that acknowledges the particularly brutal relationship between poor LGBT people of color and the police. In addition, I echo the beliefs championed by prison abolitionist activists who demand an end to all entities that bolster the prison industrial complex (PIC). The case studies of horrific violence that are used throughout the chapter are not meant to suggest that particular

instances of brutality are exceptional, but rather that they are evidence that the police and prison systems are functioning exactly as they were designed to.

In the current labor movement, unions complicity with industries of violence are rarely interrogated. I showcase a unique moment when anti-prison activists who are usually also supportive of unions began to fight against the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employee's (AFSCME) efforts to keep open Tamms, a maximum-security prison in Illinois (Eisenman, 2012). However, resistance against AFSCME was not led by labor-leaders, and indeed my own involvement with labor activism and organizing reveals that even the most progressive labor leaders shy away from discussing the problem of prisons. As an example, I cite my own attempt to bring up the connection between police unions and police brutality against queer people at a Pride at Work Transgender Caucus meeting, only to be dismissed by the transgender organizer who had previously told us that he himself was a victim of police violence. Although I do not call on labor unions to abolish their relationship with the workers in these industries, I do suggest that labor-wide support of prison abolition would embody the kind of queer, social movement unionism I urge throughout the project.

With that…

My hope is that this project offers both academic and political interventions into questions about labor, sexuality, coalitional politics and social movements. More specifically, by using a critical queer theoretical approach to analyzing LGBT-labor activism and organizing, I am able to better interrogate the increasingly neoliberal LGBT rights "movement." Thus this dissertation is both a cultural studies project

about a social movement and also a critical project about the ways in which neoliberalism is working to squash social movements. In addition, I use my background in critical media studies to better understand how, if at all, mediated discourse articulates the relationship between LGBT people and labor unions. When media ignores coalitional work, this study questions those absences and seeks to understand how marginalized coalitional work is articulated outside of mainstream media.

Ultimately, it is a queer project, one that troubles and questions what is taken for granted and makes political claims, boldly. My goal is to celebrate the unique relationship between the LGBT communities and labor communities for the ways it exemplifies a new form of coalitional politics and its potential for advancing the cause of economic justice. But celebration must be coupled with critique. Thus, this project seeks to complicate the narrative of progress often projected upon social movements, and instead uses queer critique to encourage a more radical transformation of power relations. While I am hopeful and inspired by the work being done, I am also insistent that the work is not over. I hope that the following pages contribute to the project of building a queerer labor movement, and a more just future.

Chapter Two
Gender Non-Conforming Workers and the Union: Bodies, Spaces, and Self-Determination

All we got is the clothes we wear, the bikes we ride, and where we work, you know? You can ride a Honda and work in a bindery or ride a Harley and work at the steel plant.
-Jess, *Stone Butch Blues*

Introduction

Leslie Feinberg's (1993) powerful novel *Stone Butch Blues* captures the brutal life experiences of Jess, a self-identified butch who eventually begins taking testosterone to feel more comfortable in their[12] body. Set in pre-Stonewall upstate New York, Jess discovers that to live, work, and love as a masculine female is an almost impossible struggle. On a daily basis, Jess endures abusive epithets, threats, and acts of violence. Throughout the book, Jess makes clear that the union at the plant where they work feels like one of the only things that can provide stability to an otherwise unstable life.

Although *Stone Butch Blues* takes place mostly in the 1950s and 60s, violence and discrimination against transgender people is not a thing of the past. Today, trans and gender non-conforming people are still victims to an array of abuses, sometimes in ways that are not so far off from the things that Jess experienced. However, like Jess' character in *Stone Butch Blues*, some transgender workers view the union as a tool to better their economic *and* gender-variant subject positions. In this chapter, I

[12] Replacing a usually-gendered pronoun like "he" or "she" with "they" is the preferred gender-neutral pronoun in much of the trans/queer community and will be used throughout this research. Using "they" and "their" acknowledges the fictitiousness of the gender binary and honors individuals who perform intentionally-ambiguous gender identities.

illustrate examples within the labor movement of cisgender[13] and transgender workers who have taken action to address issues relevant to transgender people. Through an analysis of the experiences of gender-variant workers, I explore how trans and gender-non conforming (GNC) [14] individuals have utilized their union and the labor movement more broadly to struggle for transgender justice. In addition, I draw from my experience on the organizing committee for the National Month of Action for Transgender Healthcare (NMATH), an effort that was spearheaded by Pride at Work.

Considering the economic standing of so much of the transgender population, it is important that a labor movement dedicated to economic justice has ways to respond to the unique needs of transgender workers. In 2011 the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality conducted the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, a study that included data from 6,456 surveys taken by transgender and gender non-conforming identified individuals. According to the survey, respondents experience unemployment at twice the rate of the population as a whole, near universal harassment on the job, and 47% percent had experienced an adverse job outcome, such as being fired, not hired or denied a job promotion because of their gender performance (pp.3-5, 2009). Not surprisingly, trans and gender non-conforming people experience disproportionate rates of poverty compared to the general population (Grant, et al., 2011).

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[13] "Cisgender" is the term for people who perform and identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

[14] I use both transgender and GNC throughout the chapter to remind the reader that not all gender non-conforming people desire to "transition." Of course, I use the preferred pronouns and terminology for all my interviewees and fellow organizers.

However, it is not just economic disenfranchisement that oppresses transgender people. Scholar and activist Riki Ann Wilchins (2001) argues that that the contemporary hostile climate in which transgender people exist is a result of a variety of factors, including societal contempt for non-normativity. Wilchins (2001) remarks, “As a culture, we work long and hard, we expend a tremendous amount of social energy making sure people don’t deviate from their ‘natural’ genders” (p. 101). Importantly, Wilchins (2011) notes that this is not relegated to “official” transgender people and transsexuals; rather, society responds to *all* gender-deviance—from masculine females to effeminate men to post-op transsexuals—with violence. Thus, challenging transphobia cannot be solved through collective bargaining alone and instead requires a more holistic approach to social justice. The examples of union initiatives that I discuss in this chapter reflect a turn in the labor movement towards a social movement unionism that is equipped to fight against the violence of cissexism and transphobia[15] on multiple fronts. As my interviews, organizing experience, and analysis suggest, labor unions have the ability to fight for transgender justice in ways that extend beyond economics.

Although the focus of this chapter is on the importance of the labor movement’s recognition of transgender peoples, this is an equally important task to demand of the mainstream LGBT movement. I take the time in this chapter to focus specifically on the transgender community, in part because they are so often left out of, or insincerely

[15] “Cissexism” is “the belief and treatment of transgender and/or transsexual people as inferior to cissexual (non-trans) people” (queersunited.blogspot.com). Transphobia is “a reaction of fear, loathing, and discriminatory treatment of people whose identity or gender presentation (or perceived gender or gender identity) does not ‘match,’ in the societally accepted way, the sex they were assigned at birth” (lgbtrc.ucdavis.edu/lgbt-education/words-that-are-transphobic-and-why).

grouped in with the "LGB." Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, examining the exclusion of transgender peoples from the mainstream LGBT movement may reveal one reason that it was the labor movement, not "Gay, Inc."[16], that spearheaded the first national campaign for transgender healthcare.

Barring that, this chapter will do four things. First, I demonstrate how a union contract is more effective at combating trans-discrimination in the workplace than federal policies. Second, I posit that NMATH demonstrates the potentiality of social movement unionism to reshape pathologizing discourse surrounding transgender people, and that it can act as a vehicle for transgender self-determination. Third, I analyze the ways in which transgender-labor initiatives utilize storytelling as an organizing component that troubles the neoliberal public/private binary. Finally, I argue that the concept of "queer phenomenology" is a useful theory to help make sense of the unique struggles that transgender workers experience and embody.

Action Research

This chapter is the result of multiple methods of research. Some of my analysis was informed by engaging with union materials (e.g., handbooks, toolkits), and reading about transgender labor issues in the media. However, the bulk of my content was generated through the interviews I conducted with transgender and gender non-conforming union members and organizers in Minneapolis, Chicago, Cleveland, and San Francisco between 2009 and 2013. In addition, I had both

[16] "Gay, Inc." is a term coined by members of the LGBT community (and allies) that have expressed criticism of the decisions made by highly-funded LGBT non-profits. In Chapter 1, I identify this as the "mainstream LGBT movement."

informal conversations and unstructured interviews with GNC union workers at the Creating Change Conference in January 2011, the Pride at Work LGBT-Labor Training in April 2012, and the Pride at Work Convention in September 2012. Finally, much of my research was conducted through my involvement with organizing the National Day of Action for Transgender Healthcare (NMATH), in which I worked alongside trans and allied union members to launch a campaign dedicated to educating and mobilizing the public in support of transgender health benefits.

My role in NMATH reflects the principles of participatory action-research (PAR), which is rooted in a commitment to doing socially-engaged academic work. It was important for me to use my research as a way to contribute to the organizing and activism I was studying, not simply "observe" it. Because I was at the Pride at Work Convention Transgender Caucus lunch meeting where members first brainstormed the campaign, I had access to the inner-workings of the organizing from its inception. In the beginning, I was intentional about taking on a less vocal role so that I could see how the primarily union member-led planning took place, uninfluenced by my outsider contributions. However, once a basic framework for the campaign was established, I participated more, mostly in the capacity of organizing a local action in Minneapolis in conjunction with the national campaign.[17]

[17] The local event took place at the University of Minnesota on March 6, 2013. I, with the help of five other volunteers, hosted a screening of the film "Diagnosing Difference" (www.diagnosingdifference.com), which was followed by a panel discussion. The panel discussion featured a University of Minnesota transgender student who was active in securing trans-inclusive health benefits in the university student plan, a transgender professor who was also involved in the health insurance

In addition to organizing a local event, I was present on weekly conference calls with the national organizing committee from October-April. After the month of action ended, those of us on the organizing committee continued to work together to discuss how we could continue to goals of the campaign after the month of March. Since the month of action ended, I have worked with fellow organizers on campaign messaging, social media initiatives, and also spearheaded the effort to create a formal network of graduate students whose research could contribute to the cause of promoting transgender healthcare.

I believe that this method of engaged-research benefited both the struggle for transgender healthcare and also the quality of my project. Being actively involved in an LGBT-labor initiative provided me invaluable insight into the ways in which transgender issues are discussed within the labor community, and allowed me to witness the ways in which power operates within and outside of such campaigns.

Law vs. Organizing

One of the most common themes that arose during my research about all LGBT workers—but especially transgender workers—is that they have more faith in the power of a contract than the power of federal policy. Although the union movement demonstrates a commitment to fighting for certain policies (e.g. marriage equality, immigration reform), my interviews with union members reveal that they are much more interested in fighting for changes through their work contracts. The Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) is one example of how federal policy

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effort, and a labor union activist who spoke about the connection between the union movement and LGBT justice.

fails to account for the needs of transgender people. My interviewees suggest that contract negotiations can support workers when ENDA cannot.

ENDA

It is currently legal in 29 US states to fire someone because they are lesbian, gay, or bisexual; in 34 states, it is legal to fire someone based on gender identity or expression (Wooledge, 2012). Because of this, LGBT rights groups have pushed to get ENDA passed under federal law. ENDA would prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, although the latter is only a recent inclusion. Prominent LGBT leaders like former Senator Barney Frank and the HRC have supported proposing an ENDA bill that would remove gender identity and expression from the list in order to make it easier to pass in Congress (Stryker, 2008). The current ENDA now includes gender identity, but has been sitting idle in the 111th Congress.

Many of the union members I spoke with wanted to fight for an inclusive ENDA, but also expressed cynicism that ENDA could do much to challenge the kinds of discriminatory practices that happen on the ground. In my interview with a white, transgender UNITE HERE boycott coordinator, Levi Pine, he explained that although Illinois has a state-wide policy prohibiting employment discrimination of LGBT-identified people, he has more than one friend who has been fired for transitioning. “Very few laws that get passed really change a whole lot if you don’t fight to enforce them [at work],” he said, and then pointed to the union as the best platform from which to have that fight.

Several other queer scholars and activists have been publically skeptical about the value of putting energy towards passing ENDA. Patrick McCreery (2001) offers the example of a gay middle school teacher who was fired after someone revealed that he used to be an actor in gay pornography. The school was able to fire him, not because he was gay, but because he had "deviant" sexual practices, something ENDA would never protect. He continues, "ENDA clearly seeks not to subvert heteronormative culture but rather to assimilate gay workers into it. As written, ENDA attempts to categorize and organize sexuality, not to acknowledge its fluidity or instability" (p. 45). Riki Anne Wilchins (2001) makes similar arguments, suggesting that ENDA would be unlikely to give any protection to gender non-conforming workers, even if gender identity was explicitly written in the bill.

The ineffectiveness of anti-discrimination laws is illustrated in the story of a transgender grocery store worker and member of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1105 who was publically humiliated by some of his coworkers when he began his transition (Slaughter 2005, p. 49). Lincoln Rose was an out lesbian at work, and was supported by most co-workers when he announced that he'd be transitioning from female to male. However, shortly after he made this announcement and started using the men's bathroom, a male co-worker filed a grievance stating that he was uncomfortable using the bathroom at the same time as Rose. Management met with the union representative and the two decided on a solution that would require Rose to hang a sign on the bathroom door whenever he used it. The union rep explained that this was all that could be done since "they didn't

have the contract language" to defend Rose's rights as a transgender person (Slaughter, 2005).

At first, a male co-worker was told to accompany Rose to the bathroom and stand outside until he was done, so as to warn anyone who might go in. He then received a sign that read "This bathroom is OCCUPIED" which he was to place on the door whenever he used it. Angry and humiliated, Rose contacted Sarah Luthen, an LGBT labor activist, and member of Pride at Work. With the support of Pride at Work and fellow co-workers, "Rose drew up a petition demanding that in its upcoming contract bargaining and in the union bylaws, Local 1105 include language prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity" (Slaughter, 2005, p. 49). After collecting 96 signatures, and having one meeting with the president of the union, UFCW Local 1105 agreed to negotiate for new contract language protecting gender identity and sexual orientation.

Rose reflected that it was a combination of "union pride" and putting "a human face on an issue" that enabled the contract win (Slaughter, 2005, p. 49-50). He explained that although some of his coworkers didn't agree with his choice to undergo gender reassignment, that seeing their friend go to the bathroom in tears every day inspired an affective response that made them ultimately supportive.

Rose's story illustrates ways in which discriminatory practices may persist in spite of federal laws, and how the union became a vehicle to combat those practices. In his analysis of anti-discrimination laws like ENDA, Dean Spade (2011) writes

> An examination of categories of identity that have been included in these kinds of laws over the last several decades indicates that these kinds of

> reforms have not eliminated bias, exclusion, or marginalization. Discrimination and violence against people of color have persisted despite law changes that declared it illegal…The persistence of wage gaps, illegal terminations, hostile work environments, hiring/firing disparities, and bias-motivated violence for groups whose struggles have supposedly been addressed by anti-discrimination…laws invites caution when assuming the effectiveness of these measures. (p. 82)

Instead of relying on federal laws that make little difference in the lives of people at work, examples of resistance from transgender union members reveals ways in which a union contract can enforce what the law sometimes can't. These stories also demonstrate the importance of centering human relationships in struggles for transgender rights. Both of these strategies—contract negotiations and affective education—were also salient in the planning and actions for the National Month of Action for Transgender Healthcare (NMATH).

Struggling for Transgender Health and Self-Determination

> *Winning more sensitive care for trans people is not enough to save our lives. Not if we can't afford to see a doctor or go to a hospital. The fight against bigotry must go hand in hand with the battle to make health care affordable.*
> –Leslie Feinberg

The 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 19% of transgender and gender non-conforming people are denied healthcare, and 28% of transgender and gender non-conforming people postpone medical care for fear of discrimination (Grant, et al., 2011). The economic inequality experienced by so many transgender people often leads to a lack of quality healthcare options. In many

workplaces, transgender individuals are denied access to many kinds of health-care and coverage that their cisgender co-workers have without question. Whether through exclusions in health insurance policies or lack of access to competent healthcare providers, transgender individuals face extensive barriers to accessing appropriate, affordable healthcare.

In response to these issues, Pride at Work, the Center for American Progress, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Lavender Caucus, Basic Rights Oregon, the Transgender Law Center, and the National Center for Transgender Equality organized the first-ever National Month of Action for Transgender Healthcare (NMATH), which took place in March 2013. The goal of the campaign was to mobilize union members, students, non-union workers, and allies in an effort to make transgender-inclusive healthcare more common, accessible, and affordable. In addition, organizers of the campaign hoped to educate the public about what it means to be transgender and the ways in which healthcare industries continue to exclude trans and gender-variant communities.

NMATH was spearheaded by Pride at Work's Transgender Caucus whose first meeting was held at the 2012 Pride at Work Convention. As one of the attendees of the caucus meeting, I committed to organizing a local action in Minnesota, and also to become a member of the national organizing committee. Through my participation I witnessed the potential of the labor movement not only speak to transgender workers through contract negotiations and workplace justice, but also to shape an entire discourse and agenda about transgender health. I draw on my work on this campaign to illustrate the ways in which NMATH demonstrates the potential of

coalition-fueled social movement unionism to lead the way in the fight for transgender justice.

Prior to NMATH, no other organized national campaign in the US attempted to address the issue of transgender healthcare in a way that holistically addressed policy, workplace contracts, insurance companies, and healthcare establishments. As we discussed at the initial meeting and in subsequent weekly organizing calls, tackling the issue of transgender health would require more than just a commitment from labor unions to bargain for contracts that were inclusive of transgender health benefits, it would also require addressing external structural obstacles that currently bolster a climate that enables an unjust healthcare system to exist in the first place. The campaign organizers agreed to assess insurance company policies, examine statewide non-discrimination policies, and create a curriculum to train healthcare professionals on transgender health issues.

Furthermore, the campaign provided organizers an opportunity to play a role in shaping the contentious discourse that surrounds transgender health. Public conversations about transgender health—if they are happening at all—are undergirded with transphobia and misinformation. Most commonly, organizers have encountered people whose rebuttals against trans-inclusive healthcare focus on how more inclusive insurance would be too expensive. During one of my conversations with a fellow NMATH organizer, Renee Rathjen explained,

> A lot of people say they aren't supportive because they can't even get covered for basic stuff, so why would they want to let more money go to a 'sex

> change.' But that's usually just a way for them to say they're not supportive without admitting to being transphobic.

Rathjen—who is also an SEIU staff member and identifies as a transman—viewed NMATH as a campaign to build strategies that could respond to both the misinformation and the prejudice.

Addressing the false accusation that transgender health insurance would drastically increase the cost of employer insurance plans proved simpler than addressing the prejudice. Although there is limited data, "The Benefits of Equality Toolkit" (TBET) (2012) published by Basic Rights Oregon[18] reports that "no jurisdiction, employer, or insurance company which covers trans health care has found the cost to be prohibitive" (p. 7). TBET shows that the City of Portland only experienced a .08% increase in their health care insurance budget, Monmouth County reported an increase of "less than a dollar per person," and the City of San Francisco declared that the increase was "so small as to be negligible" (p. 35). Despite the small sample size,[19] the information from the toolkit provides a helpful point of reference for union members that want to fight for trans-inclusive coverage in their contracts.

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[18] "Basic Rights Oregon (BRO), a 501(c)(4) organization, was formed in 1996 to sustain and strengthen Oregon's LGBT rights movement between and beyond measure campaigns. In 1999, the Basic Rights Education Fund (BREF), a 501(c)(3) organization, was formed to supplement the electoral and legislative work of Basic Rights Oregon through education and advocacy for LGBT Oregonians" (http://www.basicrights.org/about-us/our-history/).

[19] Currently, the public employee insurance packages of Portland, Monmouth, and San Francisco are the only examples of insurance costs that have been published. During the NMATH organizing, those of us on the committee that were in graduate programs started having conversations about how our research could help the work of NMATH, and one of the ideas was for a graduate student to collect more data about these costs.

Finding ways to respond to resistance that is fueled by transphobia is considerably more challenging for activists dedicated to the struggle for transgender healthcare. Transphobia—like homophobia, racism, or xenophobia—cannot be entirely eradicated through a campaign, contract, or policy change. Progressive attempts to dismantle deep-seeded prejudices are always already working within the confines of a system that is built upon a cissexist, white supremacist, heteropatriarchy. That said, campaigns like NMATH and the other examples of union-led responses to transgender issues provide a way to address the affective symptoms of structural inequality by working to address individuals' fear of transgender people. Trangender activists and allies have developed a variety of ways to respond to transphobia, but I will discuss two common themes that arose during my research and organizing work.

Self-Determination, Not Pathologization!

> *No one is going to queer the labor movement as an ally.*
> -Levi Pine

First, the transgender justice activists I worked with were invested in finding a way to articulate transgender health care as something that is necessary, but not something that is pathological. Much like the debates about biological determination in relation to gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity, the debate about whether or not transgender people are "sick" is something that is contested by transgender activists and allies. Currently, it is legally necessary for transgender people to concede to having a "disorder" in order to obtain the right to certain medical procedures and legal protections. Since 1980, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders (DSM) has included “gender identity disorder” (GID) and “transexualism” in their list of mental disorders. Some transgender individuals and allies view this as a beneficial articulation since it has allowed surgeries that aid in transitioning to be covered as a form of treatment rather than a cosmetic procedure (Bender-Baird, 2011). However, for many transgender individuals, this “protection” is actually quite harmful since it pathologizes trans identity.

In addition, not all gender nonconforming people decide to undergo surgery or take hormones, which reiterates why it is important for activists to focus on gender-variance, rather than the category of transgender identity *per se*, when discussing the rights of gender non-conforming people in the workplace. The concretization of GID does not trouble the gender-binary, but rather reinforces it by characterizing essentialist “male” and “female” qualities. For example, the DMS description of GID suggests that as boys, men with GID, “particularly enjoy playing house, drawing pictures of beautiful girls and princesses, and watching television or videos of their favorite female characters” (quoted in Dean, p. 24, 2003). In contrast, a queer approach to gender justice rejects the two-gender system entirely, and encourages room for self-determined gender-variance to flourish.

In response to the pathological categorization constructed in the DSM, transgender activists are trying to build a movement based on self-determination. Scholar and transgender activist Dean Spade (2003) writes,

> I would like to see the end of gender designation on government documents, the end of gender segregation of bathroom and locker room facilities, and the end of involuntary corrective surgeries for babies with intersex conditions. I

> would like people to have the freedom to determine their own gender identity and expression and not be forced to declare such an identity involuntarily or pick between a narrow set of choices. And I would want no person to be required to show medical or psychiatric evidence to document that they are who and what they say they are. I would like self-identification to be the determining factor for a person's membership in a gender category to the extent that knowledge of the person's membership in such a category is necessary. (p. 29)

Because NMATH and other labor-led transgender health initiatives are worker-centric, they provide an excellent conduit for pushing an agenda of self-determination.

For example, in 2009, the New York-based organization Pride in Our Union created a handbook for labor unions and focused specifically on the issue of transgender health care. In it they emphasize the importance of working with insurance carriers to provide coverage for "the medical needs appropriate to [the workers'] bodies, regardless of the sex indicated in insurance paperwork or other legal documents" (p.11). This becomes important for transgender men who, for example, still require cervical cancer or breast cancer screenings, or for transgender women who need a prostate exam. The union contract is a place that can provide protection for individuals with "inconsistent" identities.

NMATH organizers were also aware of the ways in which the media can play both a positive and negative role in the struggle for self-determination. During one of our organizing conference calls, our media liaison, Tash Shatz of Basic Rights

Oregon, explained that we were going to do the majority of our publicity work through vetted LGBT and labor publications: "The mainstream media will often use language that ends up hurting the cause more [than helping it], so we try to stick to LGBT and labor publications more than broad mainstream media." Shatz was alluding to the ways that mainstream publications often misuse gender pronouns, or how they discuss the "condition" of "transgenders" as pathological. Instead, NMATH was committed to publicizing the campaign in ways that honored the rights of transgender people to articulate their identity and oppression on their own terms.

Our Stories, Our Selves

> *That's how we do it in the labor movement. A whole lot of our work is based on sharing stories.*
> –Cleve Jones

The organizers of NMATH emphasized the importance of finding ways to disseminate transgender people's stories about their experiences with the healthcare system. During one of the conference calls, a white, transgender SEIU member and co-founder of the Pride at Work Transgender Caucus, Gabriel Halaand stated, "Only one in eleven people know a transgender person, which means they are less likely to support trans social justice issues. We've got a lot of ground to cover." Taking a cue from past social movements, NMATH sought to bridge the gap between cisgender and transgender people through the use of storytelling. In her book on the use of storytelling in protest and politics, Francesca Polletta (2006) writes,

> Stories elicit sympathy on the part of the powerful and sometimes mobilize official action against social wrongs. Where authorities are

> unyielding, storytelling sustains groups as they fight for reform, helping them build new collective identities, link current actions to heroic pasts and glorious futures, and restyle setbacks as way stations to victory. Even before movements emerge, the stories that circulate within subaltern communities provide a counterpoint to the myths promoted by the powerful. (p. 3)

In an effort to combat such myths, NMATH organizers worked to set up "story banks." The story banks were designed to collect stories from transgender people that could be used in press releases and articles about the month of action and transgender health more generally.

In a debriefing session I had with Rathjen, he stated that his work on marriage equality amendments made him realize the importance of sharing stories, rather than just sharing facts to persuade people to support causes that they may not understand. Organizing around health requires activists to describe details about transgender bodies, and if a story is not attached to the abstract concept of "the transgender body," the public will be less likely to be sympathetic to the cause. However, if the story accomplishes garnering a supportive response, the person hearing the story must pause and reflect on why they feel differently than they did at the beginning of the conversation. It is this moment that illustrates Rathjen's belief that, "telling stories is a form of persuasion that seems to get people to reflect on their prejudices." For Rathjen, challenging the culture of cissexism requires pushing people to be self-reflexive about their own transphobia. As Dana Cloud (2011) notes, "the stories we tell and the questions we ask are instrumental to the process of worker education, consciousness-raising, and mobilization" (p. 175).

Although there are also limits to the power of narratives in social justice campaigns, the NMATH campaign managed to avoid most of these pitfalls. In discussing the risks of using stories in social justice movements, Poletta notes, "When disadvantaged groups or people challenging the status quo tell stories, they may be especially vulnerable to skepticism about the authority, generalizability, or authenticity of the form" (p. 25). Further, "stories' capacity to inspire [action may be] time-bound, fleeting" (p. 25). Perhaps most dangerous, the use of narratives and storytelling in social justice campaigns runs the risk of making injustice seem like an individual rather than a structural problem. However, NMATH organizers were intentional about coupling storytelling within the context of a campaign that addressed the structural inequality of the healthcare system. In that way, the stories "provide unique insights into the connections between individual life trajectories and collective forces and institutions beyond the individual" (Maynes, et al., 2008, p. 3).

The use of storytelling around campaigns like NMATH differs slightly from the use of storytelling in one-on-one labor organizing, but the latter highlights even more the ways in which stories can productively trouble the lines between individual and structural, public and private. As a boycott coordinator, Pine asks workers to risk their livelihoods to participate in strikes and other public actions. Pine suggests that being an out transman is helpful in evoking that sense of commitment from the rank and file. He stated, "We're only gonna do things that are really tough and scary if we know each other really well." Pine explained, "every time that I've been truthful about being trans it's been a good thing; it's always made me closer to people."

Judith Butler's (2005) theory of "giving an account of oneself" is helpful in making sense of Pine's use of telling his gender-identity story. Pine, who is in the process of "transitioning," has a narrative that would, for much of society, be incoherent. But Butler explains that if:

> …the identity we say we are cannot possibly capture us and marks immediately an excess and opacity that falls outside the categories of identity, then any effort "to give an account of oneself" will have to fail in order to approach being true. As we ask to know the other or ask that the other say, finally or definitively, who he or she is, it will be important not to expect an answer that will ever satisfy. By not pursuing satisfaction and by letting the question remain open, even enduring, we let the other live, since life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it. (pp. 42-43).

The precarity of a trans identity succeeds only through its failure to be fully understood. Similarly, when Pine gives his incomplete narrative of himself to workers, he too is met with only incomplete and partial understandings of "who they are." But a "satisfying answer" becomes less important than the feeling of connection that Pine describes as *love*: "The way that I've always [approached discussions with workers about my trans identity], it feels more like organic relationship building than, 'Hey, I'm oppressed too, let's meet somewhere in the middle.' It's more like," Pine paused, "it's more like these are people who I love…and I want them to know me."

Pine and NMATH organizers commitment to sharing stories as a way to educate and build connections challenges the divide between public and private. In

The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy, David L. Eng (2010) argues that a once radical visions of queer politics have transformed into what he calls "queer liberalism." Queer liberalism promotes a politics of inclusion that upholds capitalism and relies on the heternormative distinction between the private and public sphere. All forms of discrimination are relegated to the private sphere, which, queer liberalism suggests, is the only space in which these abuses can be performed and solved. In response, Eng proposes that "we must develop a critical vocabulary and analysis of the ways in which racial disparities and property relations embed and recode themselves within the private realm of family and kinship relations, only to seep back into circulation within the public domain" (p. 6). Pine's comments reflect similar tensions about how to translate what is accomplished interpersonally to more structural forms of change.

Storytelling and "giving an account of oneself" offer a way to reclaim forms of kinship that simultaneously reject queer liberalism. By insisting that what is normally deemed fit only for the private—like personal stories, or admitting feelings of love—be a central component of a campaign in the public sphere, organizers that implement an affective approach to organizing through storytelling challenge the normative framework that queer liberalism has helped to maintain. This intentional blurring of the lines between the public and private reflects a "feeling of kinship in and with the world that exceeds the analytic prescriptions of traditional perception, legal recognition, and social belonging" (Eng, p. 196).

Kinship and relationality were prominent themes that emerged throughout my interviews, conversation, and organizing work with transgender labor activists and

organizers. In the section that follows, I will elaborate specifically on the how physical embodiment shapes and is shaped by space and relationships.

The Labor of Orientation

During my interview with Pine, he stated,

> If the whole point of the labor movement is for people to gain self-determination over their lives, and their futures, and of their bodies---a lot of it is self-determination about your body and what you do or do not have to do with your body, and how you use your body to survive---I mean, I have to be part of that conversation. For the same reason it's not okay to tell me my body is female, that's the same reason it's not okay to ask someone lift a [heavy] mattress twenty times a day.

Here, Pine illustrates the importance of understanding the ways in which bodies are contingent on their environment in space. Geography and other studies of space provide theories of how class is produced through and because of the spaces in which classed bodies inhabit (Bourdieu, 1977; Wills, 2008; Mitchell, 2010). Alison Stenning (2008) argues,

> Working classness is placed. It is performed and constructed within communities and, in turn, shapes the spaces of community, economy, politics, and much more. It is often within the spaces of community—local and not so local—and the spatial practices of work and life that subjectivities and materialities intersect. (p. 10)

Stenning suggests that class is a result of both surroundings and activity, and motions toward the intersection of work and subjectivity.

Feminist and queer theorists have contributed to theories of space by making central questions of how sexuality influences and is influenced by environment, surroundings, and place (Taylor, 2009; Binnie, 2011; Ahmed, 2006). For example, Sara Ahmed (2006) uses phenomenology to theorize how space-time influences sexual orientation, noting, "To become straight means not only that we have to turn toward the objects given to us by heterosexual culture but also that we must turn away from objects that take us off this line" (p. 554). Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of "lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready to hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 544). Given the ways in which workers bodies and transgender bodies perform "repeated and habitual actions," phenomenology is beneficial to further unpack the physically embodied struggles experienced by transgender people discussed above. Building on Ahmed, my queer analysis of labor centers workers' relationships to their bodies and their spaces of work, and I extend it to include how space determines gender expression. Using examples from transgender union members relationship to other workers and to the spaces of the jobs themselves, I draw on transgender workers' accounts of their bodies in relation to other bodies and their space of work to illustrate the necessity for union organizers to confront the burdens that befall the workers' physical bodies.

Of course, focusing on the physical hardships endured by workers is not novel for the labor movement. Indeed, early labor organizing in the US revolved around

workers in factories who endured physical danger on the job, and emphasized bodily harm as one of the primary impetuses for organizing (Triece, 2007; Dray, 2011). However, my use of queer phenomenology troubles conventional understandings of the body and work by focusing on ostensibly innocuous work affairs that actually cause bodily stress to transgender people.

For example, Pine provided an example of his embodied discomfort when UNITE HERE planned a direct action to support strikers outside of a Hyatt hotel in Chicago. The plan was for UNITE HERE staff and community allies to invite arrest by blocking guests from entering the Hyatt, a tactic that is common for unions that practice civil disobedience. The point ultimately was to make space for the workers to strike without risk of arrest, which they felt they could accomplish through the defense of the staff members in court. Although Levi was fully supportive of the action, he was terrified about what would happen to him as a transman. He recounts,

> So we get the call at the office that people are going over who are willing to get arrested, and everyone is like 'no problem, so simple.'…And in my head I was like "Fuck!...What fucking jail am I going to go to?" My ID says one thing, I present kind of differently. And I don't know a trans person who has gone to jail that hasn't gotten the shit beat out of them. And so I'm just dealing with this silently in my head. And we all get in a cab and go over. And when we get out at the hotel, I pulled my lead aside and was like, "Ahhh, what is gonna happen to me? I don't know if I can do this." And she was like, "Oh, I never thought about that before—but wherever you go, you won't be alone." And when she said that, I kind of knew that she meant more than just

> 'whatever jail cell I'm in there will be more than 4 or 5 people with me' it was more like…There's 800 people who risked their livelihoods today to fight for something better, and it's come to the point that they will not be able to continue doing it unless someone else can get arrested. So they were completely depending on us to be able to fight for themselves. And if anything happened to me, I had 800 people to back me up. So my ability to do what I wanted to do and do the right thing, and my ability to be out in public and feel safe depended on them, and can't be separated from each other.

Pine's body became a reminder of "the violence that the otherwise gendered suffer in the public world and…that embodiment denotes a contested set of norms governing who will count as a viable subject within the sphere of politics" (Butler, 2004, p. 28). Further, Pine's experience demonstrates how "bodies take shape through being oriented toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 552). That is, Pine's orientation towards his work—which, at the time, was to get arrested—transformed from fear to courage when he felt situated beside the bodies of his fellow union organizers.

Pine expands on his orientation to the space of the potential jail cell through a re-emphasis on his orientation to his fellow workers:

> I think that's the power of organizing verses the power of passing anti-discrimination laws. Like my friend who got fired after he started taking hormones didn't have 800 people backing him up—and he got fired, and then he was homeless. But if I got fucked with in jail, I have the union. And it's not like I'm gonna go file the papers with the lawyers, no, I have my committee

> and I have people who know me deeply and I know them deeply. Like I know what they went through—to get to the country, or to leave their abusive husband—and I'm going through this to.

When Levi connects his struggle as a transman to the hardships immigrants face when coming to the US, and that survivors of domestic abuse face when removing themselves from harmful environments, he illustrates how our orientations alter our relationship with the spaces we inhabit. For the labor movement to work in solidarity with movements for transgender justice, it must acknowledge explicitly the spatial-relationality between workers and other workers, workers and their work spaces, and the sometimes overlooked sites of bodily danger.

Examples of the potential for harm in taken-for-granted safe spaces are prevalent for transgender workers. The example of Rose's struggle for gender-neutral bathrooms is another perfect illustration of how the orientation of bodies in space can enhance or negate the precarity of work life. Similarly, a transgender worker who shared his story for the NMATH campaign discussed the health challenges that occurred from his need to bind to go to work everyday. "Binding" refers to the process many transmen undergo to flatten their breasts using any variety of materials, including ace bandages, control top panty-hose, neoprene, among others. Binding can cause physically harmful side effects, such as over-compression and breathing problems, abnormal spinal alignment, and breast tissue damage ("Binding FAQ," n.d.). Thus the act of *dressing* for his workspace became a health hazard. Queer phenomenology helps "explore how bodies are shaped by histories, which they perform in their comportment, their posture, and their gestures" (p. 552), and is thus a

helpful theory to make sense of the unique struggles experienced by and embodied within transgender workers.

Conclusion

My interviews and analysis illustrate the ways in which organized labor has made transgender issues central in the fight for fair working conditions and economic justice. The insight gained from the experiences of trans workers and organizers are not just relevant for workplaces that have trans and gender non-conforming employees, but for any workplace.

First, my critique of ENDA suggests that federal policies often fail to address actual practices of discrimination in the workplace. Instead, I highlight Rose's struggle for gender-neural bathrooms to illustrate the effectiveness of both the union contract, and the potential of affect in organizing. Witnessing Rose's physical and emotional distress during his trips to the bathroom moved co-workers to fight for a better contract. This example acts as a reminder that although pushing for an inclusive ENDA bill to pass is important, it is even more important to protect collective bargaining rights.

My experience on the NMATH campaign provided me insight into how the labor movement can contribute to movements for transgender self-determination. By challenging the pathologizing discourse of the medical model, NMATH provided space for trans people to discuss health care in a way that wasn't always already connected to the language of disorder. Similarly, the use of storytelling by NMATH and other labor organizers provides space for transgender people to give their own

accounts of their livelihoods. Additionally, storytelling offers a way to challenge liberal divisions between public and private, and is therefore a powerful method for resisting injustice in a neoliberal climate.

I end with Sara Ahmed's notion of "queer phenomenology" to more deeply make sense of the transgender workers' experiences discussed throughout the chapter. Where Ahmed troubles phenomenology to expand on sexual orientation, I build on Ahmed's troubling to point to the leaks in hegemonic understandings of what does and does not count as "safe" work activities and spaces. Further, applying queer phenomenology to transgender workers orientation towards workspace and co-workers reveals the ways in which our subject positions are altered by space, time, and relationality, and becomes useful when trying to understand the injustices experienced by trans people at work (and outside of it).

At the end of *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess, now older, passing as a man in New York City, gets up the courage to speak at a rally organized by gays and lesbians. Jess is nervous at first, but asks, at the end of the speech, "Isn't there a way we could help fight each other's battles so that we're not always alone?" (Feinberg, 1993, p. 296). Later that day, Jess runs into Duffy, the old union steward from his days at the plant. Jess tells Duffy about the rally, and explains, "I wanted to tell them how it was in the plants, how when a contract's almost up management works overtime trying to divide everybody. I didn't know if they'd get what I meant if I said it took the whole membership to win the strike" (p. 299).

What Jess is describing is 'solidarity'—specifically, the intersection between the oppression of LGBT people and the oppression of workers. Similarly, Pine, Rose,

Rathjen, and the many people I worked alongside in the NMATH campaign emphasized the importance of making the connection between economic and transgender justice. While dominant society and much of the mainstream LGBT movement continually marginalize the transgender community, this chapter demonstrates how the labor movement is providing the tools to make significant progress in the struggle for transgender justice.

Chapter Three
The Diversity "Problem": Challenging Corporate Diversity Training Through Pride at Work's LGBT-Labor Training

Introduction

In the post-Civil Rights US, anti-discrimination laws helped to create an increasingly diverse workplace. More recently, demographic shifts brought on by global capitalism have led to a US population that is even more heterogeneous. With a US workforce composed of a greater number of people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, and LGBT people, workplaces have had to "deal" with the changing face of the workforce. As a result, "diversity" has become more than a buzzword—it's become a neoliberal industry. A recent study estimated that the "diversity business" is an over 8 billion dollar industry (Anand&Winters, 2008), and countless business and organizational communication studies about "managing diversity" have been published (Marquis, et al., 2008; Gilbert, et al., 1999; Hubber, 2004).

One of the most prominent (and profitable) methods of diversity management is "diversity training." The goal of these trainings have varied over time, and although they began primarily as a way to address racial diversity in the workplace, more recent iterations seek to tackle "managing" differences in ability, national origin, and sexuality. Mainstream gay rights organizations[20] maintain a commitment to this

[20] As I indicate in the introduction, the mainstream gay rights movement refers to what has become the popular agenda for LGBT progress and the organizations that have the financial capital to center those agenda items over others. Specifically, this serves as an indict of organizations like the HRC whose campaigns often fail to

method of “inclusion,” and have become politically powerful advocates for this approach. Meanwhile, a movement that is less committed to this method and is better equipped to address inequality in the workplace – the US labor movement – continues to decline.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is the most influential player in the mainstream gay rights movement. The organization’s fight for equality has been popularly championed, evidenced through its ubiquitous logo: a blue square with two yellow bars that create an “equal” sign. The success of the HRC has led them to become a pivotal voice in working for the rights of LGBT people. However, there are consequences when a non-profit—rather than a social movement—leads a struggle for “rights.” The HRC contributes to what some scholars and activists have dubbed the “Non-Profit Industrial Complex” (NPIC) (INCITE, 2007). According to the grassroots organization Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, the State uses non-profits to:

> monitor and control social justice movements; divert public monies into private hands through foundations; allow corporations to mask their exploitative and colonial work practices through “philanthropic” work; encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than challenge them. (INCITE, 2007)

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address the unique marginality of transgender people, LGBT people of color, and poor LGBT people. I follow in the footsteps of queer scholars and activists whose academic and political work seeks to pose alternatives to the often racist, classist, “homonormative” trajectory of the HRC and other mainstream gay rights organizations.

The confluence of non-profits and corporations lead to decisions that benefit those with more wealth and power. One way this HRC demonstrates this is through its approach to diversity training, which mirrors the rhetoric espoused by corporations themselves. Because they are so similar, throughout this chapter I will be referring to "corporate diversity" interchangeably with the HRC's approach to diversity. Through this analysis I will make clear that the HRC is a clear member of the NPIC, and thus, I argue, should not be leading the way for sexual justice.

Pride at Work is also a non-profit organization, but one that offers an alternative model that works to challenge systems of power. Pride at Work is constituency group of the AFL-CIO, with a mission to "organize mutual support between the organized Labor Movement and the LGBT Community for social and economic justice" ("Pride at Work," n.d.). Although not entirely free from the problems connected to the NPIC, I argue that Pride at Work's response to diversity is more in line with progressive grassroots social movements. Specifically, I suggest that the mission of Pride at Work helps shift organized labor towards "social movement unionism," which Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss (2004) describe as building unions that act as vehicles to address multiple forms of injustice. Thus, while I agree with the critiques of the NPIC, this chapter suggests that there are examples of ways in which alternative models of non-profit organizing can exist within the system at large.

In this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the history of diversity training programs, then discuss how the HRC contributes to this corporate tactic. In contrast, I will explain the ways in which labor unions and the organization Pride at

Work have approached talking about sexual diversity in the workplace. Specifically, I will analyze the AFL-CIO's response to AIDS and the Pride at Work LGBT Union Training that I attended in April 2012 in Washington, D.C. In addition to analyzing union materials on this topic, I also incorporate my personal ethnographic experience at the training, as well as interviews I conducted with LGBT union members.

Ultimately, I argue that there are several major differences between corporate diversity training and the HRC model of LGBT-inclusion, and the approach to diversity enacted by Pride at Work and the AFL-CIO. I will focus on two major differences. First, corporations and the HRC understand diversity as important only insofar as it might generate profit for employers, whereas unions understand diversity training as a way to foster solidarity and power amongst fellow workers. Second, corporate diversity training and the HRC generally discuss diversity through a single-issue lens—that is, while a training program might include more than one form of diversity (gender, race, sexual orientation), they do not understand them as interconnected. Conversely, a significant portion of the Pride at Work materials framed sexual diversity through an *intersectional* framework. In addition to illustrating how and why intersectionality is imperative for any project that aims to positively influence the LGBT workforce, I will also highlight the few areas in which the labor movement has fallen short in making these necessary connections. Finally, this analysis will contribute to scholarship that critiques neoliberal anti-discrimination policies and the rhetoric of "equality" (Duggan, 2004; Reddy, 2011; Spade, 2012).

History of "Diversity"

In a retrospective analysis of diversity training from 1964 to the present Anand and Winters (2008) identify the thematic shifts in diversity training programs, explaining that, at their start, trainings began as a matter of compliance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. During the early 1980s, Reagan-era deregulation led to fewer diversity training programs, but those that remained focused on trying to get women and people of color to assimilate to corporate culture. The 1987 study, *Workforce 2000* (Johnson & Parker, 1987) projected that the demographic makeup of the "net additions" into the workforce in 2000 would be comprised of more women and minorities. This study is "credited with putting the term 'workforce diversity' into the business lexicon and creating an important rationale for the diversity industry" (Anand & Winters, 2008, p. 358). From the late 1980s to the late 1990s, diversity training grew, now with a focus on "fostering sensitivity" and improving interpersonal relationships between coworkers. None of these methods proved as effective in intervening in the interpersonal realm at work as employers had hoped, and the most recent trend in business's approach to diversity "are fueled by the desire to achieve business success, profitability, and growth" (Anand & Winters, 2008, p. 362). With this shift, recent diversity training materials focus on "inclusion," stress the importance of cross-cultural competence, and view these skills as an ongoing process rather than something that can be accomplished via a one-time program or workshop (Anand & Winters, 2008).

The boom in diversity training corresponded with a shift in popular discourse about "diversity," "tolerance," and "individual rights." Chandan Reddy (2011)

attributes this shift to the rise of the neoliberal state. Since Ronald Reagan's presidency, Reddy (2011) argues that regarding race specifically,

> the state has relied heavily on the judiciary as the branch most representative of the ideal of the neutral state. In the case of racial disparity, this has meant that the state addresses racism through the affirmation and protection of individual rights, while using a juridical rights-bearing subject as a means of silencing all alternative discourses and systemic accounts of antiracism by project them as racist. (p. 145)

Diversity training illustrates Reddy's observations about difference under global capitalism more generally. The contemporary corporate approach to diversity training is designed to address individual, interpersonal discrimination, rather than providing education about structures such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism.

Similarly, in her critique of contemporary gay rights organizations, Lisa Duggan (2004) describes "gay equality" as a "branch of multi-issue neoliberalism" (p. 47) that is also focused on individual rights rather than structural changes. For Duggan (2004), neoliberalism confines political culture to the right, resulting in LGBT rights organizations' increased dependency on fundraising for survival. She notes, these organizations "have nearly all moved away from constituency mobilization and community-based consultations…[and instead] have adopted neoliberal rhetoric and corporate decision-making models" (p. 45). This shift, Duggan argues, is closely tied to the ways in which neoliberalism has influenced organizations to co-opt identity politics to espouse a form of "multicultural diversity." Upholding "equality" and "diversity" as the necessary tenants for an advocacy group

enables what would once be considered a "progressive" cause to actually promote capitalist, conservative, neoliberal values.

The HRC is a perfect example of an organization that deploys the kind of neoliberal tactics critiqued by Reddy (2011) and Duggan (2004). Below, I will discuss how the HRC's approach to LGBT workplace issues promotes key tenants of neoliberalism, through their commitment to profit, privatization, and individualist understandings of inequality.

Corporate Equality

Representing over one million members and supporters, the HRC is the largest and most well-funded gay advocacy group in the US. Its mission states that it "envision[s] an America where LGBT people are ensured of their basic equal rights, and can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community" (HRC, 2012). To the detriment of members of the LGBT community that are poor and/or people of color, the HRC maintains a credibility with a vast majority of the progressive public that allows them to set the mainstream gay rights agenda. As Dean Spade (2006) notes,

> The most well-publicized and well-funded LGB organizations [like the HRC] have notoriously marginalized low-income people and people of color, and framed political agendas that have reflected concern for economic opportunity and family recognition for well-resourced and disproportionately white LGB populations. Feminist, anticapitalist, and antiracist analysis has been notably absent from mainstream discourses about LGBT rights, and low-income

> people, people of color, and gender-transgressive people have been notoriously underrepresented from leadership and decision-making power in these movements. (p. 5)

In February of 2012, the HRC named Goldman Sach's CEO Lloyd Blankfein as its national corporate spokesman for same-sex marriage, illustrating a blatant alliance with the "the 1%." With this relationship intact, the HRC secured a source of stable funding, which influences their approach to LGBT work issues.

Although much of the HRC's energy is spent on efforts to pass a federal law allowing gay marriage, a variety of additional issues are included on its website, including: Aging, Coming Out, Hate Crimes, Health, Military, Parenting, and Workplace. The "Workplace" link leads to a page that states, "Non-discrimination policies, benefits and other practices that include LGBT workers are essential for U.S. businesses as they compete for talent and customers" (HRC, 2012). Immediately following, it provides links for three comprehensive reports: the Corporate Equality Index (an in-depth analysis of over 500 U.S. employers and their policies and practices relating to LGBT employees), Buying for Workplace Equality (a consumer guide to employers' products and brands), and Degrees of Equality (a national study examining workplace climate for LGBT employees). In addition to the reports, they provide a variety of "Workplace Resources," some of which appear to be targeted at LGBT workers, but most of which are directed towards private-sector, corporate employers.

For example, the website offers research for employers on "important benefits to include, in addition to health insurance coverage for partners," "best practices for

counting a workforce's gender identity and sexual orientation for recruitment, retention and productivity purposes, while maximizing employee privacy," and "how to handle same- vs. different-sex unmarried partners, marriage for same-sex couples, and concerns about fraud through enrollment requirements (e.g. affidavits)" (HRC, 2012). One of the only sections relegated for LGBT employees is titled "Advocating for Change with your Employer," which, at the time of writing, lists mostly dead links; the only functional links lead to corporate businesses that support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). Directing this information towards employers rather than employees illustrates that the HRC is committed to "helping" LGBT workers by empowering their bosses to make decisions about benefits that may produce fair results for employees, but that are ultimately designed to protect the company more than the worker. Not surprisingly, the HRC website doesn't make any mention of labor unions.

A significant portion of the "Recruitment and Retention" page discusses the importance of diversity programs, training, and management. The website explains, "by ensuring a safe and productive internal climate, businesses will be more prepared to engage the broader LGBT community" (HRC, 2012), as both employees and consumers. With few exceptions, most of the HRC resources discuss LGBT employees in terms of their monetary value to corporations. Certainly the HRC is more likely to make a convincing case to large employers if its focus is on LGBT employees as valuable, profit-producing assets. However, by taking this approach to workplace issues, the HRC treats workers as mere inputs in the production process.

That is to say, it takes on the viewpoint of the capitalist employer, treating the worker as an object, rather than a subject in the workplace.

Both “equality” and “diversity” are salient in HRC messaging and seem to be the two most important elements it emphasizes when discussing rights for LGBT individuals in the workplace. The “Diversity Training” page of the HRC site states:

> With the an increasingly diverse workforce and consumer market, and the rise of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender workforce over the last decade, many employers struggle to help their established workforce adapt, and furthermore to bring new staff into the organization's culture. (HRC, 2012)

The site goes on to explain that 52% of Fortune 500 companies provide diversity training about sexual orientation and 42% provide diversity training regarding gender identity. No other data is provided about businesses outside of the Fortune 500 list. The absences here speak volumes. The HRC’s language targets a clear demographic: the owners and managers of large corporations. Neglected from this are the large majority of people who do not run or own Fortune 500 companies: the working-class. The goal of the HRC seems to be to help the employers more than the workers.

To help the company succeed, the website recommends implementing a training program that is done proactively and suggests that employers may want to do more in-depth sessions with managers. For employees, HRC suggests going over “basic information” such as explaining “the business rationale.” For example, “we want all employees to feel safe and comfortable so they can be productive” (HRC, 2012). Similarly, in her book about transgender employment experiences, Kyla Bender-Baird (2011) writes, “providing policy protections and diversity trainings are

just good business practices that enhance productivity and create a harmonious environment" (p. 141). Although there is nothing inherently bad about implementing training programs, the focus on employer-led training over worker-led organizing allows employers to propose false interpersonal "solutions" to workplace issues that are actually about *power*. Therefore, the logic of this model of diversity training fits comfortably with that of the "union free" workplace. Both eschew the collective action of workers in favor of management-driven and individualistic solutions to problems. Thus, this chapter is not arguing that all diversity and sensitivity trainings should be done away with, but rather that they are not enough to actually protect workers from unjust treatment.

In my interview with Karen Wood at the Pride at Work training, she provided evidence that diversity-training programs are often more beneficial to the employer than the worker. Wood is a Black lesbian, former employee of Delta, and is currently employed at ExpressJet, where she represents International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) Local 223C. Wood was 45 before she came out at work at Delta. At first, she remembers, "my closetedness [sic] was to protect my children and myself because I needed employment." But when she heard her co-workers making jokes about gay people, she decided she needed to speak up. "They didn't believe it," Wood says, "*'But you have kids!' 'That picture on your desk is of your sister!'*" they responded. "Yes I do have kids, and no, that picture on my desk is my partner."

When management announced that they were going to start a diversity-training program, Wood was skeptical and thought it was just put in place to protect

Delta's interests. Indeed, she says it did not create a major shift in the climate of her workplace. Rather, "people started to walk on eggshells" around her. "It was like I was good enough to work with them, but not to be who I was," Wood told me. It took time and a shift in the culture for things to change. Wood noted that "each year became easier," and pointed out that Delta eventually became a major sponsor of Atlanta Pride and the HRC. Still, Wood ultimately left the notoriously anti-union Delta to work at ExpressJet where she plays an active role in her union, which she says makes her feel better in her workplace than the diversity trainings ever did.

Wood points to the failure of a diversity training program that centers employers over workers, but appealing to the sensibilities of the market is a strategy that is also utilized by union contract negotiators in an attempt to persuade bosses to adopt more inclusive policies. However, the impetus of union organizations and those of the HRC and other corporate diversity measures could not be more different. While the former sees educational opportunities as a way to highlight a common place of oppression, the latter views them as ways to enhance profit. In the section that follows I will interrogate the ways in which union-led inclusive training programs challenge this increasingly common neoliberal approach to diversity.

Organizing Particularity: AIDS in the workplace and Pride at Work's LGBT Union Training

In contrast to the rhetoric of diversity espoused by corporations, SEIU, UNITE HERE, and the AFL-CIO's Pride at Work have approached sexual diversity in the workplace through a commitment to solidarity. I will illustrate examples of this

through an analysis of the AFL-CIO's response to AIDS and contrast that to the way that the HRC talks about AIDS-related workplace problems. I will conclude with an overview of my experience with Pride at Work's LGBT Union Training, a 3-day program that I attended in Washington, DC in April 2012.

Union Response to AIDS in the Workplace

One of the most prominent reasons that labor unions confronted the reality of gay and lesbian workers was due to the AIDS crises during the 1990s. Labor's response to AIDS has taken many forms, including efforts by labor unions to implement standard programs to serve HIV/AIDS impacted members and creating AIDS-related educational materials ("Business responds to AIDS," n.d.). I will focus on "AIDS in the Workplace: A Steward's Manual" (2006), a document the AFL-CIO published to encourage local unions to remain engaged in the fight against AIDS. This document is particularly significant as it was published on behalf of the entire AFL-CIO, which indicates that the leadership at the top was supportive of this progressive stance on AIDS, sex, and sexuality.

The introduction reminds stewards that "[t]he labor movement has long been on the forefront of the historic struggles to eliminate bigotry and discrimination from the workplace, to establish safe and healthy working conditions, and to provide basic health care and social insurance for every American" (AFL-CIO, 2006, p.1). It goes on to state that the AIDS crisis has caused discrimination and threatened the health and safety of workers, in addition to the health care and benefits for workers. All of these things are workplace issues and "the struggle to protect members' rights when

they are ill is no different from any other union struggle" (p. 1). This language implies a commitment to the health and well-being of workers that is contingent upon a foundation of economic justice. To frame these issues as interrelated shows the vast differences between the corporate verses union approach to fighting for the health and rights of workers.

The bulk of the manual is an overview of what AIDS is—including how it spreads and how to prevent it (including a passage about safe sex). In addition, it explains of how AIDS impacts workers. Because this is written for a shop steward[21], the manual discusses how a steward can help a worker who reveals that they have AIDS. First, it recommends educating co-workers, and how to handle prejudices against homosexuality that may arise when AIDS is mentioned. "Such prejudice and discrimination must be fought head-on," the pamphlet continues

> Prejudice leads to discrimination not only in the workplace, but also in society in general. It is contrary to everything the labor movement stands for. As union members facing AIDS, we must directly confront any racism, sexism, or fear of gay people, just as we would confront such prejudice in any other situation. (206, p. 6)

Importantly, the pamphlet acknowledges that stewards themselves may have to deal with some of their own prejudices about people with HIV infection or AIDS—"their challenge will be difficult; preventing their feelings and prejudices from getting in the way of protecting the rights of members with HIV infection or AIDS" (p.6). The pamphlet then suggests that stewards who are experiencing feelings of prejudice seek

[21] A shop steward is the union representative from a workplace.

help dealing with personal issues from both AIDS organizations and their international union.

This is a noteworthy addition to the pamphlet for a number of reasons. First, the commitment to confronting “racism, sexism, or fear of gay people” alludes to the labor movement’s own history of enacting racist, sexist, and heterosexist practices. This pamphlet reminds us that the labor movement has made progress since the days of segregated unions and anti-immigrant positions. Secondly, this paragraph illustrates labor’s recognition that discrimination is interconnected and intersectional. By listing AIDS-based discrimination alongside race, gender, and sexual discrimination, the AFL-CIO acknowledges not only that all oppressed peoples share commonalities in the struggle, but that labor is a vehicle from which to fight against shared abuses.

After discussing the importance of educating co-workers, the manual gives a brief overview of ways in which HIV and AIDS infected persons are victims of discrimination on the job. To ameliorate this, the pamphlet recommends negotiating for protection against discrimination in the contract, building community support for a worker with HIV/AIDS, and becoming familiar with national laws that prohibit discrimination against HIV/AIDS infected people. Importantly, the use of the law as protection is mentioned as only one of many strategies. The “justice system” is decidedly not just (Mogul, et al., 2012; Spade, 2011; Reddy, 2011). Dean Spade (2011) describes focusing on the law to create change as “[attending to] the fiction that if we change what the law says about a vulnerable population, we will necessarily change the key conditions of vulnerability” (p. 7). The union pamphlet

acknowledges this by insisting on using multiple tactics to challenge injustice, including collective struggle.

The pamphlet also spends a significant amount of time discussing benefits, specifically how unions "needs to help members with HIV infection or AIDS use and retain the benefits to which they are entitled" (p. 7). A thorough overview of possible benefits is provided, including home health care, hospice care, extended care facilities, insurance coverage for prescription and disability leaves. It also offers ways to structure a "catastrophic illness policy," to ensure that HIV and AIDS infected workers are treated with respect and are never at risk for losing or not getting a job because of their disease.

Remaining sections cover more specific discussion of transmission and prevention for hospital workers, an overview of testing, a more detailed guide for education members about AIDS through workshops and committees, a glossary of terms, and a resource list for AIDS centers and information hotlines across the country.

There are several important ideas that emerge from this pamphlet. The first is the candid approach to discussions of sex. Speaking openly about sexual behavior—particularly sexual behavior of workers that may not be heterosexual—points to the significant progress being made by organized labor. For example, activist Amber Hollibaugh (1999) recalls an experience in the early 1990s working with SEIU Local 1199, the healthcare workers union in New York City, to address to the issue of AIDS. She explains that, at the time, the focus was all about safety measures:

protecting hospital workers from HIV and AIDS-infected patients, and not the possibility that workers themselves may be positive. She writes:

> They thought their members should be trained about safety measures, but—as in most unions at the time—there was deafening silence about the fact that union members were dealing with HIV in their own personal lives. HIV only made it more obvious that people had to choose between their private lives and the way they saw themselves as workers. It was profoundly isolating. (p. 74)

Fortunately, things have changed. This pamphlet, published seven years later, provides information for shop stewards to support not only patients with HIV and AIDS, but also fellow union members.

The AIDS steward manual also points to evidence of the US labor movement's shift toward social movement unionism. The AIDS manual makes salient that very goal, particularly when suggesting, (as noted above), that, "Prejudice leads to discrimination not only in the workplace, but also in society in general. It is contrary to everything the labor movement stands for" (p. 6). This affirmation reflects a commitment to fighting social injustice in and through the workplace, but also outside of it. The pamphlet demonstrates that the AFL-CIO believes that all injustice is connected and that AIDS is indeed a "workplace issue," but at the same time, they make clear that they are committed to resisting those injustices beyond the confines of the workplace.

HRC Responds to AIDS in the Workplace

The HRC's website also addresses AIDS in the workplace, stating on their website

> Americans living with HIV or AIDS may face discrimination based on their health status in many areas of life—including employment. *Fortunately, federal and state laws protect against discrimination.* (HRC, 2012; emphasis mine)

The page goes on to describe the details of how persons living with HIV/AIDS are covered under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). It concludes that if someone still, in spite of the law, feels they are a victim of discrimination that they should file a complaint with the nearest Equal Employment Opportunity Commission office, noting that the employee may be provided a "'right to sue' letter, which allows the victim to sue the employer directly in federal court for violations of the ADA" (HRC; 2012).

Here, the HRC illustrates its commitment to neoliberal anti-discrimination laws at the expense of a critique of the system that enables discrimination in the first place. Dean Spade (2011) describes how relying on this kind of logic creates a "perpetrator/victim dyad" and suggests that the problem at hand is a discriminating employer who "irrationally hates people on the basis of their race [or gender identity, sexuality] and fires or denies service to…the victim based on that hatred" (p. 84). This focus on individual intention distracts from all the other forms of abuse that continually oppress marginalized populations. Spade (2011) notes,

> All the daily disparities in life chances that shape our world along lines of race, class, indigeneity, disability, national origin, sex, and gender remain untouchable and affirmed as non-discriminatory or even as fair. (p. 85)

Furthermore, this tactic assumes that the court system itself will be a neutral zone, in which discrimination "victims" will be provided a fair trial. It also presumes that employees will have access to resources that enable them to take an employer to trial, and ignores the unique challenges that may face HIV/AIDS-infected transgender individuals and people of color. Most problematically, promoting the judicial system as a solution to classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism wrongly assumes that the legal system is fair.

Spade's (2011) critique reminds us of the importance of working against injustice through methods that go beyond litigation. Spade (2011) proposes reviving more social movement, grassroots organizing to better the lives of oppressed peoples, but neglects to suggest the union itself as a central point for organizing. Spade (2011) and queer scholar/activists like him are quick to point out the ways in which neoliberalism weakens unions, but few turn to the union to see the work that is currently being done within the movement to resist these neoliberal trends, particularly when it comes to sexuality. Thus, while I echo Spade (2011) in pointing out the limits of the law, I seek to expand on his assessment by offering the labor movement as an ideal site for struggle beyond policy and the courtroom.

Although Pride at Work and the majority of the US labor movement are also publically supportive of anti-discrimination policies such as ENDA, that is not their sole strategy for combating employment abuse. In fact, Pride at Work talks less about

discrimination and more about protecting workers' rights to organize, a strategy that is actually premised on the notion of combating unequal distributions of power.

Pride at Work's LGBT Union Training

To better understand the differences between HRC and the corporate diversity approach versus organized labor's approach, I attended Pride at Work's three-day LGBT Union Training in April 2012. The training was designed for LGBT and allied union members, as well as non-union allies in the fight for worker and LGBT rights. The three days cover a variety of LGBT and labor-related issues, but was primarily designed to provide tools and resources for workers to make their unions more inclusive of LGBT issues, particularly through contract negotiation. In addition, the training also addressed how to start Pride at Work chapters, went over basic LGBT and labor language, and discussed the reality of economic inequality on LGBT populations. The training featured a variety of notable guest speakers, including Cleve Jones, Liz Shuler, and Whit Kathner.[22] Pride at Work Executive Director, Peggy Shorey (an out, white bisexual), Associate Director Darren Phelps (an out same-gender-loving black male), and Co-President Donna Cartwright (an out, white transgender female) facilitated the training.

[22] Cleve Jones is a well known AIDS, LGBT, and labor activist, most known for being the founder of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. Jones is also the founder of UNITE HERE's Sleep With the Right People (SWtRP), the organization for the allied LGBT-labor community. He currently works for UNITE HERE, and remains instrumental in SWtRP's work. Liz Shuler is the first woman and youngest person to hold the position of Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO. Whit Kathner is a staff member for SEIU and was a driving force behind getting transgender health benefits covered in SEIU's International employee contract.

For the most part, the discussions and workshops were remarkably intersectional in their approach to LGBT union issues. That is, rather than addressing "LGBT" as a single-issue identity politic, the training highlighted the ways in which race, immigration status, and class impacted queer workers in unique ways. The term "intersectionality" is most often contributed to legal theorist, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995), who called attention to "law's inability to make visible black women's experience of discrimination, which was intersectional" (Berger&Guidroz, 2009, p. 4). The concept has been taken up and expanded upon heavily in feminist academic circles, but has also extended into social and political realms; for example, in 2002, the United Nations declared "the importance of examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination" (cited in Yuval-Davis, 2009, 45).

Although many scholars have critiqued the theory of intersectionality for its various shortcomings, I find the term is still an important one to keep in the lexicon of feminist, queer, and social justice-oriented scholars and activists. I use the term with the weight of the work by scholars like Jaspir Puar (2005) and Tavia Nyong'o (2005) that have complicated and pushed its boundaries. For my purposes, I find the term does not foreclose encompassing Puar's (2005) call to destablize the identities on the intersections, nor does the term inherently exclude Nyong'o's (2005) insistence that we nurture these identities "all at once." In fact, I believe that Pride at Work's intersectional approach actually illustrates how these critiques can be reconciled within an intersectional analysis. In addition, Pride at Work speaks to Roderick Ferguson's desire to contextualize intersectionality within and through the political economy of the contemporary neoliberal state.

Approaching labor work with this kind of intersectionally in mind is vital for a movement that is dedicated to organizing an increasingly heterogeneous workforce. Robin DG Kelley (1997) challenges those on the Left who argue that paying attention to difference will lead to division. Kelley (1997) says that those who adhere to a class-reductionist understanding of the movement "either do not understand or refuse to acknowledge that class is lived through race and gender" (p. 109). Ignoring the unique ways that people are oppressed is not only a form of exclusionary racism, but is also pragmatically inefficient: less than half the working class labor force, about 46 percent, is white men (Zweig, 2000, p. 31). Because of this, it's important that the labor movement adapts. As I discuss in the introduction of this dissertation, one part of adapting requires organizing beyond formal unions through worker centers that are able to target the poor who work in sectors that are impossible to unionize. The focus of this chapter, however, demonstrates that the union movement must also adapt by honoring and acknowledging multiple identities through their organizing strategies.

Pride at Work is one exemplar of labor's attempt to make changes that suit the current work force. Pride at Work began as a way to highlight the explicit intersectional components of working-class life and this message was salient through the LGBT-Labor Training. The most obvious example of Pride at Work's commitment to intersectional analysis is that it addresses sexuality *through* class. Instead of focusing on the conditions of sexuality as an isolated variable, Pride at Work speaks to those members of the LGBT community that are oppressed simultaneously through their status as workers. This contrasts with the mainstream gay rights movement, which, as discussed in the introduction, produces discourse

about “gay rights” (particularly through marriage, ENDA, and the military) that removes sexuality from discussions of class.

The Pride at Work trainers also spoke to other forms of intersecting oppressions, including race, immigration status, and gender identity. On the first day of the training, Shorey and Phelps provided an overview of LGBT language, explicating the nuances between the “LGBT” acronym, the use of the term “queer,” and the differences between “Gender non-conforming,” “Transexual,” “Intersex,” and “Transgender.” Each attendee was provided with a binder that included several pages of definitions and clarifications about terminology. The section of the binder titled “What is Gender?” explains the difference between sex and gender, then notes,

> Age, race and class are major factors that determine our gender roles, which can be fluid. Gender awareness embodies an understanding of the negative impacts of gender issues and the need to address the inequalities that arise from them. (Pride at Work, 2012).

This short sentence suggests that the leaders of Pride at Work understand the importance of reading sexuality as interconnected to issues of age, race, and class.

Another example of Pride at Work’s commitment to intersectionality is exemplified in a presentation featured in the training, “Violence, Poverty & the Struggle for Economic Justice,” that focuses specifically on transgender violence. Shorey, who led the presentation, made sure to point out the fact that it was not a coincidence that most of the images of transgender victims of violence that we saw were transwomen of color. Shorey used statistics from The National Transgender Discrimination Survey (Grant, et al., 2011) stating that transgender and gender non-

conforming people are four times more likely to live in poverty, that they have double the rate of unemployment, and that Black transgender people have four times the rate of unemployment, compared to the general population (2008, p. 2). Drawing attention to the explicit connection between violence, poverty, race, and gender identity is something that is usually missing from the gay mainstream's articulation of LGBT oppression, and is an omission that enables the continuation of the aforementioned violence.

During the presentation, Helen Gonzales of the AFL-CIO also added to the discussion on transgender violence by highlighting the insidiousness of the Voter ID Act on both transgender and immigrant populations. There are currently 31 states that are pushing bills that would make it mandatory to show a form of identification before voting at the polls. Of the fifteen states that require photo identification, only seven will allow the voter to prove their identity through another list of criteria. That means that in Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin, you are unable to vote without a photo ID, and Republicans worked tirelessly to get similar legislation passed before the 2012 presidential election. Proponents for strict voter ID laws argue that this rule will prevent "election fraud," an ominous-sounding phenomenon that has little to no evidence of actually being a problem (Drum, 2012). Because most advocates for voter ID are those in conservatives in positions of privilege, it is more likely that this is an attempt to withhold power by denying citizenship to marginalized members of society who tend to vote for more liberal candidates.

Gonzalez explained that those marginalized members of society most impacted by voter ID bills include both transgender people and immigrants. Undocumented people living in the US are disenfranchised from necessary public services such as health care, education, access to driver's licenses, and a variety of other important social services. Often times, transgender and gender non-conforming persons will not have ID that matches their gender presentation. Because acquiring valid identification with a sex that matches one's gender performance is often contingent on whether or not the person has undergone surgery, this type of identification is often only to those trans and gender non-conforming (GNC) persons who can afford the tremendous costs of a gender reassignment procedure (Spade, 2011). Furthermore, as I note in Chapter 2, not all transgender and GNC persons *want* to undergo surgery. Therefore, this legislation withholds citizenship to not only poor transgender people, but also to transgender and GNC people that have an alternative approach to gender performance. Both of these exclusions structurally reinforce the maintenance of a political system that upholds economic inequality and white supremacy by disenfranchising particular segments of the population that would likely vote against more conservative legislation.

When Pride at Work makes explicit these important connections, the organization is saying it understands that oppression, injustice, and discrimination cannot be understood through a single-issue lens. This is vastly different from the style of "diversity training" taken up by corporations and also diverges from the HRC's approach to "dealing with" discrimination. Most significantly, the LGBT union training supplied by Pride at Work pointed out the ways in which workers—

gay or straight, white or of color—can build solidarity with one another. This is a significant contrast to selling "diversity training" to management as something that will increase productivity, and also potentially thwart organizing efforts.

The Pride at Work training also included a workshop that focused on "one-on-one" organizing tactics for union members to use on fellow union members, and potential allies. A one-on-one simply refers to a conversation that takes place between an organizer and a person the organizer is attempting to persuade. The purpose of this particular part of the training was to find ways to convince either a straight worker to support an LGBT-related contract initiative or to persuade an LGBT person to support a worker-related policy. Phelps warned, "Don't assume that all gay people are progressive, and don't assume that everyone who is anti-union is anti-gay." His comment points to the complexity of subjectivity and the ways in which capitalism enables divisions that weaken the possibilities for collective action. That is, although both workers and LGBT people experience discrimination and injustice, alliance is not necessarily a given. Pride at Work does not articulate this kind of explicit critique of capitalism. However, the work they do still aims to speak to this disjuncture by encouraging oppressed workers to identify with oppressed members of the LGBT community and vice versa.

During the organizing exercises, those of us involved with the training were broken up into small groups and given hypothetical scenarios to practice the tips provided for a successful 1:1 conversation. For example, one scenario involved a straight organizer talking to a lesbian worker about joining the union. Our training manual suggested we enact the following steps: Engage the person in

conversation/Dialogue; Get their story/Listen; Educate on Vision; Questions/Reservations/Objections; Find common ground/Get a Commitment. The final step—“find common ground”—allows organizers to emphasize that, as the old union saying goes, “an injury to one is an injury to all.” This too shows that the labor movement is emphasizing a method of collective resistance that seeks to challenge rather than affirm systems of power. This is drastically different from the interpersonal method suggested by corporations and the HRC.

During our workshop, we discussed many challenges that might arise during these dialogues and also strategies to address them. In addition to noting that workers and/or union staff may have personal prejudices against LGBT people, Pride at Work members again mentioned the importance of checking our own assumptions about what “kinds of people” will be hostile to LGBT issues. One member specifically addressed the way the media framed the passing of Proposition 8 in California in 2008. News reports about the passing of the legislation often suggested that Black voters’ homophobia contributed to the win. But, as this member pointed out, that’s an inaccurate and unfair assumption, particularly since it erases the existence of queer people of color. “Instead of assuming all black people are homophobic, we need to start talking about how the gay community can be very racist,” he said bluntly.

The explicit conversation about not just race, but also *racism* sets Pride at Work apart from the curriculum of most diversity trainings. Although on the surface this discussion may seem to approach race in a similar way to the individualistic analysis that undergirds the HRC’s model of diversity training, Pride at Work challenges that by connecting the interpersonal to the structural. While the one-on-

one trainings focused on individuals' feelings and behaviors, we discussed as a group how these prejudices are part of a larger system of structural racism and heterosexism. Also noteworthy is that our discussion about sexuality included a conversation about race. Rather than viewing race and sexuality as separate, the leaders and participants of the training made sure to explicitly connect the two.

Significantly, discussions of race were not relegated to our discussion about Black and Brown people. Members also discussed the ways in which whiteness operates in our society and within the labor movement. In addition to having discussions about white privilege, we also discussed how class influences white identity. For example, Prairie W., an organizer from the Bricklayers Union, discussed how she made unfair assumptions about the blue-collar white workers she organizes. Prairie recalled how she worked really hard to get her members to support a domestic partner benefit but did not even try to talk about transgender health benefits with them, assuming that would be too much for them to handle. To her surprise, during a convention where members voted on contract rights, she was shocked to see all of the bricklayers from her local support the transgender benefits. Wells explained, "I think once they saw how gay issues weren't a big deal, because it was really about someone doing the same job as them and having the same rights, they were like 'Well, we might as well go all out and support the trans stuff too'!"

The Pride at Work training interrogates rather than entrenches categories of difference in a way that allows diversity to emerge as a bi-product of intersecting modalities. This challenges the neoliberal approach to diversity management that seeks to separate difference in an effort to better contain resistance. The examples

described above confirm that coalitions with organized labor may help lead to a social movement rooted in issues that, like sexuality, are not exclusively related to work, but that are ultimately connected to economic justice. The struggle for LGBT justice must be led by those who understand this connection and not by organizations that favor corporate equality over justice.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that the approach to LGBT workers shared by corporations and the HRC are entrenched in the same neoliberal framework. The current state of "diversity training," relies on articulating discrimination as a problem that should be solved between individuals, rather than addressing the structures that perpetuate power imbalances that fall on the side of the wealthiest and whitest. Because our neoliberal climate enables NPIC-entwined organizations like the HRC to flourish most, the HRC remains a key player in shaping how LGBT communities and allies respond to employment problems faced by LGBT workers. Thus, as the above analysis indicates, the majority of LGBT workplace issue "organizing" continues to help only the most privileged LGBT workers and ignores the most marginalized.

Since the AIDS crisis in the 1990s, the US labor movement has been actively involved in their own style of LGBT-focused "diversity training." However, the methods enacted by labor unions and Pride at Work rise above the "perpetrator/victim" model and instead work to provide an intersectional understanding of oppression. Through an analysis of the AFL-CIO's published manual on AIDS, and my experience at the Pride at Work training, I have illustrated

how the labor movement demonstrated a response to sexual difference through class, and have provided numerous examples of how race and immigrant-status were discussed by labor leaders as interconnected to "LGBT issues."

Pride at Work's approach to organizing—and more specifically, organizing difference—demonstrates that there are avenues for change that can be paved even within the confines of the NPIC. The relationship between Pride at Work and organized members of the working-class creates an immensely powerful coalition and produces a foundation for social movement unionism. The potential of this kind of social justice organizing will not only positively influence the rhetoric of diversity but also the material lives of those whose diversity is being 'managed.'

Chapter Four

Queering the Strike: Asserting Economic Labor Power through LGBT Militant Protest

Introduction

In May of 2010, the Westin St. Francis Hotel was occupied by trombones, queers, and fierce dance moves. The occupation—or, more appropriately, the "flash mob"[23]—was organized by gay-labor coalitions in correspondence with the boycott of the hotel, which was declared by UNITE HERE Local 2 in 2009. The union members made the hard decision to call for a boycott of their own workplace when management failed to provide a fair contract during negotiations. UNITE HERE's LGBT-Labor coalition group, Sleep with the Right People (SWtRP)[24], became a supporter of the boycott and used the flashmob as a way to draw attention to the unfair labor practices the endured by the workers.

The flash mob started with a staged hotel check-in by a lesbian couple. One of the women interrupted the receptionist to inform her partner that she just remember they shouldn't stay at the hotel, since it was under boycott by the union workers. Upon this news her partner started singing, "Oh-oh-oh-No-oh-oh! We're caught in a bad hotel" to the tune of Lady Gaga's popular song, "Bad Romance." Unassuming "patrons" from the hotel lobby and hotel café slowly started joining in the song, until an entire mob of singers, dancers, and brass instrument players participated in the

[23] A flash mob is a form of spontaneous guerilla-style protest that began to gain popularity in 2009.

[24] In addition to Sleep With the Right People, the groups One Struggle One Fight and The Brass Liberation Orchestra also took part in planning and performing the flashmob.

choreographed protest. After the dance, one of the organizers, Jane Martin, used a bullhorn to announce:

> We are here to tell people the workers have called for a boycott of this hotel. We are sending a message to the hotel corporations that the gay community is an important source of tourists' dollars and that we support the worker boycott…At the same time, we are sending the message to members of our own LGBTQ community that when you come to San Francisco in June for the Pride celebration, support the workers and honor the hotel boycott.[25]

The video of the performance went viral just days after it took place, and, at the time of writing, has nearly half a million hits on YouTube.[26]

Using this and other examples of queer labor activism, this chapter argues that the labor movement's public commitment to queer workers benefits the unions in two significant ways. First, elements of radical queer protest reflect some of the more militant actions of labor's past and may contribute to a labor climate that is capable of "reviving the strike" (Burns, 2011). Second, I suggest that labor's openness to queer culture provides particularly effective tools for labor activism. Throughout this chapter I use literature about queer activism, examples from actions organized by Pride at Work, SEIU, and UNITE HERE, as well as interviews with LGBT union members, to illustrate how queer workers and LGBT-labor coalitions have "queered" labor activism. The tactics and messaging created by these groups provide the labor movement with an image that challenges stereotypes—rather than "thugs," "good old

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[25] Information retrieved from interview with Izzy Alvaron, 2008, and multiple viewings of the video on YouTube.com.
[26] Video can be found at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-79pX1IOqPU

boys," or "lazy people,"[27] queer activism makes the union movement germane. Queer politics' influence on labor activism results in campy, sex-positive actions and rhetoric and reminds the public that labor unions are significant to a variety of people, not just white, male factory workers.

In addition, this chapter contributes to contemporary debates on public protest and messaging, specifically as it relates to the contention between queerness as a postmodern refusal of identity categories verses a long history of identity-based political organizing. Through my analysis I illustrate how the rhetoric espoused by queer-labor coalitions offers a form of public messaging that reconciles this tension through a politically strategic intersectional approach to protest. Further, I argue that the ambivalence of queer affect is politically productive for a movement that is dedicated to fighting economic justice within a system that is inherently economically unjust.

Before delving into contemporary examples of queer-labor activism, I will give a brief overview of both LGBT (and/or queer) political movements and the labor movement. I devote time to these histories to set up my argument about how the roots of each movement have characteristics of a radical politics that sought to challenge systems of power. For both movements, the move away from more radical politics and activism is, in part, a result of the effects of neoliberalism—the cooptation of "gay rights" on the one hand, and continual creation of barriers that halt effective labor organizing on the other. Any radical residual that persists in spite of these

[27] This list of stereotypes was generated by the attendees at the Pride at Work LGBT-Labor Training in Washington, D.C., April 2011.

obstacles is the ground from which to build a common movement that more effectively combats injustice.

A Brief History of Queer Politics and Activism

As with many social movements, the history of LGBT/queer politics and activism is complex. Before gayness could be identified as a political issue, it first had to be constructed as an identity. In his canonical essay "Capitalism and Gay Identity," John D'Emilio (1983) articulates the connection between modern formations of capital and the emergence of a gay subject. D'Emilio describes how capitalism broke down the structure of the self-sufficient family by offering space for men to go out and work. In creating a space outside the home for men to be/long, gay identity—(not to be confused with gay sex acts, which were absolutely present before capitalism)—became possible. World War II was another factor that enabled gay social identity. According to historian Alan Berube (2011), McCarthy-era attempts to "punish, 'manage,' or isolate gay Americans…only reinforced gay identity as an emerging minority," (p. 111). This collectivized minority status helped to create gay network and social institutions, including the Mattachine Society, formed in 1951 by Harry Hay, and the Daughters of Billitis, which began in 1956.

The 1960s ushered in a new spirit of protest across the US, and alongside protests against the war, queers began fighting back against police brutality. In 1966, a group of drag queens and gay hustlers started a riot at Gene Compton's Cafeteria, a popular queer venue that was regularly targeted by police. On a hot night in August, instead of accepting the police harassment, the queens and gay men fought back,

throwing coffee in the faces of abusive cops, breaking windows, and resisting arrest (Stryker, 2008). Similarly, in 1969, the famous Stonewall rebellion began when gays and lesbians at the Stonewall Inn, a Greenwich Village gay bar, rioted in response to the usual onslaught of police violence. Sherry Wolf (2009) notes

> While not the first incident of mass upheaval against sexual and gender norms, the Stonewall rebellion in New York City in 1969 marked a turning point for modern lesbians, gays, and bisexuals—and gave rise to the conditions for transgender people to assert their demands and launch their own organizations. (p.11)

But direct action and demands for sexual liberation became muted in the decades to follow.

During the 1970s, gay protest evolved towards a more organized and in-the-system approach to resistance. The first official Gay Pride Parade was held in San Francisco in 1973 (Wolf, 2009). One year later, Harvey Milk became the first openly gay person elected to a governmental office when he took the role of city supervisor of San Francisco. Anti-gay-violence “safe-street” patrols also formed during this decade; SMASH in New York City and the Butterfly Brigade in San Francisco. In her analysis of these groups, Christina Hanhardt (2011) points out the ways in which the groups’ methods were riddled with racism and classism—in their efforts to make the streets safer for [white] gays, they simultaneously contributed to the criminalization of youth of color.

The contrast between the more militant actions of the 1960s, and the tamer organizing of the 1970s foreshadows the split that would occur in the conception of

gay politics during the 1980s. According to Mary L. Gray (2009), one version of gay politics that emerged during this decade involved a commitment to a liberal notion of 'minority rights,' while the other "emphasized sexual difference as a point of divergence that called for a broader movement of sexual and gender liberation" (p. 215). The latter of these concepts manifest most prominently in the activism and organizing that took place in response to the AIDS crisis, with groups like ACT UP and Queer Nation leading the way. During this conjuncture, "a theory and politics of 'antiessentialist, postidentitarian, strategically fluid 'queerness' emerged" (Stryker, 2004, as cited in Gray, 2009, p. 213).

ACT UP's approach to protest was rooted in both theatrics and also militant economic tactics. In addition to staging "die-ins" to performatively draw attention to the devastating reality of AIDS, ACT UP also participated in several meaningful boycotts and attacks on anti-gay corporations. In 1988, ACT UP Atlanta organized an action that effectively shut down Circle K gas stations: activists would put 25 cents worth of gas in their car, then pay with a twenty-dollar bill. In order to get their services running again, Circle K reversed their discriminatory, anti-gay policies ("An ACT UP/Atlanta Chronology," n.d.). In 1987, ACT UP and allied AIDS activist organizations protested on Wall Street in response to Burroughs Wellcom Co.'s monopoly on AZT.[28] Five protestors, who chained themselves to the balcony of the New York Stock Exchange, were arrested. Just weeks later, the corporation dropped the price of AZT by 20 percent (Gould, 2009).

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[28] This monopoly resulted in extremely expensive, often unaffordable drugs for AIDS patients.

This split between militant tactics and assimilationist tactics still exists today in the world of LGBT/Q politics and activism. Mainstream gay rights groups continue to organize around "rights," and often rely on essentialist understandings of gender and sexuality. For example these organizations will often demand access to things like same-sex marriage and open service in the military on the grounds that gays and lesbians were "born this way."[29] In contrast, radical queer theory and politics, largely inspired by radical AIDS activism of the past, challenges the discourse and demands of "gay rights" and "equality" and instead seeks to "challenge the politics of inclusion."[30] For example, a queer collective called Against Equality[31] argues that the mainstream gay rights movement's focus on the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell "draw[s] upon the narrow and patriarchal discourse of the nation-state and the glory of war, as if these were righteous and just and pure" ("Military," 2011).

Similarly, other self-professed radical queer organizations, activists, and bodies of literature reject that marriage and the military are the most important issues for the LGBT community, and instead put forth demands for a more intersectional analysis of oppression. Rather than suggesting queers should ally with the State,

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[29] The theory that homosexuality is something one is born with is often used by advocates for gay rights in an effort to "prove" that gay identity is not a choice. This method of persuasion enables these particular advocates to appeal to a variety of oppositional camps, including those who reject homosexuality on religious grounds by suggesting that 'God made people gay.' Further, this argument allows gay rights advocates to frame homosexuals as a minority status due to genetic dispositions, and equate lesbian and gay marginality with the likes of race or gender marginality. This phrase became increasingly popular after Lady Gaga released a song of the same name in 2011. As I discuss in the chapter, this argument is problematic for a variety of reasons.

[30] Against Equality. (2012)

[31] Against Equality (againstequality.org) is "an online archive, publishing, and arts collective focused on critiquing mainstream gay and lesbian politics" (2012).

radical queer critique posits that queers should rally against the State's oppressive forces, including marriage, the military, prisons, racism, and the police. In *That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, Matilda Berstein Sycamore (2004) reiterates this:

> A gay elite has hijacked queer struggle and positioned their desires as everyone's needs—the dominant signs of straight conformity have become the ultimate measures of gay successes….If gay assimiliationists wanted real progress, they'd start by fighting for the abolition of marriage…and universal access to the services that marriage can sometimes help procure: housing, healthcare, citizenship, tax breaks, and inheritance rights. (p.3)

These radical queer critiques have manifested in a unique style of activism. Some of the activist tactics utilized by radical queer groups borrow from militant and radical activism of the past, but this movement also gave rise to some unprecedented forms of public protest. Two of the most significant queer groups that influenced the diversity of tactics brought to protest are ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), and Queer Nation (QN). Members of ACT UP, an AIDS-awareness movement that began in 1987, were "united in anger, experiencing daily grief over other members' death" (Gray, p. 218), and used direct action tactics and safe-sex education to respond to the crisis the government was ignoring. Queer Nation was more invested in "playful takeover" (Gray, p. 218), and implemented a combination of pastiche, camp, and sex-positivity to communicate their resistance. Both of these organizations set a precedent for progressive and radical queer protest and activism

that would follow and, as I illustrate in this chapter, has also come to influence the shape of some pockets of labor activism.

A Brief History of the Labor Movement in the United States

There is also a rich history of labor union politics and activism. The early labor movement of the late 1800's was comprised mostly of skilled-workers that created craft unions. Although these workers had a lot of power due to their skill level, this style of unionism was not sustainable. Industrialization led to a vast increase in unskilled jobs, and trade schools were established as a way to make skilled laborers more plentiful. In addition, early craft unionism was inherently exclusionary—requiring that only certain types of skilled workers be included, meant "craft unionism…represented the solidarity of *white* labor" (Burns, p. 15, 2011; emphasis mine).

Starting in the 1930s, unions enjoyed success through industrial unionism. This style of unionism worked to unite all workers, and regularly exercised the strike. Joe Burns (2011) argues that the main reason for the strength of the labor movement during this time was the fact that strikes were legitimately powerful. In contrast,

> …today's strike has lost two of the key components that defined the powerful strike upon which the modern labor movement was built: the halting of productions, and an industry-wide approach to standardizing wages; i.e. worker solidarity. (p. 20)

This period of labor history lasted for over a decade, leaving the union movement strong enough to threaten those in power who were invested in the security of the free market economy.

The first significant shift in labor's power occurred when the Taft-Hartley Act was implemented in 1947 (Cloud, 2011). This post-WWII, post-New Deal legislation was created as a way to "revise the gains of the labor movement" made during the 1930s (Burns, p. 50). As a result, the bill made illegal solidarity strikes and boycotts, and closed shops. Burns notes,

> Thus, Taft-Hartley legally prevented workers from banding together and supporting each other's picket lines in a meaningful way, in the process outlawing citywide shutdowns and the use of solidarity strikes and boycotts. In one fell swoop, Taft-Hartley made illegal the very tactics most responsible for labor's successes in the 1930s. (p. 51)

In addition, similar anti-union legislation led to a decline in picket-line militancy, which led to a decrease in sit-down strikes, and made it permissible for employers to hire scabs to take over strikers' jobs.

With these structural obstacles in place, it is not surprising that today's labor movement is as weak as it is. It's also understandable that the amount of public labor actions—protests, strikes, occupations—have, with few exceptions, been almost non-existent. When public actions do take place, they are certainly important and meaningful, but rarely *powerful*. I use the term 'power' to denote actions that result in significant gains and achieve the workers' desired goal. Although there are numerous examples of picket lines that take place in the US, they are rarely effective since it is

so easy for companies to hire non-union workers. In addition, contemporary labor unions avoid militant scab-deterring tactics such as blocking streets, and working to rally the public to discourage scab work.

In the past five years, there have been a very small number of cases in which union workers did engage in a meaningful strike. In December of 2009, workers at the Republic Windows and Doors Factory in Chicago occupied their factory after management told them they were going to be laid off. The workers said they were owed vacation and severance pay and were not given the 60 days notice usually required by federal law when companies make layoffs. After a peaceful six-day occupation the workers were given their benefits. Also in Chicago, in 2012, the Chicago Teachers Union went on a week and a half long strike, and didn't settle their contract until they gained some of their demands, including increased pay and a commitment that requires employers to place laid-off teachers at different schools (Davey, 2012). Another example of the effectiveness of the strike can be seen through the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)'s *threat* to strike in December 2012. Even just the idea that 14 major US ports would shut down resulted in fast negotiations by the employer, and left the union members satisfied with their contract (Jonsson, 2012).

Despite these glimmers of promise, the labor movement is still in a state of decline. In addition to being banned from the most effective methods of striking, US workers are also experiencing the effects of globalization, which has led to a massive influx of companies shipping jobs overseas. Responding to this reality requires that labor unions attempt to gain a foothold in industries which cannot be moved overseas,

an effort in which both SEIU and UNITE HERE have engaged.[32] That labor is facing challenges on multiple fronts requires multiple methods of resistance. Although "reviving the strike" is pivotal, the labor movement must also respond to a variety of other factors that contribute to its dismal state, including combating stereotypes about who and what the labor movement stands for. My argument in this chapter suggests that queer interventions in labor not only positively influence the ability to wage effective strikes, but also create an important shift in public discourse.

Finding Our Roots and Shifting the Discourse

The coalition of queer and labor movements reveals a promising potential to combat obstacles that have burdened both movements. Both have roots that have been lost for the better: the racism and xenophobia of the labor movement and the lack of organization of the early queer rebellions. And both have roots that have been lost for the worse: the militancy of the strike and the militant intersectional approach to queer resistance.

In addition, the public perception of both of these movements has changed dramatically over time. The current face of gay politics exists in mainstream discourse almost exclusively around the issue of same-sex marriage. A 2012 poll

[32] Both of these international unions have run campaigns to strengthen their ability to challenge the power of global corporations. For example, UNITE HERE began its "Hotel Workers Rising" campaign that promotes the boycott of labor-disputed hotels across the world. This coincided with UNITE HERE's strategy to line up the expiration dates of contracts so that in 2004 and 2006 hotel owners saw all their contracts expire at the same time, giving the workers a stronger foothold at the bargaining table (personal communication with Cleve Jones, 2012). In 2012, UNITE HERE launched a global boycott against the Hyatt hotel chain, which I will discuss further.

conducted by CNN revealed that 54% of people believe that marriage between gay and lesbian couples should be recognized as legal, with 42% opposed (Steinhauser, 2012). A 2013 Gallup poll showed that 54% of people supported same-sex partner benefits, with 39% opposed (Gallup, 2013). Generally, US society seems to “accept” gay and lesbian people, but are still split on whether or not this population deserves the types of rights that are currently being proposed by mainstream gay rights organizations (which include marriage, open military inclusion, and employment protection). These polls are not designed in a way to account for transgender people, and few polls focus explicitly on opinions about transgender rights. There are no opinion polls about the segments of queer movements that espouse more radical, intersectional politics because these movements do not possess the same kind of resources as the well-funded gay rights organizations that maintain media presence.

Current discourse that surrounds the labor movement is similarly split. A 2012 Gallup poll states that 52% of Americans support labor unions, but 52% also state that they believe labor unions will become weaker in the future (Jones, 2012). In his book, *“They’re Bankrupting Us!” And 20 Other Myths About Unions* (2012), Bill Fletcher, Jr. notes that many people in the US wrongly assume that unions are hurting the economy, that they are corrupt, and that they protect lazy people (Fletcher, 2012). In 2011 and 2012, the discourse surrounding the anti-union legislation in Wisconsin and the teacher’s strike in Chicago shifted to focused attacks on public sector worker unions. Although there was a tremendous wave of support for the workers, the rhetoric of the opposition—illustrated blatantly in counter-protester signs and a

variety of conservative opinion pieces about both examples—framed public sector unions as the cause of the budget deficit.[33]

In addition to being attacked for their alleged economic impact, others continue to criticize unions for being a "[straight, white] Boys Club."[34] Undeniably, this view stems partly from the labor movement's history or racism and sexism.[35] However, this view of labor erases the history of racially progressive labor unions, as well as the labor movement's relationship to the Civil Rights movement.[36] Further, this assumption ignores the reality of union membership: a 2010 study showed that "black workers were more likely to be union member (13.4%) than were white (11.7%), Asian American (10.9%), or Latino (10.0 %) workers" (Fletcher, 2012). Despite this increasing diversity, Fletcher Jr. states, "diversity doesn't necessarily mean that internal power relationships have fundamentally shifted. The question is always one of who is actually making the decision, not just who is at the table" (p. 104).

By joining forces, queer activism has the potential to offer the labor movement ways to combat some of these myths, stereotypes and setbacks. The merging of the two movements reveals compelling truths: many queers are working-

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[33] See Charles Krauthammer (2012, June 7), "What Wisconsin means," *The Washington Post*; Jeff Jacoby (2012, June 10), "The end is near for public-sector unions," *The Boston Globe*; Bob Moore (2012, September 11), "In Chicago, a strike against students," *The Washington Post*; among others.

[34] As is mentioned above, his was one of the stereotypes that was listed during the Pride at Work training. Bill Fletcher Jr.'s book on the myths about unions also includes a chapter on the myth that "Unions are all racist and people of color need not apply" (Fletcher Jr., 2012, p. 96).

[35] See Roediger, D. (1991). *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class.* New York: Verso.

[36] See Goldfield, M. (1997). *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics.* New York: The New Press.

class, the working-class is full of queers, and many of these queer workers are also people of color. While some examples of the labor movement's acknowledgment of queer workers fail to address the intersectional subjectivity of their constituents—or, what Dara Z. Strolovitch (2012) refers to as "intersectional marginalization"—the activism that I discuss in the chapter uncovers more promising alternatives. Uniting in coalition around these identity-categories actually serves to create a foundation *beyond* single-issue identity, and instead recognizes and then resists oppressed peoples shared relationship to capital. Because the current manifestation of neoliberal capitalism burdens all working-class people—straight or gay, cisgender or transgender, white or of color—united together, they have a common enemy to fight against.

Cathy Cohen (1997) addresses the intersection of queer, poor, and non-white people in her essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" Addressing the ways in which queer of color activism transcends single-issue politics, Cohen contends

> …while the politics of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered activists of color might recognize heternormativity as a primary system of power structuring our lives, it understands that heteronormativity interacts with institutional racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation to define us in numerous ways as marginal and oppressed subjects. And it is this constructed subservient position that allows our sisters and brothers to be used either as surplus labor in an advanced capitalist structure and/or seen as expendable, denied resources, and thus locked into correctional institutions across the

> country. While heterosexual privilege negatively impacts and constrains the lived experience of "queers" of color, so too do racism, classism, and sexism. (p. 448)

Here Cohen is urging white, middle and upper-class queers to understand the ways in which marginalization of queer people, people of color, and poor people must be understood as a result of the same system of oppression. That different forms of marginalized subjectivity are interconnected is also a lesson the labor movement must internalize in order to build a stronger movement for and lead by the subjugated classes of society.

This connection can be illustrated more explicitly by examining the system of heteronormativity. Heternormativity is a system that frames

> heterosexuality—constrained within a nuclear family structure and shaped by raced, classed, and rigidly dichotomous constructions of gender—as fundamental to society, and as the only "natural" and accepted form of sexual and gender expression. (Mogul, Ritchie, Whitlock, 2011, p. 24).

In this way heterosexuals can also fall outside of a heteronormative framework if they do not perform their race and class in ways that are accepted as "natural." The repercussions of this are significant. "Markers of race, class, gender and relationship to the nation-state have long served to identify who is and who is not a presumptive 'criminal'" (Mogul, et al., p. xvii).

The common history of discursive and material abuse makes the coalition between labor and LGBT people (specifically poor LGBT people and LGBT people of color) a powerful one. These alliances create new possibilities for social

movements, protest and public action. Through an analysis of interviews about and observation of several “queered” labor actions, I illustrate how this partnership provides a space for queer protest to demonstrate a greater commitment to intersectionality, inspires increased solidarity from straight workers, and also aids in reshaping public perception of labor unions. That any of these things would be worthwhile goals for the queer movement and the labor movement will be further explored in the section that follows.

Unfair Labor Practices are a Drag

Reverend Israel Alvaran, or, “Izzy,” is a stocky, butch Filipino man, in his mid-30s. Alvaran came to the US seeking political asylum due to persecution he received for being involved with a revolutionary party in the Phillipines. Since coming to the US he got his ministerial degree and became a reverend, and also holds the position of Community Outreach Organizer at UNITE HERE Local 2, where he works mostly with the faith community. Alvaran is also self-identified as queer and has a proclivity for dressing in drag.

Alvaran was the first to give me the details of the “Bad Hotel” flashmob described at the beginning of the chapter. Although UNITE HERE was not officially involved with the planning, Alvaran’s involvement with San Francisco Pride at Work and One Struggle One Movement provided him access to some of the behind-the-scenes happenings. During our interview he suggested that the action was instrumental to moving straight members.

> After [the flashmob], field representatives would go to the hotel and show our members the YouTube video—so we believe it kind of changes their thinking. [Members respond], *'These [queer protestors] are people that I don't like, that I think are morally reprehensible, but they're out there [for our cause]!'*

Alvaran went on to describe the experience some of the demonstrators had when, after they were kicked out of the Westin for the flasmob, they went back to the hotel later in the day to picket outside:

> So they marched there, did a picket outside, and some of them were in drag, and I don't know what happened, but they went inside, and some of them were telling me that the doormen actually opened the door for them. And they wanted us to go in. And some of them heard [the doormen] say, "Well, they're fighting for our contract." So, ya know, that kind of solidarity…is very important.

Alvaran's comments point to the ways in which the LGBT action became a method of building of solidarity more broadly. Further, Alvaran noted that the action made clear the disconnect between a self-proclaimed "gay friendly" hotel—through it's affiliation with Starwood Hotels, the Westin was awarded a "perfect score" by the Human Rights Commission (HRC)[37]—and the hotel's treatment of workers. Alvaran remarked, "If you're not worker-friendly, you're not gay-friendly."

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[37] For this and a list of other often-laughable "gay-friendly" corporations, see the HRC's Buyer's Guide: http://www.hrc.org/apps/buyersguide/ranking.php?category=1232#.UVDKv4Umw7A

Similarly, in a speech given by UNITE HERE organizer, Kristin Winn at the 2013 Pride at Work Convention, she makes clear that just because a hotel promotes gay consumerism does not mean the hotel is supportive of LGBT justice. Referencing a series of Hyatt advertisements featuring attractive white models posed to look like gay men on vacation, Winn remarks, "Going on a trip with your fake boyfriend does not mean you have power, and I think a lot of people in our community confuse this with power." These demonstrations against Hyatt act as a reminder for both the LGBT community and the labor community that they often oppressed by the same entities.

The Hyatt Hotel Boycott continued to grow stronger, and in the summer of 2012, Hotel Workers Rising launched another full-scale boycott against the chain through a "Vote Hyatt the Worst" campaign. LGBT groups like Pride at Work also maintained their support. I take the time to quote in full the July 23, 2012 press statement from Pride at Work, as it exemplifies the ways in which an alliance between the LGBT and labor communities can positively benefit the lives of both straight and LGBT working-class people.

> When the LGBT community and labor stand together, we can win. We saw it over thirty-five years ago in the fight against Coors brewing, when we stood as one to fight back against racism, sexism and anti-worker attitudes--successfully. We have roots in effectively working together to achieve equality and social justice for all people. Today we urge you to continue in that spirit by standing in solidarity with housekeepers who are fighting to end abuses at work…

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and labor have a long history of standing in solidarity with labor. We've seen it in our struggles to win inclusive contracts, winning domestic partner benefits and standing up against employers discriminating against workers. In recent decades, housekeepers have stood shoulder to shoulder with the LGBT community in the fight against AIDS and against anti-gay legislation, like Prop 8 in California. That's why we're joining over one million voices online to support Hyatt housekeepers and we urge you to do the same: Vote Hyatt the Worst.

For LGBT workers at Hyatt, this is not just about standing in solidarity with labor as good allies - this is about asking the LGBT community to *see* the regular working people in our own LGBT community who are fighting for good jobs and safe working conditions. We must honor the struggles of LGBT workers in our community and let them know we've got their back, just as we stand in solidarity with all of the workers at Hyatt who are courageously standing up and standing together.

Today, we can continue the important work that was started decades ago between the labor movement and the LGBT rights movement. We are stronger together than alone when combating wealthy individuals and corporations who stand in the way of achieving full civil and economic equality. (Pride at Work, 2012)

There are several important things to note about the content of the press release. First, Pride at Work references the rarely discussed history of LGBT-labor actions, specifically noting the Coors boycott that took place in the late 1970s in response to a worker-led strike and discrimination complaints form gay and lesbian workers. Fueling the boycott was the Los Angeles based Coors Boycott Committee, an organization founded by gay and lesbian activists. Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected public official, also supported and brought attention to the boycott, highlighting the interconnected struggle of the straight workers, gay workers, and the outside lesbian and gay community. UNITE HERE organizer, Cleve Jones, who worked alongside Milk in organizing gay and lesbian bars to honor the boycott, notes,

> It was challenging for me, a young, gay, San Francisco activist, to build bridges with heterosexuals, let alone Teamsters. But we succeeded. As far as I know, the Coors Beer Boycott was the first ever coalition between the gay rights movement and labor unions. To this day, you would be hard pressed to find Coors beer in any gay bar in America. As for me, the Coors Beer Boycott taught me an unforgettable lesson about the power of coalitions in the struggle for equality. (quoted in Jones, 2009)

Similarly, the gay and labor community is building bridges through the boycott of the Manchester Hyatt hotel.

The power of coalitions represented in the work around boycotting Coors and the Hyatt are about more than warm and fuzzy notions of "unity." These actions have a significant economic impact—the Coors boycott "effectively stunted the company's

growth" (Tasini, 1988), and as of February 2013, the Hyatt boycott has cost the company $27 million dollars in business ("Hyatt hurts," 2013). It is this rare demonstration of economic injury that Joe Burns (2011) argues is missing from the majority of contemporary labor activism. Although the LGBT community is not the only group that can ally with labor to implement boycotts, the economic power wielded in both the Coors and Hyatt boycotts demonstrate the effectiveness of this particular alliance. In addition to its economic power, it is a coalition that reaches out to the oft-neglected majority of the queer community. While mainstream LGBT rights discourse focuses on issues relevant to middle and upper-middle class gays and lesbians, LGBT-labor coalitions act discursively to remind the public that poor and working-class people exist, and also materially provide those same working-class queers a platform from which to struggle for the needs of non-affluent LGBT people.

In addition to drawing attention to the existence of LGBT workers, the Pride at Work statement also points to the ways in which economic injustice is inextricably linked with civil injustice. When they note, "We are stronger together than alone when combating wealthy individuals and corporations who stand in the way of achieving full civil and economic equality," Pride at Work suggests that the struggle for progress is about all marginalized people's relationship to power. This analysis of power reflects Karma R. Chavez's (2010) notion of "coalitional subjectivity," which, she suggests, will lead to an awareness of the ways in which individuals' relationship to power and privilege are inextricably bound to others. Through her analysis of grassroots queer and immigrant rights organizing, she argues that, "[i]t is on the ground, and in the day-to-day relationships we build with others that we learn to long

to be better people, to belong to a more just world" (p. 151). Chavez highlights how affective ties built through intentional coalition and with an awareness of intersectionality can ultimately benefit the material goals of political organizing.

In *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*, Deborah H. Gould (2009) argues that queer affect is a powerful tool to advance political agendas. In her analysis of ACT UP protests, Gould suggests that the ambivalent nature of queer affect is akin to what Raymond Williams (1977) describes as "structures of feeling," and that this affective state "can shake one out of deeply grooved patterns of thinking and feeling and allow for new imaginings" (p. 27). Gould elaborates her understanding of queer affect, as "a constellation of contradictory feeling states, including shame about homosexuality along with gay pride, as well as desire for social acceptance along with repulsion from a society that oppresses sexual minorities" (p. 24). This historical foundation of queer subjectivity in the political imaginary brings with it a way of doing affective work that is productive *because of* it's visceral inchoateness, not in spite of it. In her reflection on ACT UP, Erin Rand (2012) suggest that "[r]emembering ACT UP's naissance…is an opportunity to recognize the political stakes of recounting a particular affective history, and also to cultivate a deep appreciation of the contradictions involved in deploying affect as an activist tactic" (p. 75).

Indeed ACT UP's affective history influence contemporary queer politics, which is reflected by a movement that embodies the same ambivalence: a rejection of the marriage institution verses a desire for equality under the law; a contempt for the military industrial complex verses a commitment to fighting exclusionary policies,

etc. Through the liminal spaces of conflicting feelings, queer affect offers labor activism the mirror of self-reflexivity by calling attention to the paradox of a fight for economic justice that doesn't challenge the economic system itself. Of course, queerness is not a necessary pre-condition for a movement to perform an affect of self-reflexivity and ambivalence. The movement for Black liberation, radical feminist movements, among others have long been critically aware of the incongruity of fighting for "rights" within an abhorrent system. But *queer* affect also insists that our political movements be rooted in the sexual body, and more specifically, derived from feelings like desire, pleasure, and fun.

The direct-action tactics of ACT UP were coupled with a commitment to bringing unapologetic discussions about sex into the public consciousness. Their *"Silence=Death"* slogan was powerful not only because it drew attention to the reality of dying people, but also because it simultaneously condemned the government and society for treating sex as something that should not be spoken about. Activist and writer Amber Hollibaugh (2001) argues that people are most mobilized from a place where they feel the most passion, and that passion is often a result of desire. Sex matters in the workplace, she says, because who got pregnant, who has AIDS, who had sex behind the factory can change the landscape of a workplace, and union organizers need to embrace that. Hollibaugh declares, "I want to create a political movement where…lived [sexual] experience can have value or not, depending on whether it's relevant to what's going on, but a priori won't be decided that it's not a part of the dialogue about the workplace" (p. 76). She concludes

> What you have to understand about desire is that this culture has given people no rights around desire, although it's given some men power. But it's given nobody any intelligence or training or education about their bodies, the way they live in their bodies or how they feel desire through their bodies. That has meant that women have always paid, poor people have always paid, and queers have always paid. *If that's who the union movement wants to organize, then it has to speak to the bodies that it's organizing, the ways these bodies are acted on by the culture and the expectations that people live through their bodies.* It can't be separate from that. It can't be. (p. 77, emphasis added)

Hollibaugh's demand that labor take into account the unique subjectivity of workers' bodies can be addressed through queer approaches to labor organizing. Queer politics history of unapologetic engaging with activism through and because of the body encourages labor to bring the body—the *sexual* body, in particular—into methods of resistance.

There are several examples of how queer workers and queer-labor alliances have addressed sexuality through their organized actions, including sex-positive strip club picket lines, drag queen marches, and boycott-encouraging fashion shows. The Lusty Lady Theater in San Francisco is the world's only unionized worker-owned peep-show cooperative.[38] Before the union-drive in 1996, management implemented

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[38] I include a strip club in my analysis of "queer labor" for two primary reasons. First, several of the women who worked in the strip club were queer and/or lesbian-identified. Second, using the definition of "queer" as something that is non-heteronormative absolutely includes sex workers (which I discuss further in Chapter 5). For sex workers, whether they are same-gender loving people or not, they inevitably endure similar challenges with norms that queers do. In the introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1991), Michael Warner notes, "Every person who comes to a

numerous exploitative working policies for the strippers, including: unfair stage fees (meaning strippers had to pay for their stage time), racist policies (limiting the amount of stage time permitted to women of color), and a total lack of security and safety precautions for the women. To fight this, a group of the strippers contacted the Exotic Dancers Alliance, who then put them in touch with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 790. Throughout the organizing campaign and first contract negotiation, SEIU encouraged the dancers to strategize through, rather than hide, the nature of their jobs as sex workers. For example, one tactic was to implement a "No Pink" day. On that day, in protest of the boss' refusal to give in to certain contract demands, the strippers danced, but never opened their legs to the clientele. During all their shifts, they danced nude, but kept their legs closed. As a result, management fired one of the dancers. For the two days that followed, workers picketed outside their workplace, chanting, among other things, *"2-4-6-8, Don't come here to masturbate!"* Management responded with a lockout. But their persistence worked; management rehired the dancer, and offered all the workers a raise (Query & Funari, 2000).

In this example, SEIU demonstrates the often-doubted reality of union democracy. It was not the union staff who are often removed from the nuances of a particular workplace that came up with these tactics. Rather than imposing a static formula of contract negotiations upon a decidedly non-normative employment sector,

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queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is intricated with gender, with the family, with notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body" (p. 6).

SEIU provided the tools for a worker-led struggle. Because the workers took charge of their campaign, the protest tactics—which aided in material gains in the contract—reflected their queer line of work. For the Lusty Lady strippers, workers' rights cannot be separated from the body, and more specifically, the sexual body. Certainly bodies are always instrumental in labor movement organizing—strikes, pickets, and, of course, labor, are all physical embodied acts. However, when SEIU allowed explicitly queer tactics to take place in their name, it publicly proclaimed that the labor movement considered the livelihoods of non-heteronormative workers as equally valuable as other workers.

There are several other contemporary examples of labor unions' recognizing and incorporating queer protest methods in labor actions. UNITE HERE and California-based gay-labor alliances continue to take action against the Manchester Hyatt hotel franchise. In addition to the Pride at Work support statement, the Manchester Hyatt has also been home to a "Manchester's a Drag!" picket, which included drag queens among the line of marching supporters. The same groups that put together "Don't Get Caught in a Bad Hotel" also created a viral video called "Occupy Telephone," which parodied the Lady Gaga/Beyonce duet "Telephone," and turned it into a song about economic inequality.

At the Pride at Work LGBT-Labor Training discussed in Chapter 3, Executive Director Peggy Shorey used the two Lady Gaga parodies to discuss the importance of using social media in the labor movement. "Anything you can do to help build community is good," she noted, "So, not necessarily a website, that's more passive, but…something where people can engage and interact." She went on to say how the

"Don't Get Caught in a Bad Hotel" video had over 370,000 hits on YouTube, and the "Occupy Telephone" video was getting similarly high hits for the amount of time it had been posted.[39] The Pride at Work Convention that took place in 2012 also included full sessions dedicated to "Flash Mobs 101" and "Social Media Strategies."

LGBT-labor alliances are not the first movement or coalition to emphasize the value of social media, but the militancy and theatricality involved in the aforementioned events that were put on YouTube suggest that online activist tactics still require bodies in action, beyond the click of a mouse. That is, these online strategies are only secondary to the in-person direct action of the performance. Although queers are not inherently or essentially inclined to performance, the history of queer social movements is inscribed with strategic spectacle. These sensational performances were designed to persuade audiences through song, dance, and camp. Furthermore, the history of queer activism has always centered the body as a form of political argument, or what Kevin Michael DeLuca (1999) calls "body rhetoric." In his analysis of ACT UP and Queer Nation, DeLuca explains how these early queer organizations used their bodies to "create compelling images that attract media attention" (p.10). However, because neither sound bite journalism nor Internet memes provide space for nuanced arguments, it is the images of bodies that become "the site and substance of the argument itself" (p. 10). In drawing on the visual performance tactics of queer activism, the LGBT-labor alliances insist that while social media activism may enhance direct action, it can never be a substitute.

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[39] "Occupy Telephone" video can be seen here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czKY3Hnbevs

On the Margins

In contrast to the strategy of mainstream gay rights organizing, the examples above illustrate that these labor alliances are not afraid to show the ways in which the LGBTQ community may not be "just like everybody else." Campaigns that promote the legalization of same-sex marriage often do so through the rhetoric of normalcy. Gay and lesbian couples, the argument goes, are just like straight (white, wealthy) couples, and therefore they deserve to marry, to have children, to help promote rather than distort family values.

As Michael Warner (1999) notes, "the trouble with normal" is that it maintains the status quo. Rather than challenging the system that oppressed and marginalized them in the first place, organizations like the HRC and similar gay rights groups, work to affirm and contribute to that system. Warner comments,

> Gay political groups owe their very being to the fact that sex draws people together and that in doing so it suggests alternative possibilities of life. How ironic, then, that so often the first act of gay political groups is to repudiate sex. (p. 47-48)

Of course not everyone is afforded the luxury of appearing "normal." In the US, the reigning hegemonic norm is one of whiteness, wealth, and sexual conformity. For queers, people of color, and the poor and working-class, their non-normalcy is written on the body and their bank accounts.

In her analysis of class and sexuality in *Hustler* magazine, Laura Kipnis (1999) explains how social forces have disciplined bodies as means of withholding

power. This has impacted individuals on the sexual, racial, and economic margins. She writes,

> Symbolically deploying the improper body as a mode of social sedition also follows logically from the fact that the body is the very thing those forms of power under attack—government, religion, bourgeois manners and mores—devote themselves to keeping “in its place.” Control over the body has long been considered essential to producing an orderly work force, a docile populace, a passive law-abiding citizenry. Just consider how many actual laws are on the books regulating *how* bodies may be seen and parts may not, *what* you may do you with your body in public *and* in private, and it begins to make more sense that the out-of-control, unmannerly body is precisely what threatens the orderly operation of the status quo. (p. 134)

Labor activism that highlights rather than hides from marginalized bodies is a direct assault on the status quo.

The 1996 UNITE[40]-led fashion show at Barney’s in Manhattan provides another example of using excess as a strategy. The workers were cat-walking in an effort to exhibit their strength to management during a grueling negotiation that left them a full week without a contract. The flyer for the event played on the clothing store-theme: *“What’s in Fashion This Year? A Fair Union Contract!...Get the Inside Scoop on Life at Barneys! Strike a Pose for Dignity!”* (Ross, 2001). The actual event included the majority-queer workers sashaying about while the Emcee commented on

[40] This took place before the merger of UNITE and HERE. In 1996, UNITE represented garment workers.

both the models' flamboyant aesthetic qualities and also realities about their labor conditions. For example:

> A big hand for Timothy from the cosmetics department, Queen Bitch for Glamour. Here to show unity—it's a family affair—is his sister Sharon and Chanel poster puppy Bon Bon, his puppy. He is a firm believer in an ironclad contract as long as management can no longer be trusted.
>
> Please welcome Philippe, a popular Parisian from couture who is against mandatory overtime because he needs to get his beauty sleep!
>
> Next up is Erving, an up-and-coming designer who wants to make sure that nonselling employees get a fair increase. Work, girl, work! (Ross, 2001)

And so on.

As Andrew Ross (2001) notes, this action was an "extension of baseline gay culture" (p. 83). In drawing on the campy and fabulous elements of an amateur drag night at a gay club, the union workers demonstrated several key elements of a good union action: strong visibility, show of unity, and being coherent to the public. Ross argues that because the action was worker-scripted and led, it "expressed their own identity [and] served to increase their militancy" (p. 89). As a result, the workers won a contract almost better than they had hoped, including job security, and a compensation system negotiated on the worker's terms. This strong contract – the direct result of the militant and "queer" tactics used in the campaign – meant improved working conditions for all union members at Barney's. Given this, the

"overtly queer campaigning" was a benefit to all the workers, both gay and straight (Ross, p. 90).

LGBT-organized labor actions provide one way for queers to fight for power without having to assimilate. This is an important move since in many cases these bodies *can't* assimilate. However, blatantly expressing marginality comes with challenges. All of the organizers I interviewed for this project had at least one story about a union worker who was reluctant to support LGBT issues in a contract or at an action. Still, none of these stories ended in failure: all the organizers spoke of the workers' eventual ability to see how their queer union family deserved the same benefits that they did. The workers' realization did not result from union efforts to make queerness seem "normal."

Levi Pine, a UNITE HERE organizer, describes how, on the contrary, it was a gay pride parade that ultimately transformed a homophobic worker. UNITE HERE and SEIU have been marching in Gay Pride Parades throughout the US for years, giving workers who are unfamiliar with queer culture a glimpse of its most spectacular aspects. Pine explains,

> There are staff and rank and filers who, every year resist [going to the Gay Pride Parade]. Not common, but some people are anti-queer. One of the women on staff… said, 'No way, that's not what the union should be about, that's disgusting. I'm a Christian woman.' Finally someone wore her down and she said, 'Fine I'll go and I'll bring my son, but he's not wearing shorts.' And after she went she said, 'Wow, that was really beautiful. And I still felt really weird and uncomfortable, but I had to think about why I was

> uncomfortable.' And that's what the union is about. We push each other and we grow and we move on…And now she loves Pride.

Pine's story shows how even the in-your-face spectacle of gay pride parades can be a place from which to create a more inclusive union membership.

In a conjuncture when mainstream gay rights agendas often rely on activism that reifies the normality of queer people, these examples of labor activism offer a refreshing and necessary point of departure. Instead of suggesting that queers (and/or members of the working-class) are or should be symbols of upstanding neoliberal citizenship, queer-labor activism can become a way to reject that becoming an upstanding neoliberal citizen should be the goal.

Conclusion

In a 2012 interview[41] about the Hyatt campaign, Cleve Jones emphasized the importance of coalition-building in the labor movement. Using an LGBT-labor coalition to spearhead the Hyatt boycott spoke both to the LGBT workers at Hyatt, and also provided an opportunity to build alliance against a multinational corporation. Gaining allies, Jones insisted, is necessary to win, especially when it comes to boycotts. The only powerful boycotts are ones that "cost the company." He continued,

> I am always saying to young people: don't ever let them tell you that you have no power, no voice. You always can access that power, and you begin by reaching out to others and reaching across the boundaries that have been

[41] From Amy Dean's interview with Cleve Jones. Originally published on August 17, 2012 at truth-out.org.

> created to divide us from each other. When I go to a hotel struggle, I see women from Ethiopia and Sudan working shoulder to shoulder with women from El Salvador and the Philippines and China, on the picket line with gay men and lesbian women. That's how we win.

Jones mention of this alliance “on the picket line” is not incidental. As this chapter has made clear, the act of protest is powerful for any movement committed to social progress. The lack of militancy in both the labor movement and the mainstream LGBT rights movement is hurting the most marginalized members of society. The alliance between labor and queers provides many ways to revitalize these struggles.

First, re-energizing labor and queer histories of militant protest offers a means for labor activism to make an economic impact on corporations. Second, the alliance of labor and LGBT organizations helps shift the permeating negative discourse about the exclusionary practices of unions. Finally, an alliance based on the militant tactics in the shared histories of labor and queer movements can lead to powerful actions that run counter to discourses of organized labor’s irrelevance and queer marginality. Such actions instead show unions and queer workers as powerful forces with which to be reckoned.

Chapter Five

Interrogating Industries of Violence: The Role of a Progressive Labor Movement in Challenging Police and Prison Brutality

In the past three chapters I provided examples and analysis of the productive relationship between working-class queers and labor unions. Labor scholars describe the method of using union power to address social issues outside of the workplace as "social movement unionism" (Fantasia & Voss, 2004). From gay activists and union activists working together to fight against the 1978 Brigg's Initiative,[42] to contemporary campaigns such as Pride at Work's efforts to win health benefits for transgender people, the coalitions formed in these struggles are important to examine not only for what they tell us about the relationship between the economy and sexual regulation, but also for the ways they model an *intersectional* approach to achieving social progress.

The campaigns referenced above have shown that, in many ways, LGBT-labor coalitions are ideal for challenging the intersectional oppression faced by queers, people of color, and the working-class. However, some sections of the union movement are guided by firmly held assumptions that are an obstacle to effectively challenging this intersectional oppression. Specifically, many union officials promote an identification of workers with their industry. These same leaders often harness union resources to advocate for expansion of their union's industry and the

[42] California Proposition 6, also known as The Brigg's Initiative was a law that would ban lesbian and gay people from teaching in public schools, and would possibly extend to anyone who supported gay rights (Rimmerman, 2001).

consequent increase in the union's membership numbers. This approach poses a particular problem to an expanded LGBT-labor coalition when this industry advocacy involves upholding and perpetuating structures that cause violence to queer populations. In this chapter, I analyze the role of police and prison unions, specifically. I argue that these institutions are component pieces of systems that continually target, criminalize, and harm sexually marginalized populations, and most especially those who are also on the margins of the dominant class and race. Because both the law enforcement and corrections industries are heavily unionized, an industry advocacy approach to unionism makes the labor movement complicit in systems that harm LGBT populations and arguably the working class in general. I argue that in order to create a stronger alliance, the labor movement must interrogate its relationship with the policing and prison industries, even if this means being critical, or even oppositional, to industries that employ many union members.

When unions collude with police and prisons, they are working with institutions that ensconce the very worst of capitalism's retributions: violence against and forced disenfranchisement of the oppressed. With very few exceptions, the police force has been on the side of its employer, who, as an agent of the state, rarely has the best interest of workers in mind. For example, there is a long history of the police using violent (and sometimes deadly) force against striking workers, overwhelming evidence of targeting racial minorities, and, as this chapter will reveal, horrifying examples of targeting queer bodies. Similarly, prison guard unions are forced to "negotiate" with an institution that is always-already working to maintain unjust orders of power. Indeed, unions should be wary of an establishment that supports and

enables the most organized form of slave labor in the United States.[43] Sarah Flounders (2011) reveals the numerous ways in which prison labor is exploited by corporations and the military. She writes that "the military, oil and banking conglomerates, interlinked with the police and prisons, have a stranglehold on the U.S. capitalist economy…The very survival of these global corporations is based on immediate maximization of profits" (2011). To accomplish those maximized profits, these conglomerates turn to the exploitation of incarcerated workers. The best, most well-meaning prison guards cannot undo a system that relies on a foundation of exploitation, racism, and, as I discuss below, punitive measures against sexual difference.

In this chapter I use numerous case studies to illustrate the oppression of queer populations by the police and prison guards. I argue that police and prison guard unions that advocate for the expansion of these institutions should not be part of the vision for the future of a labor movement that is committed to social justice issues. In addition, I will draw from my experiences as a labor activist and member of Pride at Work to describe the frustratingly stagnant conversations about this topic that are currently being had (or not had) within progressive labor groups. I borrow from scholars and activists before me that have inserted questions of class and race into the workings of the State—specifically queer of color critiques and critical trans politics (Ferguson, 2004; Spade, 2011). Further, I work from the fundamental principles and theories espoused by the prison abolition movement, and use the term "prison

[43] See Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010) for a beginning to the conversation.

industrial complex" (PIC) to call attention to the ways in which prison building and operation have become profit-driven enterprises (Davis, 2003).

Undeniably, it is a bold move to call on the union movement to challenge the very industries that employ many of its members. It is nearly unthinkable that the AFL-CIO would take a stance that fundamentally challenged the hegemonic ordering of society, due to the deep ties between US labor and government. Prison abolition and disdain for police are highly unpopular sentiments and I have no illusions that this chapter will result in mainstream labor taking up any of these stances in the near future. That said, I would like this chapter to act, at the very least, as a conversation starter. As I have previously stated, this project was meant not only to be about queers and labor, but also *queering* labor. To queer the labor movement means to question the foundation, to question how and why things are the way they are, and how and why they have become normalized. It is not a given that prisons need to exist; nor is it a given that the union movement has to remain committed to moderate, rather than progressive or even radical agendas. To quote Jose Munoz (2010), "Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (p.1). In this chapter, I will argue for the concrete possibility of another world, one that might be propelled by an organized worker's struggle that is not afraid to fight back against the industries that fuel some of the gravest violations of justice in our country.

Critical Queer Theory and Prison Abolition

Recent scholarship coming out of queer studies has been unabashed in asserting a grounded left politics. Scholars like Cathy Cohen (1997), Chandan Reddy (2011), Jaspir Puar (2005), among others, have contributed to a pool of work that in many ways echoes the radical grassroots organizing and activism of contemporary radical queer social movements. The foundation of critical, radical queer scholarship and activism is committed to an anti-racist and anti-capitalist politics that eschews the strategies of the mainstream gay rights movement that focus on inclusion, recognition, and "formal legal equality gains that do not reach the most vulnerable targets of homophobia" (Spade, 2011, p. 172). In particular, my work is heavily influenced by Dean Spade's (2011) explanation of critical trans politics, and Roderick Ferguson's (2004) queer of color critique.

In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick Ferguson (2004) argues that the juncture of sexuality and political economy is still missing from most intersectional analyses. Ferguson insists that intersectional analysis must also "[investigate] how intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and capital" (p. 4). Similarly, Dean Spade's (2011) critical trans politics moves away from championing single-issue reforms and instead identifies the needs of transgender people as always already a part of struggles for racial and economic justice. Both of these approaches insist on an engagement that is predicated on interrogating the hegemonic conditions that reproduce systems and relations of injustice. For Spade, we can't be satisfied with destabilizing these through theory—we must also do so through action. Spade's critical trans politics is a call to action, one that espouses

"locations of resistance [that] offer models of participatory, mobilization-focused struggle led by those living on the sharpest intersecting edges of multiple systems of control" (p. 224).

Similarly, the prison abolition movement burgeoned from a critical struggle with the ostensibly natural practice of incarceration. Prison abolitionists believe that all prisons—and the PIC of which they are a part—should be eliminated. Abolitionist groups like Critical Resistance (2013) argue that the PIC is not set up with a goal of rehabilitating prisoners, nor protecting citizens, but rather "the PIC helps and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other privileges" ("What is the PIC?," 2013). PIC abolition is "a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment" ("What is the PIC?," 2013). As this chapter will demonstrate, the prison system is one that is established on cruel and inhumane forms of punishment. Attempts to reform the "bad parts" of the PIC are in vain since it is the system itself—not just bad individuals or laws—that is broken. The theory and activism that drives this movement undergirds my argument that a union movement dedicated to social movement unionism, including the liberation of LGBT people, must be prepared to challenge the US criminal punishment system.

Queer of color critique, critical trans politics, and prison abolition all have the potential to lead to exciting new possibilities for radical social change, and can indeed lead to "unprecedented coalitions and alliances" (Angela Davis quoted in Ferguson, 2004, p.29). I too find hope in calling attention to the common paths being forced by the oppressed through the trenches of the neoliberal capitalist state. This chapter is

one attempt to highlight this phenomenon through scrutinizing the relationship between US labor and the criminal punishment system at large.

LGBT People and Police

There is a long history of police brutality against poor people, people of color, and queer people in the United States. For the purposes of this project, I will focus specifically on queer people, but it is necessary to note the ways in which race and class intersect with queer identities. For queer people of color and poor queers, the likelihood of being the target of police violence increases significantly. Although it is outside the scope of this chapter to review evidence of racism and classism enacted by the police force[44], these realities inevitably influence the specific ways in which particular demographics of the LGBT community are at a greater disadvantage than white and/or wealthier queer people (AI, 2005; Crenshaw, 1995).

Alongside an extensive history of police brutality against queer bodies, is a history of queer resistance against it. The 1966 Compton Cafeteria Riot and the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion were pivotal moments in which queers confronted the violence that police were carrying out against them in queer social spaces. In both instances, queer and transgender bar patrons fought back against vicious police raids and unjust arrests. Although some progress has been made since then, both institutionally and culturally, there is ample evidence that law enforcement still perpetrates violence against the LGBT community. According to a 2005 Amnesty International report on

[44] For more on how law enforcement targets poor people and people of color, see Michelle Alexander (2012); Karen S. Glover's (2009) *Racial Profiling: Research, Racism, and Resistance*.

police brutality against LGBT persons, some instances of abuse "amount to torture," and sexual abuse is also common in the accounts given by LGBT victims (p. 2).[45] The examples that follow certainly support this conclusion.

In *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States* Joey Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock (2011) provide numerous examples of horrific stories of police brutality that have occurred in the past two decades. In one case, a 31-year old gay Black man with no criminal record was arrested after an altercation with his landlord "and anally raped with a billy club covered in cleaning liquid by a Chicago police officer who called him a 'nigger fag' and told him 'I'm tired of you faggot…you sick mother fucker'" (p. 50). In another,

> a Black gay man peacefully walking in a park in New York City was confronted by an officer pointing a gun at him, saying, 'If you move, I'll shoot you.' He was then taken to a police van where others were detained. The officers made gay jokes, used the word 'fag,' and talked about Black people. The man received tickets for loitering, trespassing, and being the park after dark. (p. 49-50)

Other examples of police abuse from *Queer (In)Justice* include the story of officers raiding a gay bar then justifying their use of violence because they claimed patrons were making sexual advances towards them (p. 55); Michigan state troopers' "bag a fag" operation that targeted gay men at truck stops (p. 57); and a story about a police

[45] I share these stories in this research with the purpose to expose a reality that is unknown by many, but I do so with an awareness of what is at stake when researchers and academics "use" victims of violence as an academic tool. In an effort to thwart potential for the exploitation of stories of violence, I used mostly sources that are directly produced by transgender and queer people who share their own stories.

officer verbally harassing 17-year-old Marcus Wayman, who police perceived to be gay, and threatening to tell the young man's grandfather that he was gay—in response, Wayman killed himself after being released from jail. The latter of these cases were legally justified because of "lewd conduct" statutes, a part of the criminal legal system that empowers police officers to set their own standards for "decency" and leads to a disproportionate number of charges against gay men and transgender people (Mogul, et al., pp. 56-57). These are just a few of countless real-life stories of queers—and particularly poor queers and queers of color—being targeted and brutalized by law enforcement.

In addition to being punished for "deviant" sexuality, queer people are also punished for failing to reinforce the gender binary through their gender performance. There is a long history of gender non-conforming people being targeted by the police, and there are still some states that have laws against "cross-dressing." According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (2012), "police often use [laws against cross-dressing] to harass transgender people" ("Know Your Rights," 2012). Stories of gender non-conforming people experiencing physical and sexual violence at the hands of the police are plentiful. According to *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, a 2011 study conducted by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), one-fifth of all surveyed transgender individuals reported experiencing police harassment, "with much higher rates reported by people of color." Forty-six percent of those surveyed stated that they were uncomfortable seeking police assistance (Grant, et al., 2011). In one recent example, transgender woman Temmie Breslauer was arrested for using a subway card that

belonged to her father. When she was arrested, police asked if she had “a penis or a vagina,” then chained her to a fence with one arm raised above her head, where they left her for twenty-eight hours (Porter, 2012). According to one report,

> During her detainment the police repeatedly called Breslauer derogatory names and maliciously mislabeled her gender identity: “he-she,” “faggot,” “Lady Gaga,” and “transvestite.” Police repeatedly used the pronouns “he” and “him” to refer to her. They refused her requests to be moved to a women’s or private cell or let her go to the bathroom. The police also deliberately subjected Breslauer to sexual harassment. The fence to which she was chained was six feet away from a men’s holding pen. She was repeatedly propositioned, taunted, and hit with crumpled paper and soda cans. (Porter, 2012)

In another recent case, “a Black lesbian in Atlanta reported being raped by a police officer who told her the world needed ‘one less dyke’” (Mogul, et. al, 2012, p. 67). In 2004, an African American transgender woman reported that police broke her wrists by “throwing her against a wall and to the floor,” then handcuffing her broken wrists and throwing her into a holding cell for two and a half days with no medical assistance (Amnesty International, p. 51). In another report, two male-to-female (MTF) youth were pulled over by the police, then, upon seeing “Male” on their drivers license, forced to perform fellatio on the officers (Amnesty International, 2005, p. 47). These examples are only a small sample of the many reported incidents.

It is important to note that any study of police abuse against the LGBT community is likely to underestimate the extent of actual violence, discrimination,

and mistreatment. The many structural and cultural forces that work to dehumanize LGBT people decrease chances that those victimized by police violence will feel safe to report the violence. In addition, many assume that no one will do anything about it anyway. For example, a Native American transgender woman called 911 after she was raped by police, and in response, "the responding paramedics laughed" (Mogul, et. al, 2012, p. 63). "Realizing, 'nobody gives a shit about me,' she just walked away" (Ibid.).

As these case studies reveal, poor and non-white LGBT people face an insidious disadvantage. Numerous studies reveal that LGBT youth are at-risk for homelessness and poverty due to precarious living situations—after coming out as queer, many youth are displaced from their homes. In order to survive, disenfranchised queers often turn to criminalized activity such as selling drugs and engaging in sex work (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, 2007). Thus this population is also unduly targeted by the police, and is more likely to experience time in prison.

Dean Spade (2011) notes that his transgender clients "had no hope of finding legal employment because of the bias and violences they face and therefore turned to a combination of public benefits and criminalized work—often in the sex trade—in order to survive" (p. 11). In addition, the NGLTF transgender discrimination survey (2011) revealed that 16% of surveyed transgender respondents said they were "compelled to work in the underground economy for income" (2011, n.p.). This is unsurprising, given that the survey also revealed that respondents were four times more likely to live in extreme poverty than the general population (2011).

The fact that there are such a large number of queer sex workers should inspire organizations that are devoted to the intersections of sexual and economic justice to challenge the pervasive criminality of this form of labor. In addition to increasing the risk of violence, criminalizing sex work creates an environment that enables the mass incarceration of people of color and queer people. David Rosen (2011) notes, "current laws against commercial sex, especially targeting the sex worker and not the john, are a punitive injunction against those who challenge the rule of heterosexual monogamy" (n.p.). This becomes even more pervasive with the influx of anti-trafficking laws, such as Proposition 35, which passed in California in 2012, that requires anyone involved with the sex trade to register as a sex offender. This "tough on crime" approach to trafficking inevitably leads to increased arrest and police surveillance on the most vulnerable communities (Lennard, 2012). As this section makes clear, poor queer and transgender people will likely be *less* safe with an influx of police presence.

A labor movement committed to a broad vision of social justice should be an active opponent of such attacks. Instead, a part of the labor movement has shielded the perpetrators of these attacks on queer people. As Kristian Williams (2010) notes,

> The interests the Police Association defends are the interests the police defend. Cops are the hired guns of capitalism and the protectors of white supremacy; they stand for a system of power that exploits workers, excludes the poor, and leaves people of color at the bottom of the social pyramid. Police 'unions' do not, and cannot, represent the interests of the working class, because police are not workers like other workers. They are part of the

apparatus by which worker organizing is suppressed. (n.p.)

Indeed the function of the police counters everything for which social movement unionism stands. Rather than working against injustice faced by oppressed peoples, the police perpetuate it.

In my experiences at AFL-CIO events, Pride at Work conferences and trainings, and mainstream labor protests and actions, the role of the police and the antagonism between law enforcement and movements for social change have been treated with uncomfortable silence by union officials. For example, during the three-day Pride at Work LGBT Labor Training that I attended in April 2012, several speakers made comments about the ways in which the transgender population is often subject to police violence. However, none of these sentiments were reflected formally in the literature we received. On the last day of the training, an AFSCME member asked how to confront police violence against transgender populations, particularly because she was a member of the same union that represented the police.[46] The leaders of the training seemed unprepared to answer the question; they skirted around the comment and changed the subject. A similar incident occurred at the Pride at Work 2012 Convention. At the Transgender Caucus meeting, a transgender speaker made a casual comment about police abuse. Later in the meeting, I stated that I would be interested in talking about the conflict between police unions and police abuse against the transgender population. The facilitators re-phrased my comment more

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[46] The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) represents over 100,000 "public safety personnel, including police, correction, fire and EMS workers" (afscme.og, 2012). AFSCME's website promises that their "members work hard to keep our families and communities safe."

vaguely as “violence against transgender people,” but ultimately the question was “shelved” in favor of discussing transgender health benefits.

I have no doubt that the speakers and leaders involved at Pride at Work are concerned with the reality of police violence. For them to intentionally avoid addressing the questions is likely motivated by a desire to avoid open conflict with other forces within the AFL-CIO. Already, being an LGBT-specific organization puts them in a place that forces them to prove their “normalness.” For any LGBT organization to challenge the status quo is to risk a certain amount of progress—in the case of Pride at Work it may mean risking funding and/or affiliation with the AFL-CIO. It is for this reason that the work of queer activists, organizers, and researchers continue to struggle for a justice that is inclusive of “deviant” bodies *and* ideas—including the idea that a union movement dedicated to fighting injustice must confront those institutions that perpetuate injustice, even when some union members work for these institutions.

Queers Incarcerated

A social movement unionism that speaks to the realities of queer oppression must also be prepared to confront the PIC. This poses a significant challenge for organized labor, given that the PIC is increasingly union-dense. AFSCME Corrections United is comprised of 62,000 corrections officers and 23,000 corrections employees “who’ve joined forces in AFSCME to fight for better pay and benefits, for safe workplaces, and to uphold the standard of professionalism in [their] field” (afscme.org, 2012). According to the AFSCME website, the 2011 AFSCME Public Safety Congress was held to help members “arm themselves with the tools and

information needed to defends themselves on the job and build their union" (afscme.org). This declaration is deeply troubling when placed in the context of the ways in which building their union has aligned with prison expansion.

When Illinois Governor Pat Quinn announced plans to close the notorious Tamms "Supermax" Correctional Center in June of 2012, he found his greatest foe in AFSCME Council 31 which represented the prison guards. In Stephen F. Eisenman's (2012) commentary on the controversy, he writes of AFSCME's loss of support among many of its staunchest allies. He writes that these progressive allies, including himself, "believe that while corrections staff deserve to have work, their jobs should never come at the expense of the basic human rights of other people. Torture is a crime – it should not be made a career" (2012, n.p.). AFSCME Council 31's advocacy on the behalf of the prison industry is a telling example of the dangers of a unionism that places the interests of members in a particular industry above a vision of social justice and liberation for all people. As I detail below, this is a particular barrier to building a stronger constituency of queer workers within organized labor because of the particularly egregious sufferings imposed on this population by the PIC.

The huge workforce in the corrections industry is a necessary structural response to the fact that the US has the highest number of prisoners in the world. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2009), there were 743 adults incarcerated per 100,000 (BJS, 2009). The disturbingly large number of prisoners is a result of a variety of factors, including the "War on Drugs" that began during the Nixon administration and the more recent phenomenon of prison privatization. In

2003, the US government “spent nearly 60.9 billion on corrections expenditures and employment, soaring over 423% since 1982” (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, 2007). A report published by The Sylvia Report Law Project (2007) explains that “the growth of the US prison system has had a severe and disproportionate effect on communities of color and low-income communities” (p. 9, 2007). For example, African American people constitute 12.3% of the national population, compared to 43% of the US prison population. White people make up 69.4% of the national population and 37% of the prison population. Latino/a people comprise 13% of the national population and 19% of the prison population. “Startlingly, almost 13% of African American men between the ages of 25 and 29 are currently in US prisons or jails, compared to 3.7% of Latino men and 1.7% of white men in the same age range” (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, p. 10, 2007). In addition, “transgender and gender non-conforming people are disproportionately poor, homeless, criminalized, and imprisoned” (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, p. 11).

These statistics are not a reflection that some “types of people” are more inclined to commit crimes than others. Rather, these numbers reveal the fact that “policing and law enforcement are disproportionately concentrated in low-income communities, communities of color, and poor urban areas” (Sylvia Rivera Law Project, p. 10). The US prison industrial complex (PIC) is one of the most blatant illustrations of the ways in which white supremacy is proliferated by the neoliberal state. The organization Critical Resistance defines the “prison industrial complex” as a term “to describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and

political problems" (Critical Resistance, 2013). Furthermore, "the PIC helps and maintains the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other privileges" (Critical Resistance, 2013).

Like those who experience violence on behalf of law enforcement on the street, the stories of prisoners and former-prisoners are filled with examples of physical and sexual violence, discrimination, and torture that took place after arrest was made (Amnesty International, 2005; Sylvia Rivera Law Project, 2007). An interview with a transgender woman named Bianca conducted by the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (2007) recounts one horrifying example of repeated violence. Bianca described,

> …it's a war in here. The administration is against us….[There is] a lot of harassment from other prisoners, but…the correctional officers are the ones who are the most violent….I'm raped on a daily basis, I've made complaint after complaint, but no response. No success. I'm scared to push forward with my complaints against officers for beating me up and raping me. I was in full restraints when the correctional officers assaulted me. Then after they said I assaulted them. All the officers say is 'I didn't do it.' The Inspector General said officers have a right to do that to me. That I'm just a man and shouldn't be dressing like this. (p. 19)

This is just one of countless stories of the mistreatment endured by lesbian, gay, queer, transgender and gender non-conforming prisoners.

That gay, perceived-to-be gay, and gender non-conforming prisoners are routinely victims of sexual and physical violence, mistreatment and neglect, is a

reflection of the foundation of the prison system itself. Foucault (1978) reminds us that the founders of the modern-day prison had an investment in the "discipline and punish[ment]" of deviance—most especially sexual deviance. In *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality*, Regina Kunzel (2008) provides a critical history of the sexual culture in prisons, revealing how the moralistic foundations of the prison were connected to anxieties about those on the margins of sexual and gender normativity. She contends, "criminality and sexual perversion had long been understood to exist in a tautological relationship, such that attention to one naturally and inevitably invited attention to the other" (2008, p. 7). Mogul et al. (2012) reiterate this, explaining that reformers and politicians "created a uniquely violent and repressive, structurally queer institution" in their attempt to set out "to stop crime, contain vice, and instill good moral habits in the unworthy poor who were perceived, among other things, as sexually degraded" (p. 95).

This kind of disciplining continues to be illustrated in the accounts revealed by LGBT prisoners. A study done by the Bureau of Justice Statistics "found that sexual orientation was the single greatest determinant of sexual abuse in prisons," and another study revealed that 67 percent of LGBT-identified prisoners reported being a victim of sexual assault (Mogul, et al., 2012, p. 99). Like the reports of police violence, these numbers are likely a very conservative estimate of actual incidents of sexual violence, especially because the risks of reporting attacks are so dangerous to the victim. For example, according to numerous inside-accounts of prison-life, being labeled a "snitch" is a death-sentence (Garland and Wilson, 2012). Rather than getting protection from future abuse, victims who file grievances are often put in

more harms way by prison officials. Sometimes that takes the form of isolating the prisoner to the equivalent of solitary confinement—although this is said to be done to protect the inmate, the conditions of solitary confinement are intentionally brutal and inhumane[47]. In addition, many stories from prisoners who have made formal reports about violence reveal a disturbing and pervasive theme: prison guards often respond to these grievances with laughter, and insist that gay inmates both "deserve [rape and/or sexual violence]" and "enjoy [rape and/or sexual violence]" (Mogul, et al., 2012, p. 102).

Most prison policies require that inmates be housed in the facilities that are determined by the detainees' genitals. This has serious implications for transgender and intersex prisoners and numerous studies suggest that when transgender people are housed with a population that does not match their gender-identity, they are at far greater risk for physical and sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2005). In one story that is similar to many others, a transgender woman attempted to amputate her penis in an effort to be housed with women. Not only did she nearly bleed to death, but she also continued to be denied access to hormone treatment, which contributed to her already profound depression and psychological distress (Mogul, et al., 2012, p. 112). In *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex,* Stephen Dillon (2011) importantly reminds us that in the US prison system

[47] Also referred to as going in "the hole," research and prisoner-accounts about solitary confinement reveals that it is borderline inhumane. An article by Atul Gawande (2009) published in *The New Yorker* shared findings that suggested the practice of denying human contact and interaction was akin to torture. Shane Bauer, who was held in an Iranian prisoner of war cell, claimed that America's prison "holes" were worse than what he experienced. See also Smith (2006).

"institutionalized white supremacist and heterosexist violence…[is] not exceptional nor spectacular, but rather routine, mundane, and everyday" (p. 178).

While inmate-on-inmate violence receives a lot of public attention, prison guard-on-inmate violence is far less scrutinized. This is due in large part to the ways in which media, policies, and public figures consistently dehumanize prisoners. For example, the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA) was originally created in an effort to stop the abuse of prisoners by guards. However, the legislation did not pass until it was re-worded to also include the abuse of prisoners by fellow inmates (Mogul, et al., 2012, p. 105), which was connected to public anxiety about the spread of AIDS (Kunzel, 2008, p. 234). This example illustrates that the rhetoric of rape and violence requires what Judith Butler (1999) would describe as a "grievable" victim; that is, a life that was deemed "livable" enough to be acknowledged at its end as worthy of grief. In the instance of PREA, the only way to construct a grievable victim was to construct an intelligible villain. Because the humanity of prisoners is already suspect, the PREA advocates realized that defending inmates' rights demanded the creation of an even less human villain, a role that the prison guard was not able to fill. Another prisoner, however, was a perfect assailant; it allowed the public imaginary to maintain a belief in the evil inmate, even if it meant extending sympathy to those prisoners who were *less* evil.

This binary—monster-prisoner/respectable-guard—is substantiated by prison guard unions. In *The Toughest Beat: Politics, Punishment, and the Prison Officers Union in California,* Joshua Page (2011) argues that the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA), the prison guard union of California, contributes to

the societal stigma against prisoners by framing all convicts as “animals.” He explains,

> [T]he union contributes to popular prejudices about prisoners and promotes warehousing as the primary, if not sole, purpose of imprisonment. The ‘toughest beat’ would not be so tough (and the union’s insistence that officers are victims would not ring true) if prisons were filled [with] people who, in general, just want to ‘do their time’ and move on with their lives—rather than animalistic individuals programmed to cheat and harm others. The CCPOA’s strategy to enhance its officers’ professional image, status, and compensation depends on the public, press, and politicians believing that California prisoners are the ‘worst of the worst.’ (p. 72)

It is important to note that the CCPOA is intentionally not affiliated with the AFL-CIO, and declared that it would not “not take positions on behalf of ‘labor’ or the ‘labor movement’” (Page, 2011, p. 37). That said, public sector unions—including the AFSCME prison guard union—“strive to affect public policy, state spending, and institutional operations in schools, prisons, and the like” (p. 8). And the successful ones do just that.

Organizations like Pride at Work that seek to address the intersections of LGBT and worker issues should not ignore the ways in which their own union members are enacting some of the most horrific abuses against the most disenfranchised LGBT people. As I note above in regard to reform and police officers, actual change cannot be made through reforming a system that, at its core, perpetuates violence and injustice. Thus the role of the union is not to implement

sensitivity trainings, but rather to reject its support of and institutional connections to the prison altogether. As Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock (2012) note,

> While [reform efforts] may produce changes for individual prisoners or facilities, systemic and transformative change has proven elusive. The violence and punishment visited on LGBT prisoners 'are not anomalies,' and they cannot be eradicated through reform. They are deeply embedded in the fabric of the person system, and perpetuated through queer criminalizing archetypes. Not only have prisons failed to deter crime and produce safety, they are sites where the safety, dignity, and integrity of all prisoners, including LGBT prisoners, are eviscerated, begging the question of whether freedom from violence for LGBT people—indeed, for any community—can be purchased by the continued institutionalization of such inhumanity and brutality. (p. 117)

To have the support of labor behind a vision of prison abolition could be monumental. It is necessary for labor leaders invested in social justice to confront the ways in which prisons exacerbate the classist, racist, cissexist, and heterosexist elements of society. Although these members may feel compelled to create education and training programs for guards to try to mitigate the abuses, it must be alongside of, and not in place of, fighting for actual prison abolition. Ideally, however, queer, transgender, and allied union members and leaders must organize to disempower rather than fuel the prison industrial complex.

Conclusion

In *Out at Work: Building a Gay-Labor Alliance*, Kent Wong (2001) offers the following call to action to those invested in a progressive labor movement:

> Let us work together to organize the unorganized; to fight for civil and human rights; to beat back racism, sexism, and homophobia; and to build greater unity among all working people. (p. 247).

This kind of progress cannot be made without an intentional intersectional approach to fighting oppression. Moving from single-issue organizing to movement building means confronting the ways in which the current movement falls short of addressing oppression through multiple lenses.

As I demonstrated throughout the chapter, the police force and the PIC are two deeply harmful entities working against disenfranchised minorities. The above stories about queer and transgender peoples experiences with police brutality and abuse are just a few of many examples of violence inherent within a neoliberal system that is designed to expunge the "surplus" of human life, to cage the unfit citizen. It is important to understand these testimonies not as exceptional stories about a few "bad apples" in the police force or prison, but rather a symptom of the capitalist system of power that substantiates a culture of violence and control over and against the poor, the queer, and the non-white (among others). Therefore, it is not enough for unions to implement "sensitivity trainings" for police officers and prison guards; rather the structures themselves need to be challenged at their root.

Queer of color critique and critical trans politics provide helpful frameworks to navigate the state of social justice movements in the context of the contemporary neoliberal United States. Ferguson's (2004) theory offers tools with which to better

articulate and understand the complexity of identities, not through identity politics, but through confronting the ways in which gender, race, class, and sexuality “antagonize and/or conspire with normative investments of nation-states and capital” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 4). Critical trans politics extends this analysis by putting it into practice on the ground—in courtrooms, in non-profits, and in the streets. Spade’s (2011) critical trans politics is a perfect remedy to organized labor’s reticence to embody the principles of a justice-centered social movement. Unlike non-profits that, especially under neoliberalism, are fettered to the benevolence of private foundations and corporations, the labor movement still has the potential to provide a foundation for non-privatized mass organizing on behalf of those oppressed under a white supremacist, heteropatriarchal capitalist system. To do so will require a “commitment to refuse compromises that divide constituencies with reforms that offer increased access to people with certain privileges while leaving others without access—or even more marginazlied than before” (Spade, 2011, p. 188). This means rethinking its relationship to a number of entities including prisons, police, and the State itself.

This chapter worked to “queer” the labor movement by confronting what the union assumes as natural. Doing so allowed me to point out the contradictions that exist between the movement’s ostensible mission to support economic justice and its relationships to institutions that enable economic *injustice*. With a number of radical and progressive labor leaders working to create a more “social movement unionism” model, these relationships become even more troubling. I argue that labor is an ideal place from which to challenge the racist, classist, cissexist and heterosexist violence that burgeons through the criminal punishment system because of its large-scale

organizing capabilities that are not connected to privatized monies. Furthermore, the union movement has the potential to re-direct the discourse of mainstream LGBT politics—rather than focusing on inclusion and a false sense of "equality," the labor movement can speak to issues of justice. Using critical trans politics as a guide, a justice-centered social movement unionism could not and should not fail to challenge the sites of injustice, even when these are strongholds of union membership.

Conclusion

Towards a Queerer Labor Movement

On March 26, 2013, my Facebook feed was flooded with images of the HRC equality symbol, in shades of red and pink. Those who participated in turning their profile picture into the viral meme[48] did so in an effort to signify their support of marriage equality on the day that the Supreme Court heard the first of two marriage equality cases. Coupled with this outpouring of marriage equality symbols were status updates and posted articles from radical queer thinkers and activists that critiqued both the HRC and the push for marriage equality more generally. The debates that circulated on the Internet between pro-marriage gays and allies and anti-marriage queers were as heated as the debates between pro-marriage gays and allies and anti-marriage conservatives. The radical queers accused the pro-marriage proponents of being reformist and ignoring the more dire struggles of poor LGBT people of color, and the pro-marriage proponents accused the radical queers of bolstering conservative obstacles to progress.[49] The result was a frustrating stalemate that left intact the same systems of power that all involved seem to be working against.

I began this project with a discussion of marriage equality and I end it with a discussion of marriage equality not because my work focuses on same-sex marriage, *per se,* but because my intervention seeks to bridge the gaps between these two camps

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[48] Facebook found a 120 percent increase (roughly 2.7 million users) in profile picture updates on March 26, 2013, the first day of the campaign (Thomas, 2013).
[49] For examples of some of the referenced articles, see: Lang, 2013; Nair, 2013; Coontz, 2012; Farrow, 2010;

in generative and meaningful ways. Rather than suggesting that LGBT justice is a matter of *either* marriage equality *or* ignoring marriage equality in favor of addressing trans youth and queer sex workers (for example), my project suggests instead that these goals need not be mutually exclusive. I suggest instead that the struggle for radical queer justice requires working with the labor movement, an ostensibly reformist movement, but one, I illustrate, that has the potential to be *queered*.

Uniting LGBT justice with the labor movement pacifies both proponents of same-sex marriage and queer opponents, but in doing so it also provides an alternative to the "either/or" that currently permeates the debate. Numerous labor unions have come out in public support of and organized for marriage equality, and yet labor unions are also dedicated to working with many of the same working-class, non-white LGBT people that radical queer critiques argue are left out of mainstream gay rights agendas. That said, I concede with radical queer critics who say that organized labor does not address the most disenfranchised of the LGBT population (e.g. sex workers, and others in the underground economy), but it is here where my project pushes to queer the labor movement through a more radical means of social movement unionism. Instead of relying on a soft social movement unionism that fails to address things like police abuse, sex workers, and the prison industrial complex, I posit a radical social movement unionism that embraces both militant queer and militant economic tactics.

In addition, this project also seeks to trouble the notion that identity politics and coalition must be separate, or that one has more revolutionary potential than the

other. Through my analysis of LGBT workers and the labor movement, I illustrate how LGBT workers stake claims to their unique positions of marginality and simultaneously seek to articulate their oppression as intersectional—that is, not only do the LGBT activists involved in Pride at Work actions, for example, work to struggle against heterosexism and cissexism, but they also work to struggle against economic injustice. Further, the case studies I assess throughout the dissertation reveal the potentiality of intersectional consciousness to extend beyond the confines of rigid notions of movement building. At some moments I describe the relationship between LGBT workers and their union, at others I discuss the relationship between the labor movement and LGBT people both within *and* outside of the union. I therefore posit that social progress can no longer be assumed to exist through either a vehicle of single-issue identity or coalitions that obscure difference, but rather must rely on "a complicated intersectional political approach that refuses to see politics and identity as anything other than always and already coalitional" (Chavez, 2011, p. 3).

Implications of research: Inside and outside of the academy

This dissertation contributes to the fields of communication studies, labor studies, and queer studies. As a communication project, my research interrogates hegemonic articulations of LGBT oppression, as mediated and espoused by the mainstream LGBT movement. Comparing that discourse to the experiences of poor and working-class LGBT union members, I reveal how mainstream LGBT politics often ignores the most marginalized members of the LGBT community. This is an important intervention because it illustrates what is at stake when political communication fails. When the HRC materially and rhetorically asserts that marriage

is the most pressing issue to which LGBT activists must dedicate their time and resources, they simultaneously silence segments of the LGBT population for whom marriage is not the imperative goal.

In addition, by comparing the ways in which mainstream LGBT politics are articulated by non-profits to the politics asserted by the more grassroots LGBT-labor coalitions, my project provides insight into the state of movements for social progress in an age of neoliberalism. Although I am not the first scholar to note the challenges that neoliberalism creates for grassroots organizing (see Duggan, 2004; Harvey, 2007; Spade, 2011; Vaid, 2013), as a communications scholar, I offer a particularly astute analysis of the ways in which messaging functions to contribute to the material consequences of the privatization of social movements. Because non-profits and social movements rely more and more on social media, I was also able to bring in the tools I have gained from being a scholar of media criticism to assess the successes and shortcomings of online activism.

This dissertation also demonstrates the value of bringing queer studies into the field of communication studies. The interdisciplinary nature of communication lends itself to queer scholarship, a field that also values troubling the rigidity of disciplinarity. I hope this project adds to the work of scholars like Erin Rand (2007), Dustin Goltz and Kimberlee Perez (2010), Karma Chavez (2011), and Aimee Carrillo Rowe (2005) who use their background in communication to enhance theories of queer coalitional subjectivity and politics. While many queer theorists stop at the critique of marriage, this dissertation joins activist scholars whose own participation

in political work provides models for alternative solutions for progressive organizing (Spade, 2011; Chavez, 2011; Vaid, 2013).

As a dissertation that addresses the state of the labor movement, my research also contributes to debates amongst labor activists and researchers who seek to resolve the decline of unions. In this project I discuss two theories of unionism: one that champions a move towards social movement unionism (Fantasia & Voss, 2004), and the other that insists labor unions must return to an ethic of economic militancy (Burns, 2011). My participation in and research about queer-labor activism suggests that it will require both the coalitional work espoused by social movement unionists *and* the revival of economically effective strikes to build a stronger movement for working people. Specifically, my intervention illustrates the particular strength of LGBT-labor coalitions and highlights the ways in which the history of the gay liberation movement offers lessons for the contemporary labor movement.

In addition to adding to scholarly understandings of social movements and LGBT politics, my adherence to participatory action research meant this project was also relevant outside of the academy. Ideally, the aforementioned ideas about how to move forward with labor organizing will reach the right ears. However, even if my words are never actually read by LGBT-labor activists and organizers, my research allowed me to simultaneously contribute to LGBT-labor projects. My work on the National Month of Action for Transgender Healthcare (NMATH) benefitted the campaign by providing another event to add to its list of local actions. Further, as one of the few academics involved in the organizing, I was able to spearhead a network of graduate students and faculty who do work relevant to queer and labor communities.

My involvement also led me to write several editorial pieces for popular online websites on topics like ENDA, transgender healthcare, and queer and labor connections to the Voter ID Act.[50]

My use of PAR was also a testament to the productive work of coalitional politics. In building community with labor and LGBT activists through my academic work, I was able to demonstrate the potentiality of working beyond self-directed, single-issue agendas. For example, during my work on NMATH, I was on an organizing committee with an eclectic group of people, including cisgender people from labor unions, transgender people from LGBT organization, cisgender professors, queer union members, and straight union members, among others. Each of us was able to offer some form of resource to the group, despite the fact that we may not have been (explicitly) personally impacted by more inclusive healthcare policies. Karma R. Chavez (2011) explains,

> those who are different connect issues and minimize divisions where divisions might otherwise be expected. When activists refuse to be divided, they not only evidence the development and functioning of coalitional subjectivities, but they also challenge the notion of the singular "ego" that many scholars rely on to discuss motivation for involvement. (p. 14)

While I attempt to emphasize this point theoretically through my examples of the activism and organizing I researched, my own involvement—and those I worked with who may have not had a personal stake in the outcome of the projects—also acts as a heuristic to understand the process of coalitional belonging.

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[50] See www.inourwordsblog.com for referenced articles.

Laboring for [Queer] Change

This project is both celebratory and critical of the contemporary relationship between LGBT people and the labor movement but it is this ostensible contradiction that also provides me an opportunity to nuance contemporary struggles for social and economic justice. Through an interrogation of what I refer to as the "mainstream LGBT movement," I reveal how pervasive articulations of LGBT injustice fail to address the intersectional reality of oppressed peoples lives. That is, when mainstream gay rights agendas focus almost exclusively on marriage equality, progress for LGBT people becomes reduced to single-issue politics. I use critical queer theory—ideas sprung not only from the academy, but also from radical queer activists in the streets—as a contrast, and a framework to further reveal the shortcomings of HRC-style organizing for "rights." More specifically, I draw on critical queer politics to show the promise of a theory that is rooted in an intersectional analysis that troubles taken-for-granted distributions of power.

Somewhere in between "Gay, Inc." and radical queer organizing is the work being done by the LGBT-labor groups upon which I focus. As with the LGBT movement, there is a "mainstream labor movement"—in the US this refers to those unions who are affiliated with the Change to Win Federation and the AFL-CIO. Given the diversity of union membership within these two federations, it is illogical to presume that the movement espouses a singular set of beliefs. That said, my involvement with and research about contemporary labor movement politics enables me to make claims about the trajectory proposed by the leadership of the federations. The agenda of the mainstream labor movement becomes important insofar as I can

point to ways in which it does and does not reflect the goals of queer politics that I argue would benefit the labor movement, and therefore benefit the lives of poor and working-class people. More specifically, this means I look for ways in which the labor movement demonstrates examples of intersectional consciousness and moments of radical potential for challenging oppressive power relations.

Due to recent calls by labor activists and leaders to work towards social movement unionism, examples of intersectionality are more common to find than examples of radical resistance to power imbalances. My analysis of Pride at Work reveals a significant example of how the labor movement can work to address LGBT people—whether they are union members or not—through methods that address the multiply layered forms of oppression facing poor LGBT people, LGBT people of color, and LGBT immigrants. For example, the Pride at Work LGBT-labor training spent an entire morning teaching attendees about the distinct obstacles faced by transgender people and went on to specifically discuss transwomen of color. More than that, the trainers went so far as to explain that many transwomen—particularly transwomen of color—end up doing work in the "underground economy," most commonly as sex workers. The violence experienced by women in this industry, one trainer noted, is often at the hands of the police. Here, Pride at Work provided a powerful analysis of oppression, one that is more complex than most messaging about oppression disseminated by the labor movement. However, Pride at Work ultimately failed to connect that to unions' relationship with police. This moment of intersectional awareness fell short of the radical potential inherent in queer critique.

Social movement unionism, as it's currently being written about and discussed in labor circles, offers a promising, but not revolutionary, means of addressing social injustice. As it stands, theories of social movement unionism promote organizing through solidarity, using corporate campaign tactics, looking beyond National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election as the only form of labor recognition, "rhetorically connecting labor movement revival to a broader movement for expanded democracy and social citizenship in the United States and to anticorporate struggles internationally" (Fantasia & Voss, 2004, p. 129), and "creative" activist tactics (pp. 127-131). This reflects much of what I have been arguing for: however, it misses the importance of reviving the strike, and neglects to challenge the industry-identification promoted by so many major unions that enable an uncritical relationship to violent instruments of the State. I suggest that a critical queer politics—informed by theory and activist history—is useful in pushing social movement unionism towards these more radical ends.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of my research also point to potential for future research. Although I repeatedly address the intersectional nature of LGBT workers, I was unable to delve deeply into the even more uniquely marginalized position of LGBT people of color or immigrant LGBT people, for example. This project points to the importance of further investigating the ways in which the contemporary US labor movement reaches out to groups which have been historically excluded from its ranks, or whose realities have not been fully addressed in labor's initiatives. For

example, organized labor has, in recent years, become outspoken proponents of comprehensive immigration reform that favors amnesty and legalization. More research could be done to examine how and why the labor movement overcame its xenophobic past to support the precarious livelihoods of immigrant workers.

Additionally, this project urges scholars, activists, and organizers to further explore the LGBT organizing that goes beyond single-issue politics. In an effort to go beyond the radical queer verses mainstream LGBT politics debate, this project paves the way to showcase more examples of what is being done *right*. Through this, social movement scholars may want to build on questions of coalition to challenge notions that identity, intersectionality, and coalition can be complements in the process of building movements for social change.

I hope too that future research might explore how social movement unionism can be extended to be an actual threat to the status quo. Although there is little scholarship on social movement unionism, the trend has become fairly prevalent within labor communities. But little work is being done by labor activists to create models of *militant* social movement unionism. It is my wish that those of us invested in strengthening the labor movement will continue to theorize models that challenge the neoliberal efforts to dismantle the organized working-class. Part of this means continuing to find ways to marry economic militancy with identity-based organizing and activism. Although I posit one manifestation of what this union may look like, there is still innumerable room to think through this relationship.

Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, this project addresses a very small segment of the labor movement. My criticism of where unions fall short often does so

from a position of critiquing an already somewhat progressive union initiative. That is, I may critique Pride at Work for not addressing prisons, but I rarely address unions that are doing *nothing* to respond to the needs of LGBT workers. The majority of my interviews and organizing work was done with union members in the service sector (specifically, SEIU and UNITE HERE), and the few times that I was able to talk with organizers and members from trade unions were far less developed in my analysis. I would be interested to see another project tackle LGBT issues in trade unions. Specifically, a project that addresses identity within a union like the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)[51] could assess how a union that *does* display militant economic tactics through threats of strike engages with instances of unique marginalization within their membership.

Onward

In *Irresistible Revolution: Confronting Race, Class, and the Assumptions of LGBT Politics,* Urvashi Vaid writes,

> For me, irresistible revolution is one in which the LGBT movement deploys the power it has gained to challenge and change traditions of ignorance, violence, poverty, and authoritarian control that continue to dominate the world. This defined not by narrowing but by expansion. It calls on us to answer the question posed by the Indian gay advocate and lawyer, Arvind Narrain: 'Is the imagination of queer politics merely about access to rights for

[51] In December 2012, the ILA from 14 major US ports threatened to strike during contract negotiations. Had they not been granted their contract requests, the strike would have been "crippling" (Jonsson, 2012). Technically, a strike of this magnitude would not break the Taft-Harley Act, but the impact would be the same, as more than one location would be impacted.

queer citizens or also about questioning structures which limit the very potential of human freedom?' (p. xvii)

Vaid echoes the desire of many radical and progressive LGBT activists. However, *how* to deploy power to "challenge and change traditions of violence, poverty, and authoritarian control" is less clear. This project adds to the voices of LGBT and allied social justice warriors who demand that the struggle for queer progress does not become a tool in maintaining the status quo. At the same time, the labor movement is struggling to remain alive and relevant in a neoliberal climate. Both movements' enemies are the same: a neoliberal capitalist agenda that co-opts difference and disempowers unions for profit.

The culmination of this project is also a call to action. It calls on the LGBT activists to understand the labor movement as a potential vehicle from which to build a more expansive, revolutionary movement. It calls on the labor movement to understand sexual difference (and the history of activism that sexual difference has spurred) as a benefit, not a distraction to the struggle for economic justice. And it calls on all activists and scholars dedicated to a more just world to understand the ways in which the ostensibly singular system of global capitalism oppresses the working-class of the world in complex and distinctively multiple ways. To combat against such insidious violences then, requires responding through diverse tactics, which includes both economic and social organizing. And it requires an understanding that the particular subjectivities that compose the oppressed peoples of the world are not a hindrance to a unified struggle, but rather the very composition upon which struggle depends.

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