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# Queering Activism: An Analysis of Localized LGBTQIA Advocacy Efforts

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# Queering Activism: An Analysis of Localized LGBTQIA Advocacy Efforts

## **Keywords**

queer advocacy; marginalization; power; oppression; sexuality; gender; homophobia

## **Subject Categories**

Continental Philosophy | Feminist Philosophy | Gender and Sexuality | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies | Political Theory

Senior Honors Thesis

*Queering Activism: An Analysis  
of Localized LGBTQIA Advocacy  
Efforts*

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*Submitted to the Philosophy, Politics and Economics Program at  
the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Honors.*

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*Dedicated to Marcella Irene Lawless, my grandmother and my best friend. Thank you for always seeing me for the person I am and for showing unconditional love, support, and care.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The writing of this thesis has been a tremendous exercise in self-discovery, commitment, and scholarship. There were moments during the process of researching and drafting that I felt surprisingly hopeless. Much of the first two months I spent thinking about what I hoped to explore in my thesis felt a bit like riding a tsunami toward its climax. Moments of elation were often tempered with the unfortunate realization that another person had already thought of the idea that I considered to be unprecedented and innovative. Eventually, however, I came to find something I found incredibly interesting, and I ran with it. As I prepare to submit this document for its final review in partial fulfillment of the requirements of my major, there are many persons whom I would like to thank.

I extend the most enormous and heartfelt gratitude to my adviser, Dr. Rogers M. Smith, whose consistent guidance and wisdom helped this project to become what it is. Our weekly meetings constantly challenged me to elevate my thinking and explore entirely new realms I had never before considered. My experience working on this thesis under your instruction has inspired in me a commitment to academia that I know will last a lifetime. You gave me significant freedom to explore the topics about which I cared and helped me to refine that care. For that, I am eternally grateful.

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*No one wants to be called a homosexual.*

*- Homos, Leo Bersani*

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## FOREWORD

It was not until I came to college that I was able to come fully to terms with my own queerness. I was aware of how my male peers had interacted with me up until that point, and I knew what homophobia was in theory despite lacking the language or capacity to describe it. I also knew and understood difference in a very abstract way. This understanding was, of course, complicated by the fact that I did not "come out" until my very first few days at Penn. Making the transition to transparency about my queerness continues to be a complicated process. I come out constantly, feel pressure at times to represent the "queer perspective" (a notion I challenge on its face - I cannot really speak for anyone but myself), and become increasingly aware about the limitations that have been placed on my sexuality and my body by persons whose value systems clash tremendously with my own.

As I began to reflect on the experiences I have had at Penn and those I had during my adolescence, I began to see how much my queerness affected my perceptions. As a person otherwise privileged, the difference I experienced as an effeminate queer male shaped my approach to critical thinking. The eyes through which I saw the world were complicated not just by a "deviant" sexuality but also by an expression of gender that was apparently problematic because of its incongruity with my male

body. I wondered how these experiences could be reconciled and how to locate spaces where my expression would not be complicated by my bottom location within multiple systems of social privilege. I knew that there were many organizations at Penn whose purpose (at least, the purpose I presumed) was to better the lives of Penn's queer students, but something seemed a bit perplexing to me. If I felt the pressures of homophobia as a white man of socioeconomic privilege, I wondered about the sense of social alienation others might feel whose difference spanned across far more identity categories than did my own. It was out of this thinking that this project was born.

*Queering Activism: An Analysis of Localized LGBTQIA Advocacy Efforts* presents an investigative discussion about the processes of marginalization within communities and the advocacy efforts that are intended to speak for those communities. It raises questions about the nature of advocacy and the ability of leaders to correct for the systems of privilege that colonize efforts of representation. It poses queries like: who is forgotten in the queer advocacy movement? Around whom is the movement centralized? How does this centralization affect in-community response to advocacy efforts? What are the values that lead our advocacy? It opens up a dialogue around the nature of queerness and the kinds of oppression that exist within queer communities, focusing on the ways in which queer men advocate

for and interact with one another. It seeks to illuminate the positive effects of queer advocacy while not veering away from the necessary criticisms of its shortcomings. It reflects on what can be done next by examining where our efforts begin.

At the current socio-historical juncture, systems of power and oppression dominate all experiences. It is, I believe, a lived truth that all persons participate in evolving systems of power and domination; some participate by being oppressed by others. Certain bodies, ideas, and identities are privileged over others. This privileging is what lays the foundation for oppression, an immobilizing and reducing force that creates systematic networks to ensure the stagnancy of any group of persons. This oppression is fortified by systems of power, constantly evolving dynamics that work both within and outside systems to shape the scope of choices that all persons have. When operating together, these systems of privilege and power are known as kyriarchy, a complex pyramid of social structures all interacting to create the totality of oppression. Kyriarchy is the fusion of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, religion, ethnicity, and the countless other markers of identity that have been employed by those with power to diminish those without it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schussler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. "Introduction." *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian*

The praxis of oppression is visible in the existence of marginal groups, which have been long recognized historically as collections of persons who have been politically, economically, and socially disempowered. These groups are typically organized around a single axis of identity, with the norms and ideologies surrounding that identity reinforcing the boundaries of that community. While communities may depend upon indigenous institutions and leaders to learn more about their own identities, scholarship by political scientist Cathy Cohen suggests that many of the systems of privilege that are responsible for the marginalization of identities inadvertently permeate disenfranchised communities.<sup>2</sup> This results in stratification within already hierarchical spaces, a phenomenon Cohen calls advanced marginalization. Advanced marginalization is a pattern of stratification within communities that involves the inclusion and legitimization of marginal group members along a matrix as they conform to dominant norms and behaviors. For those who do not, the costs of exclusion become much higher.

Advocacy organizations, which have historically played a central role in the representation of the disenfranchised, must be able to contend with the stratification of marginal

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*Studies*. Ed. Laura Salah Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009. 1-26. Print. Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen, Cathy J. *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999. Print. Chapter 1.

communities in order to be effective. This requires knowledge of the cleavages within communities and the appropriate ways to address them without forcibly integrating their distinctive values into those communities. Despite their best efforts, as Dara Strolovitch notes, advocacy organizations are not always effective at representing the most intersectionally disadvantaged of their constituents.<sup>3</sup> In fact, many times advantaged subgroups become the focal point of advocacy efforts, leaving those persons with the most significant need even more distanced from their efforts. Reasons for this are numerous, Strolovitch argues; in short, the reproduction of privilege in capitalist advocacy makes it difficult for the most marginalized to gain the attention of those with the most power.

Considering the ways in which marginal communities are produced by systems of oppression and how advocacy organizations tend to respond, I became very interested in how queer advocacy dealt with the issues of privilege in its work. Specifically, I became very interested in how queer men saw their roles in advocacy and how the multiple ideologies that have socialized men's bodies affected their perceptions of their work. To explore this, I designed an in-depth survey that I administered to sixteen queer male leaders on Penn's campus. Because of the

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<sup>3</sup> Strolovitch, Dara Z. *Affirmative Advocacy: Race, Class, and Gender in Interest Group Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007. Print. Chapter 1.

accessibility of Penn students and the significant role that queer advocacy has played on Penn's campus, I felt that I would be able to explore significantly more about queer organizing than if I tried to contact local community or national leaders.

Upon reflection and analysis of the sixteen interviews, it became clear that, despite the good intention of many campus queer leaders, there is significant stratification in the advocacy that is happening at Penn. Claims about inclusivity and community acceptance fall short for queer leaders who have sexual identities other than gay; a process of bisexual, pansexual, and fluid erasure has begun on campus that has left a significant part of the queer community isolated.

This erasure is only amplified by the overwhelming privileging of the gay white male in advocacy efforts. While this may seem intuitive (gay white men likely suffer the least stigma because of their collective identities when compared to other queer persons), I believe that the analysis must be extended to what I refer to as the circularity of advocacy. Queer white men have identity privilege that likely makes it *easier* for them to be open about their sexual and gender identity. The increased ease in coming out allows them greater opportunities to be active in advocacy communities, which increases their ability to dominate agenda items and privilege the issues that concern them. This process becomes cyclical,

resulting in more queer white men who are able to come out and engage in advocacy efforts that are entirely about their issues.

Because advocacy is itself based on a system of values, it came as little surprise that the values which governed advocacy at Penn matched those of the mainstream queer political movement. Ideas around equality as sameness dominate the discourse, with events like "Freedom to Marry Day" representing the cornerstone of the kind of advocacy work in which Penn queer organizations engage. As two leaders of the umbrella queer organization noted, this is because "radical queers" have little to add to the dialogue around advocacy, saying, "no one wants to work with those kinds of radicals - they can't get anything done."<sup>4</sup> Many of the interviews subtly demonstrated a hegemonic application of neoliberal, heterosexual values in the work that was done. The advocacy done here, much like the advocacy done on a national level, does not challenge the system but instead hopes to make queer needs malleable enough so that we may fit inside it. What troubles me about this is its complacency and its willingness to accept the very same system of oppression that denigrates us simply by another name.

Cooptation of values is a larger part of queer advocacy than I had expected. The point I found that most underscored this idea was the dichotomy between participants' description of

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<sup>4</sup> Interview 9.

their ideal leader and who most of the leaders were. While I only interviewed men, I came to learn that the overwhelming majority of queer leaders on campus are male. Further, most are white and are persons of socioeconomic privilege. What stands in contrast to this is that almost every person whom I interviewed expressed interest in having someone lead them who represented multiple disadvantaged identities. I believe this to be the chicness of progressive thinking; leaders want to seem as liberal and inclusive as they possibly can in order to prove their value to their constituencies, which might represent persons of multiple identities. This desire stands in contrast with the leaders who are actually elected, many of whom are white gay males.<sup>5</sup>

While my analysis of the interviews allowed me to make several important conclusions about the nature of queer advocacy at Penn, there is still significantly more that must be done on both local and national levels to understand how queer representation functions. Exploring the kinds of legislation that are proposed, who writes them, who supports them, and how they are processed throughout the legislative process all represent good points of entry for new analysis. This study focused solely on queer male leaders, which is in itself a

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<sup>5</sup> Of the approximately sixty leadership positions available to students in queer organizations, my examination suggests that white gay males hold a supermajority of the positions. Of the sixteen men whom I interviewed, thirteen were white.

limitation. Speaking to female- and otherwise-identified persons might yield a much fuller picture about the relative efficacy of queer advocacy. I would also be interested in exploring the work done by more radical queer organizations, such as Queers for Economic Justice.<sup>6</sup>

The discussion that follows explores the depth of these issues and opens dialogue around the potential of advocacy to be instrumental in giving voice to the voiceless. Chapter 1 engages in an analysis of oppression, power, and kyriarchy, fundamental terms that will be used extensively throughout the paper. Chapter 2 provides an explanation of the theory of marginalization, exploring how marginal communities are made and how systems of privilege are reproduced within already disenfranchised spaces. Chapter 3 includes an overview of advocacy efforts with a specific focus on the issues affecting advocacy organizations whose work involves marginalized communities. Chapter 4 explores queerness as lived experience, with a focus on the nature of homophobia and the effects of privilege within queer spaces. Chapter 5 delineates the

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<sup>6</sup> A cursory reading of the mission statement and primary advocacy principles of Queers for Economic Justice, found at <http://q4ej.org/about>, demonstrates an organizational purpose that stands in sharp contrast to mainstream queer advocacy organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign or the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Their focus is on economic equality, which they consider to be the root of oppression. Although they embrace ideals such as family diversity, advocacy for marriage is not a part of their agenda. They represent an enormous mixture of identities and interests and believe strongly that queer liberation requires an end to capitalist oppression. This kind of economic justice focus is rare in the equal-rights rhetoric to which most mainstream queer organizations subscribe.

methodology of the study, with Chapter 6 thematically organizing the results of the interviews. Chapter 7 concludes by offering points for further discussion and provides an overall analysis of the nature of queer advocacy at Penn in the context of the privilege and oppression that exist within the movement.

## CHAPTER I: OPPRESSION, POWER, AND KYRIARCHY

This discussion must begin first with an understanding of oppression and the nature of its reality. As feminist theorist Marilyn Frye argues, "oppression is a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize, and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group."<sup>7</sup> It requires, among several criteria, the existence of categories into which persons can be placed and barriers that are structural and systematic. It must transcend the individuality of discrimination to ensure the reduction of nearly all persons of a certain group or class.<sup>8</sup> Oppression seeks to naturalize its own hierarchy to ensure the invisible reproduction of its power structures. It is most effective when it is able to circumscribe choice by locating its victims between systematically related pressures; the erection of its double bind, whereby the oppressed's options are reduced to a very small few, all of which result in penalty or censure, represents the cornerstone of oppression's achievement.

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<sup>7</sup> Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing, 1983. Print. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Frye asserts that the categories into which oppressed persons are organized are typically functions of a "natural or physical characteristic." As the ensuing discussion will relate to queerness, a category of both sexual and gender identity that has been argued, among other things, as either natural, deviant, biological, self-selected, or the expression of disability, it is important to note that some might believe that the terms she offers might not be sufficient to understand this kind of oppression. Queerness can be any or none of the aforementioned; it is an identity that persons can assume because of natural disposition or evolution of self-image. Regardless, homophobia relates significantly to misogyny in what it chooses to demonize and how, and this makes Frye's analysis still relevant.

Oppressive networks do not simply relate to one another; they buttress and mutually inform each other's fortitude and scope. Such structures cannot be examined in isolation but must be analyzed in their collective totality. To do so, a ladder system of analysis such as hierarchy will not be effective. Instead, this discussion will employ the analytical term kyriarchy, first proposed by Elisabeth Fiorenza in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*.<sup>9</sup> Kyriarchy is best theorized as "a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression."<sup>10</sup> Systems within kyriarchy can include class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, empire, and other manifestations of discrimination. Analysis through kyriarchy is preferable to hierarchy because of the intersectional approach they theory demands. Hierarchy may see only one system of oppression and how it interacts with a certain population. Kyriarchy suggests that all systems exist together at all times, that identities socially coincide, and that to understand the oppression that faces a community one must analyze social reality in its totality.

Social stratification occurs along various axes of identity, with relationships between them shifting over time as

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<sup>9</sup> *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*. 10.

both structural and subject positions mutate and evolve. These identities are, of course, not authentic in the essentialist sense; they grow in coherence and materialize through political discourse and dominant interpretation. Fiorenza acknowledges the interdependence of such axes, arguing that identity positions in the kyriarchal matrix constitute nodal points of privilege. As oppression evolves over time, so does the primary modality through which one experiences other identities. Like oppression, kyriarchy depends on servitude and exploitation. It needs the categorization of identity classes for a system of power to exist. Kyriarchal barriers are erected by those with power to further their own interests.

The successful exercise of power acts as the fulcrum of oppression. In the context of kyriarchy, power must be understood as both foreign and indigenous. The relations of power are constitutive of the various social hegemonies that contextualize lived experience; it exists in "no binary or all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled,"<sup>11</sup> as it is executed across a matrix of privilege. Power is, in this sense, defined by locus of identity. The more one's identities are privileged socially, the more power one has. When large groups share collective identities that are cherished as normative and

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<sup>11</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. New York: Pantheon, 1978. Print. 94.

valuable, that group is endowed with social power. Deviations from those normative loci will dictate one's experience with disenfranchisement and disempowerment.

These ideas of power and oppression will ground the political and theoretical discussions that will follow in this paper. The structuring of communities and the cleavages within them, the choices made by advocacy organizations committed to representing the broadest range of their constituencies (and their often shortcomings), and the queer male experience are all subject to the dynamics of power and oppression. There is a powerful set of core values that governs the socialization of persons in the United States, and communities once marked as populated by social pariahs seem to be turning toward embracing such values. Assimilationist behavior should not always be considered liberatory; it may result in the supplanting of one system of oppression with one more insidious and prescriptive.

## CHAPTER II: PROCESSES OF MARGINALIZATION

The praxis of oppression is visible in the existence of marginal groups, which have been long recognized historically as collections of persons who have been politically, economically, and socially disempowered. These groups exist outside of dominant norms and institutions, often denied the resources and skills necessary to substantially participate in the creation of their own quality of life. Oppression works in connection with other systems in the production of such groups; specifically, identities, ideologies, institutions, and social relationships have become sites through which disenfranchised communities are constituted.

Categorization as marginal is often tied to a "stigmatized or 'illegitimate' social identity"<sup>12</sup> that has been thrust upon groups by dominant powers. The stigmatization of an identity is often the result of social and political construction, a process that has defined a certain set of characteristics or behaviors as abnormal relative to what is seen as mainstream or socially conventional (also decided by dominant powers). The creation of the "other" requires first the casting of difference as dangerous and then the identification of difference in particular communities. It necessitates purporting that there is an objective standpoint and that the objectivity is itself

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<sup>12</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. 38.

neutral and just and not constructed socially by those whose interests benefit from the constructions. Exclusion, exploitation, and subjugation become justified by the naturalization of difference as detriment. This naturalization coagulates socially, inscribing individual identities as collective group norms that define an unequal social order. Heralded as natural and normative, this ordering inadvertently forces groups together along a specific axis of identity. Most members of that group are then treated by the standards the dominant power has created for their identity class.

Helping to permanently inscribe the contours of identities and norms are ideologies, critical components to power. Ideology presumes to instruct perspectives on what is normative, deviant, and morally right or wrong. It involves the deployment and standardization of norms and values, primarily by dominant groups, in order to reify their power and legitimacy as status in society.<sup>13</sup> Despite its capacity to mold and influence, ideology is still very much constructed by those with power, making it malleable and grounding its meaning in social reality. Ideology helps in the construction of institutions, including organizations, policies, operating procedures, and laws that limit (explicitly or implicitly) the scope of agency of marginal communities.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. 28.

Institutional frameworks extend behind such formal measures to include networks such as hiring practices, job segregation, as well as community segregation. It is through the control of institutions that "dominant groups (and more privileged marginal group members) not only constrain access to dominant resources, but also disseminate ideologies of marginalization that seek to explain the exclusion of certain groups."<sup>14</sup> The effects of these institutions trickle down, ultimately influencing social relationships that can exist with out without de jure discrimination. The real effects of marginalization happen systematically through the daily actions of individuals, many of whom do not actively intend to participate in the process of exclusion but inadvertently reify the reality of marginalization for many.

While oppression achieves its success by virtue of its pervasiveness and intended naturalization, marginalization evokes a consciousness in communities that seeks to challenge structures that circumscribe choice and agency. In response to their relegation, marginal groups will typically seek alternative resources, different conceptual frameworks of self-analysis, and oppositional institutions and structures.<sup>15</sup> Marginalization alters one's perception of the world, creating

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<sup>14</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. 45.

<sup>15</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. 62.

an experience of looking both "from the outside in and from the inside out"<sup>16</sup> such that the rules of dominant society simultaneously govern and exclude them.

The distrust and skepticism produced by social alienation often result in communities turning their trust and loyalty inward through the production of indigenous, community-based organizations, institutions, and leaders. Marginal groups tend to trust these structures as credible sites of self-information, reorienting their conception of issues in terms of the community instead of the self. Together, consciousness of cumulative exclusion and the capacity to organize within communities may lead to more comprehensive political mobilization, as individual experiences with discrimination confer legitimacy to the collective marginalization the group experiences because of their shared identity.

Much of this discussion of marginalization is situated in the traditional dichotomous paradigm of power and powerlessness. There is a group that is dominant and one that is subordinate, and all those persons who constitute the dominant class share equal power while all those constituting the subordinate class share equal disempowerment. This is an intercommunity analysis, and it is one that has often dominated discourse around theories

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<sup>16</sup> hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End, 2000. Print. Preface.

of power. Equally important, however, are intracommunity patterns of power and membership. These kinds of indigenous structures can have a tremendous impact on the political orientation of marginal groups. An effective analysis must go beyond seeing lines of power drawn across a macro social scale. It must explore how those groups that are disenfranchised exist along multiple sites of power, with focus on indigenous relationships and institutions. An understanding of indigenous structures and institutions in marginal communities will reveal how internal structures of power and privilege will elevate some and subjugate others, as "many of the restrictions and limitations...are more or less internalized and self-monitored."<sup>17</sup>

This would mean that communities operate within the boundaries of their own internalized kyriarchy. Governed by principles of inclusion and exclusion, kyriarchy reifies distributions of power by inscribing value systems on communities that have participated little in the construction of those systems. These values travel along multiple axes of identity that exist intersectionally within communities. On a socially aggregate level, the pernicious practice of social organization along lines of gender, race, and class continues to divide communities along those very axes. Aggregate marginalization does not, however, inoculate disempowered

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<sup>17</sup> *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. 14.

communities from organizing themselves internally through the very same hierarchies that have resulted in their own social relegation. In fact, systems of privilege that inspire discrimination are often the first institutions to be transplanted into socially disenfranchised spaces. To understand how power and status affect members of marginalized communities along a spectrum of privilege thus requires an exploration of structures and relationships that exist within that community.

The increasing frequency of "marginal groups...confronted with cross-cutting issues"<sup>18</sup> centralizes the necessity of analyzing not just the origins of those issues but how the issues stratify the community in question. This latter aspect focuses specifically on the individuals perceived as most central to the nature or preservation of the group. In *The Boundaries of Blackness*, Cathy Cohen explores how dominant social and indigenous community norms affect the operation of marginalized spaces. Her analysis focuses specifically on the black community's internal response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. From her discussion, important theoretical tools for further exploration of the nature of intergroup marginalization can be extracted.

Cohen's argument takes initial root in the idea that members of a specific identity class will often share similar

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<sup>18</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. X.

lived experiences. Shared oppression as a result of identity has the capacity to foster a sense of linked fate among members of an identity group. This common narrative of exclusion and exploitation weaves together individuals such that the fate of one cannot be divorced from the fate of many; synonymously, the success of one represents the progress and advancement of many.<sup>19</sup> This shared consciousness is crucial in any attempt to mobilize the group in response to oppression, which often leads to the framing of issues in unidimensional frameworks that focus almost exclusively on the marginalized identity.

To tap into this framework, issues must therefore affect the entire community's identity. These are what Cohen terms 'consensus issues,' as they tend to be uniformly visible and considered central to ending the oppression faced by members of the group in question. Systems of privilege that affect, complement, and dilute oppression around different identities, however, tend to pollute the presentation of consensus issues. A privileging of identities transpires that places certain individuals at the centers of communities - most often, as Cohen notes, "middle-class, heterosexual men...[who become] representatives and markers of the progress or threat experienced by the entire community."<sup>20</sup> For Cohen, the typical

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<sup>19</sup> Simien, Evelyn. "Race, Gender, and Linked Fate." *Journal of Black Studies* 35 (2005): 529-50.

<sup>20</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. 12.

focus on race in the presentation of issues affecting black communities ignores structures such as sexism, classism, and homophobia that equally dilute the power of its members.

Linked-fate frameworks are ineffective at addressing issues that stratify communities. Often, there are specific segments of communities that are disproportionately and directly affected by structural inequalities outside of and in addition to the primary source of their marginalization. Typically, the issues that affect these segments cut across multiple axes of identity. In the instance of Cohen's work, discussions about HIV/AIDS must consider not only the role that race plays but the role that sexuality may have in defining those persons most stigmatized by the disease. Cohen argues that it must be acknowledged that a "gay sexual identity has been seen in black communities as mitigating one's racial identity and deflating one's community standing...[and thus] putting into full view the question of who is "worthy" of support" by community standards.<sup>21</sup> The combination of a stigmatized racial identity with a marginalized sexual identity results in a unique experience with oppression, as it represents individuals who are marginalized intersectionally. The idea of intersectionality entails "the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually

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<sup>21</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. 14.

multiplicative vectors of race, gender, class, sexuality, and imperialism."<sup>22</sup>

This suggests that to conceive of marginalization as simply a reproduction of a singular relationship of power is fruitlessly myopic. Marginalization that occurs because of practices involving identities, institutions, ideologies, and social relationships to enforce complete exclusion, termed categorical by Cohen, is but one manifestation of disenfranchisement. There must be consideration of integrative marginalization, where certain members of marginal groups are given access to dominant resources and institutions despite still being "understood as inferior or subordinate to most dominant group members."<sup>23</sup> Within this system, marginalization still occurs along group lines but seeks to alter dominant ideology by being selectively inclusionary; dominant sources of power are able to produce the falsehood of inclusion by creating a person who can act as a buffer to criticism between powerful and marginal groups. This kind of system begins the privileging of certain persons, ideas, bodies, or representations in communities typically subject to ubiquitous exclusion. These two types of marginalization do not, however, focus on heightened stratification within communities.

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<sup>22</sup> *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*. 10.

<sup>23</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. 59.

Advanced marginalization is a pattern of stratification within communities that involves the inclusion and legitimization of marginal group members along a matrix as they conform to dominant norms and behaviors. It represents the reality of social cleavages within marginal groups, where integration into dominant resources and institutions seems far more possible to only select members of the marginal group; to those who venture significantly from normative behaviors and identities, the costs are significantly higher. Assimilation and cooptation become the nature of the process; due to their access to dominant ideologies and institutions, indigenous leaders begin to abandon much of their personal perspectives in an effort to continue to penetrate dominant society. This typically involves accepting the identities and ideologies that dominant society maintains - the very same ideologies that previously resulted in their collective disenfranchisement. New narratives of inclusion are written, forcing marginal group members to "demonstrate their normativity and legitimacy through the class privilege they acquire, through the attitudes and behaviors they exhibit, and through the dominant institutions in which they operate."<sup>24</sup>

To succeed in this strategy, marginal group leaders must portray their community as representing and adhering to values

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<sup>24</sup> *The Boundaries of Blackness*. 64.

and norms espoused by dominant society. In doing so, these leaders must reward certain kinds of behavior and demonize others. This creates the process Cohen calls secondary marginalization, which targets the most vulnerable members of communities.<sup>25</sup> As access to dominant institutions and power varies across a community, different persons become charged (either through choice or demand) with the regulation of their community's assimilation to conventional behavior. These individuals police their community through the "regulation and management of the behavior, attitudes, and more important, the public image of the group." This policing serves as the site for power struggles within secondary marginalization. Characteristics of marginal group members thought in accord with dominant values are highlighted, resulting in an eventual shift in cultural capital toward a new system of core values.

At the root of this process of policing is the idea that communities can reconstruct themselves for a dominant gaze, reformulating their conception of self to match the values

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<sup>25</sup> It should again be noted that at no point has the significant oppression response for the creation of the marginal group been lifted. What makes oppression such an effective system of disempowerment is that it is so rarely overt. Of course, many would say that these systems are created to be neutral and objective. Many of them are the result of democratic processes that govern through law. As Catharine MacKinnon notes in *Toward a Feminist Theory of State*, "objectivist epistemology is the law of the law, ensuring that the law will most reinforce existing distributions of power when it most closely adheres to *its own ideal of fairness*" (emphasis mine). In a society that adopts its standpoints as functions of expressed power, it is unlikely that such neutrality exists. Bias is inherent, as both laws and institutions are created by those who are likely to reproduce images and thinking in their own likeness.

espoused by those with power. What develops is a calculus of indigenous membership whereby individual persons can be evaluated by new identity characteristics. Boundaries in communities are shifted such that the assimilated become ostensibly closer in power to those who are dominant while the ostracized are moved even further away from the norm. A binary of right and wrong is born out of the necessity to conform, where social isolation evolves into political isolation.

### CHAPTER III: THE POLITICS OF ADVOCACY

Marginalized communities enter the dialogue around political representation at an interesting juncture, as some of the most fundamental disagreements about the advocacy groups that intend to represent them revolve around the potential of those very groups to do significant harm to their causes of justice and equality. Many scholars, seeing power as broadly distributed and political fields as accessible, have been sanguine about the role of pressure groups in American politics. Seeing "pressure groups...to be the essence of politics,"<sup>26</sup> some scholars have believed that disenfranchised communities can rely upon advocacy organizations to restructure the political field so that public disenfranchisement does not need to translate into political disenfranchisement.

As the quantity of advocacy organizations steadily has grown in the last half century, rejoinders to their efficacy have increasingly been heard. E. E. Schattschneider, for example, argued the American system of pluralist interest was biased in favor of the most privileged members of society. He demonstrated that the difference between those who are able to participate in interest and advocacy group activity and those

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<sup>26</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 15.

who are unable to engage the system is even more significant than the dichotomy between those who do and do not vote.<sup>27</sup>

For Schattschneider, the increasing quantity of groups meant very little with regard to empirical representation. The range of groups identifiable in mainstream political discourse was incredibly narrow, and there was nothing truly universal about their representation; pressure from upper-class persons still reigned supreme, bending democracy to oligarchy. Schattschneider's critique would eventually be expanded to include "new concerns about the biases *within* organizations claiming to speak on behalf of marginalized persons."<sup>28</sup> This concern included more than reproduction of the elite bias toward wealth and powerful interests and spoke toward discrimination and hierarchy within advocacy movements.

Scholars have discussed a multiplicity of issues facing advocacy organizations. Theda Skocpol points out the abandonment of low-income and working-class persons in the policy concerns of most advocacy organizations, with identity-based struggles reigning supreme over serious economic issues. There is also the converse of this economic versus social issues concern, where organizations become so heavily focused on class that they ignore the kyriarchal dimensions of gender, race, and

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<sup>27</sup> *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), pp. 30-36.

<sup>28</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 17.

sexual orientation within their advocacy efforts. In these instances, the barriers that help to erect class distinctions are ignored, never effectively addressing the problem at its roots.

The long-term professionalization and corporatization of advocacy groups represent a deflation in radical politics that has also been of concern to political science scholars. As organizations grow in capacity and in connection to the political world, their leaders often begin to diverge from their constituent members, becoming less concerned with the original advocacy ideals that inspired the work and instead focus on image maintenance. The wings of radicalism and protest are eventually clipped, with organizations abandoning oppositional politics and embracing moderate goals and institutionalized tactics.<sup>29</sup>

Socioeconomic bias is also a matter of concern. Advocacy groups require funding to participate politically, and in a capitalist system that is dominated by structural inequality and intentional inaccessibility, the members who are able to populate these organizations are inadvertently those of preexisting privilege. These kyriarchies appear reproduced when examining who is often at the organizational head of much of this work. Such strategic concerns are far more expansive than

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<sup>29</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 45.

what has just been briefly described, including issues of reputation concerns, policy niches, and membership capture.<sup>30</sup>

A final approach to understanding how organizations represent their disadvantaged constituents mirrors theory around the production of marginal groups by Cathy Cohen. In *Affirmative Advocacy*, Dara Strolovitch explores the potential for the theory of intersectionality to explain the difficulties advocacy groups face in determining the persons, images, and bodies for which they will most strongly advocate. Her focus is on social and economic advocacy groups, many of whom represent disadvantaged communities and populations. In order to effectively analyze the work they do and the validity of their claims as inclusive and universally representational, Strolovitch approaches her analysis from a position of power and structural hierarchy. This approach centralizes the necessity of intersectionality and multilayered analysis.

Like kyriarchy, intersectionality posits that characteristics exist in dialectal relation to one another, with different systems of privilege reorienting the experiences a person can have. It dismisses the idea of organizing around a single axis of discrimination and being sectoral in analysis of social justice issues. The reality of this structure stands in contrast to the political response to oppression, which "has

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<sup>30</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 37.

been to organize interest groups and to pursue public policies that are dedicated to addressing single axes of oppression - gender or race or poverty."<sup>31</sup> In fact, of the over seven hundred organizations that Strolovitch analyzed, fewer than twenty were organized explicitly around more than one axis of marginalization.

Strolovitch suggests that an evaluation of any advocacy organization representing intersectionally disadvantaged communities must include a review of the work it has done for the most vulnerable constituents for whom they claim to speak. In their claim to represent the voiceless, their commitments must be grounded in even deeper conviction - and data Strolovitch collected demonstrate their sincere belief in the work they do.<sup>32</sup> Organizations appear committed to those communities most in need by advocating in compensatory ways. Representation is redistributed, from which legitimacy and belief in commitment are derived. There is, however, a degree of contention in these findings, which Strolovitch acknowledges. One possibility is that leaders of advocacy organizations, who should be considered rational political actors, are seeking to maintain the image of their organization by appearing as broad and inclusive as possible. Though not without validity, this

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<sup>31</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 26.

<sup>32</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 208.

interpretation captures only a small piece of a far more complicated story.

There are significant ambiguities and nuances associated with assessing the efficacy of advocacy organizations as representatives for politically marginalized groups. Data collected by Strolovitch confirm the absence of representation for the disenfranchised, suggesting that "less advocacy is devoted to issues affecting disadvantaged subgroups than is devoted to either majority or advantaged-subgroup issues."<sup>33</sup> Issues affecting advantaged subgroups frequently receive more attention than even majority issues, suggesting a distribution of power across advocacy organizations that is very much reflective of the structures that create and cleave social status. Low-income persons are typically ignored, especially among organizations that represent women, queers, and persons of color.<sup>34</sup> This is not to say that advocacy organizations are not indispensable forms of representation for the marginalized. Very often, they are the only groups that are able to exploit policy niches and political dynamics to structurally change the lived experiences of their most disadvantaged constituents.

Even with this commitment, representation for intersectionally disadvantaged subgroups is disproportionately

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<sup>33</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 123.

<sup>34</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 124.

low. The political climate in which these groups operate rewards formalization and conservatization, often resulting in a group whose agenda is far more tame than its originators had intended.<sup>35</sup> Political threats are constant, and many organizations feel that representation of the "safest" members of a constituency ensures respect and legitimacy. Finally, many of the disadvantaged will never have access to the mechanics of advocacy. Their experiences become laboratorized, extracted from reality and turned into academic talking points.<sup>36</sup> Structures like poverty, though chic to analyze, rarely inspire the kind of commitment middle-class, normatively featured constituents can arouse.

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<sup>35</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 128.

<sup>36</sup> *Affirmative Advocacy*. 132.

## CHAPTER IV: QUEERNESS AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

### QUEER SEXUALITY AND HOMOPHOBIA

Gender and sexuality are systems with the capacity for social organization. They are able to demarcate between the morally 'good' and 'bad,' suggesting that they are systems of power. If these two structures do relate to social power, then they are also subject to historical evolution. Queerness with regard to gender identity or sexual identity has been and still often is considered to be a deviation from the normative. As such, it has represented illness, abnormality, and social perversion. Historically, for example, queer men have "played the role of the consummate sissy in the American popular mind...[as] homosexuality is seen as an inversion of normal gender development."<sup>37</sup> What this analysis will begin to explore is the location of queer oppression outside of queer communities, focusing on compulsory heterosexuality and masculinity as a source of homophobia. The angle will then shift to kyriarchy within these communities. The focus of this discussion will include bodies, masculinity, and queer spaces.

The ruling assumption of omnipresent heterosexuality, known as heteronormativity, provides a "perspective through which we

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<sup>37</sup> Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. New York: Free, 1999. Print. 121.

know and understanding gender and sexuality [culturally]."<sup>38</sup> Like whiteness, heterosexuality provides a privilege that translates as nearly invisible. Universally understood as the naturalized sexual order, heterosexuality is difficult to scrutinize because of its functionality as the norm to which all sexualities are compared. It produces an alignment of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles, all of which reinforce hierarchical binaries and traditionalist thinking.

Heteronormativity aids in the naturalization of masculinity on male bodies. Cultural masculinity, as Michael Kimmel notes, is about far more than the expression of the traits and behaviors of "men" - it is a competition against a constant sense of inadequacy fueled by men's contradictory experiences with power and sexuality. Socially constructed by iterative and repeated cultural processes attached to the male body, normative American masculinity embodies the "white, middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual man...[and] is the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured, and, more often than not, found wanting."<sup>39</sup> This kind of masculinity is what most sociologists and gender theorists

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<sup>38</sup> Westerfelhaus, Robert, and Celeste Lacroix. "Seeing "Straight" through Queer Eye: Exposing the Strategic Rhetoric of Heteronormativity in a Mediated Ritual of Gay Rebellion." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23.5 (2006): 426-44. Web. 1 May 2012. 427.

<sup>39</sup> Kimmel, Michael S. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." *Men and Power*. Ed. Joseph A. Kuypers. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1999. 107-32. Print. 111.

would consider hegemonic, the image of men with power that has become the basis in psychological evaluations, sociological research, and literature about what "real manhood" looks like. Bound up in this definition is a strong relationship with power and the ability to exercise power.

The multiple narratives of cultural masculinity coalesce around repudiation of the feminine. Masculinity is performed most successfully when femininity is absent. Men engage masculinity for other men's approval, and other men are the ones who evaluate its performance and offer status as reward for its successful expression. Literary critic David Leverenz argues that "ideologies of manhood have functioned primarily in relation to the gaze of male peers and male authority."<sup>40</sup> That man must prove their manhood in the eyes of other men buttresses sexism and gender division. Masculinity is, in fact, homosocial - men endow other male peers with the authority to confer legitimate masculinity, resulting in an often reckless willingness of performance, self-proving, and expression.

If masculinity is a homosocial engagement, then the principle upon which it functions is fear. It is about the fear men have of one another. Homophobia becomes the "central

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<sup>40</sup> Leverenz, David. "The Last Real Man in America: From Natty Bumppo to Batman." *American Literary Review* 3. 1991. 769.

organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood"<sup>41</sup> because of the fear and shame it produces at the thought of being identified as queer. Femininity is seen so strongly as weakness that masculinity's logical conclusion can only be the hatred of the feminine, an expression of gender identity that often exists on queer male bodies. The performance of a masculine gender identity produces both male expression and value in maleness.

### **HIERARCHY IN QUEER LIVES**

Together, masculinity (and its byproduct, homophobia) and compulsory heterosexuality become major sources of external oppression forcibly cast on queer communities. Cultural homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality, however, cannot be categorized solely as external agents with inward-pointing weapons. Parasitically attached to the indigenous institutions of queer identity, homophobia and heterosexism ensure a forcible cooptation of 'straight' values. These values often dictate the limits of acceptable queerness, authoring a politics of sexual shame that invisibly inscribes the reproduction of oppression. This shame stems not just from the practice of engaging in sex but from one's existence as a sexual being. Sex repression and sex obsession occur in tandem, and this constant policing

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<sup>41</sup> *Men and Power*. 121.

ensures the development of hierarchies in the world of gender and sexual identities. This holds especially true for queer men, who often experience significant differences when examining their sexuality and gender identities against the backdrop of cultural masculinity.

There is within queer male communities an overwhelming imperative to adopt a particular technique and version of the self that has been partially inspired by internalized cultural homophobia and misogyny. Constituted by the "forcible reiteration"<sup>42</sup> of specific gendered behaviors, the 'good' male queer self is expected to materialize within the limits of a grid of culturally intelligible gender norms, the boundaries of which are policed by "historically specific power relations and disciplinary apparatuses."<sup>43</sup> These boundaries involve a very specific kind of 'good' masculinity (or absence thereof) and exaggerated sexual deviance.

The constitution of the stereotypical gay male gender identity, however, has long been conflated with his sexual identity, resulting in a coagulation of gender and sexuality that mistakenly co-constructs a singular, subjective interpretation. By divorcing the two, queer men begin to exist along two axes of identity instead of one. Queerness becomes

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<sup>42</sup> Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

<sup>43</sup> *Gender Oppression and Hierarchy in Queer Men's Lives*. 36.

attributable to the expression and performance of gender and the desires of sexuality. This creates the opportunity for hierarchy, informed by the policing of bodies and expression. The severity of this surveillance in queer male communities raises the issue of homophobic policing of gender identity.

Tim Bergling's *Sissyphobia* documents the symbolic and performative significance of "straight-acting" masculinities in queer male spaces. Socially normalized masculinity, he notes, has significant currency in the queer sexual market; of the men he surveyed, many went so far as to say that they "are no different from straight guys in their behavior, and they resent the effeminate men who contradict this assertion."<sup>44</sup> Queer men reproduce not just a gender binary but a hierarchy of gender expression, seeking to expel the feminine other and thereby exemplifying the policed limits of identity legitimacy.

The subversive potential of cultural masculinity fused with queerness is limited. Its intent to reposition the stereotypical queer man in a kyriarchal matrix is circumscribed by the hegemonic nature of heterosexuality. Masculinity is caught within "the regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality that is invested in essentializing, naturalizing, and eroticizing a form a power" that is contingent on the repudiation of femininity.

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<sup>44</sup> Bergling, Tim. *Sissyphobia: Gay Men and Effeminate Behavior*. New York: Harrington Park, 2001. Print. 57.

This process is fundamentally contrary to the methodology of queerness, which seeks to go beyond binaries and disavow categorizations that reinforce structural power and limitations. What transpires in this appropriation of cultural masculinity is the "heterosexualizing"<sup>45</sup> of queerness. The limits of the articulation of queer desire are rendered narrow by the adoption of a heteronormative economy of desire.

The rationalization of gender bigotry, as Bergling suggests, stems from the fear of visibility. Culturally, the combined presence of effeminacy and the male body makes queerness readable. The ability to control the privacy of sexuality is then lost, leaving the effeminate queer man without the defense of secrecy in the face of significant homophobia. Assimilation in this instance is highly desired, as masculinity on a male body renders queerness invisible. This implicitly understood cultural surveillance exists and is very much felt. In truth, however, this fear and the subsequent assimilation are functions of the regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality. This creates an opportunity for division along lines of social safety, as if one's existence as a man is nullified by one's femininity.

Normalizing social masculinity ensures the presence of homophobia in queer spaces. Naturalizing masculine male bodies

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<sup>45</sup> Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1995. Print. 132.

is, in effect, a compensatory mechanism. Because queerness connotes a failure in masculinity, reinforcing and celebrating a misogynist and hegemonic gender binary can only author inequality. If same-sex desire should unite queer men, it is a borrowed, heterosexual values system that divides them. Femininity becomes a source of shame and an expression that must be policed for the safety and success of the community.

## CHAPTER V: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to identify how internalized cleavages among queer communities and specifically among queer men affect the style, priorities, orientation, and execution of queer advocacy efforts in a localized space.<sup>46</sup> Due to time and resource constraints, I elected to look toward queer organizing on the University of Pennsylvania campus. This decision was made because of the accessibility of queer leaders, the wide range of work done around queer activism, and the significant standing that many of the queer organizations have on campus (the Queer Student Alliance, known also as the QSA, has been active on campus for approximately forty years, for example). Penn has been lauded as one of the safest and most accepting institutions nationally for queer students by publications such as *Newsweek*, which made me comfortable that the environment in which I would be working would likely have a diversity of thoughts, opinions, and styles of activism.

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<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that this research question is a more pointed one than the inquiry with which I began my work. Originally, I was interested in understanding how queer male pornography functioned as an indigenous institution among queer men and thus affected their conceptions of gender identity and sexual identity.. Unfortunately, the results of this portion of the study were generally inconclusive. For something that would need to chart a kind of change over time, I do not think that in-depth interviewing was the most effective method to obtain the data I needed. This was a shortcoming of the study, and while I would hope to learn the answer at some point, I did not think that the data I garnered were especially relevant any longer.

With the large quantity of students involved in activism, there was a large range of gender and sexual identities on which I could focus. Past leadership trends have shown that cisgender,<sup>47</sup> white, queer men have typically been leaders, which suggested that a male-identified population might be the most sensible community to explore. This interest was solidified by my continued interest in how queer men engage one another socially and politically. As a queer-identified man, I know fully the effects of homophobia inspired by the necessity of cultural masculinity. I thought then that speaking to men about their work in queer activism would shed light on cleavages not just within the queer community at large but also between men who advocate for one another. The politics of their advocacy would hopefully expose a narrative of priorities that might illuminate how the transportation of privilege from one social sphere to another affected their advocacy efforts.

I was also very interested in the perspective of leaders, as student organizations on Penn's campus are rather empowered to set their own agendas and do the work that they feel is most valuable. Leaders on campus would, I imagined, have a unique perspective on how their organizations interface with their constituencies. Because of the sheer size of the university and

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<sup>47</sup> A class of gender identities where an individual's gender identity matches the behavior or role considered appropriate for one's sex.

its undergraduate and graduate populations, queer leaders are expected to be representative of multiple communities and significant numbers of interests.

The population on which I decided to focus was queer-identified, male-identified students on campus who had been or currently were engaged in queer activism on campus. To learn more about their work and experiences, I decided to approach this research through in-depth interviews. I designed a series of seventeen questions for the interview that included commentary on the organizations they led, the thoughts they had about their own activism, and the communities their organizations did not effectively represent.<sup>48</sup>

Of the eighteen leaders whom I contacted, I was able to interview sixteen. What follows is a mix of summary and analysis of the content of the interviews, organized thematically around the ideas I found most prevalent in our discussions. To ensure their anonymity, no actual names will be shared, as this paper may be read by colleagues and friends of those whom I interviewed.

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<sup>48</sup> Please see the attached Appendix for a copy of the questions I used during the interviews. Depending on the direction the interview went, there were times that I went off-script and allowed the discussion to flow more organically. Because of this, there were times when I would look at specific angles of what was discussed in order to extract more useful information.

## CHAPTER VI: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Upon completion of the interviews, I did a close listening of the recordings and took extensive notes in order to unearth common themes among the experiences of the leaders. The information below represents the thematic highlights of the content of the interviews. I was able to interview sixteen queer leaders between the ages of 19 and 24. All identified as queer, with fourteen expressing significant preference for same-sex partners. Of the two who expressed mixed preference, one considered himself to be sexually fluid, with interests across multiple sexual and gender identities, and the other identified as having a strong preference for same-sex attraction but a level of interest in opposite sex intimacy. All sixteen interviewees identified their gender identity as male.

All those interviewed are or were leaders of advocacy organizations, with the exception of one male leader who has been involved in queer activist work but has not yet held a position in an established organization. Religious identification among the men was primarily agnostic or atheist. Their socioeconomic backgrounds were mixed. Of the sixteen, thirteen identified as Caucasian, two as Black, and one as Hispanic. I did not inquire about political ideology or preference, nor did I ask questions about the extent to which each interviewee had opened up about his sexual identity. While

these questions could certainly be relevant and might influence their perspectives, I wanted to keep the focus on the work in which they were currently engaged.

### **CIRCULAR ADVOCACY AND SUBGROUP ADVANTAGE**

When I first wrote the question, "Is there a specific queer identity or body that is easiest to advocate for?", I expected responses to include monosexual identities or persons who most clearly represented queerness that was visible in the media. I was not sure if there would be uniformity in the answers that I received or if the question would be as intelligible as I had intended for it to be. It was surprising to me that, upon review of the sixteen interviews I conducted, fifteen persons had the exact same answer - the gay white male.<sup>49</sup> Because of his racial composition, the growing naturalization of his sexual identity, and the already privileged nature of his bodily appearance, it is this queer person whose needs dominate agendas, orient the missions of groups, and define the goals and successes of queer movements at large. These are the individuals who have a "subgroup advantage," as Dara Strolovitch would argue. They are only one segment of the collective queer community but still appear omnipresent.

Challenges to the legitimacy of this claim can be answered by the formation of two organizations that were born out of need

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<sup>49</sup> Interviews 1-3, 5-16

to address the multifaceted nature of interacting identities. The first, Queer Persons of Color (QPOC), grew from a taskforce that was organized to address a critical absence of dialogue around race and queerness. The second, Queer Ladies at Penn (QLAP), is an unofficial organization meant to address the unique experiences of queer women. As was noted by one queer leader, "most organizations on campus are not equipped to handle the double minority status that comes with being a queer person of color."<sup>50</sup> QPOC is meant to address the needs of communities that are of double minority status in a way that mirrors the mission of QLAP. That this leader also believed vehemently that QPOC consistently ranked on the lowest level of priority for collective queer organizations on campus - as he said, "We have always been at the absolute bottom of...the list of priorities"<sup>51</sup> - should also be considered indicative of implicit systems of ranking of privilege in advocacy efforts.

Unfortunately, with gay white men at the forefront of much advocacy, the myriad ways in which queers participate in discrimination and oppression are absolved because of the misguided sense that "we are all in this together."<sup>52</sup> This is not to say that these leaders have not been responsible for significant change or that the many queer leaders who have been

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<sup>50</sup> Interview 16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Interview 16.

engaged in advocacy efforts for decades go unnoticed. However, just like in any movement for social change, participants must be conscious of the kind of privilege that they bring to the table for discussion.

The domination of gay white men is, I believe, something more than just the kyriarchal interactions of privilege fusing together to locate that person closest to the core of power. I propose a consideration of the privilege of coming out, an opportunity that contributes to a process that I call circular advocacy. Gay white men match the social and cultural images of queerness that are most accessible and acceptable to the public at large. Their bodies are legible and their behaviors, though often caricatured, have resulted in a sense of normalcy around their expressions and sexuality. Gay men have, in many ways, become American cultural icons.

One need only consider the popularity of a show like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, ranked as the most successful program to ever be broadcast on the Bravo television network, to see the validity of this claim. The show revolves around five effeminate queer men who are matched every week with a culturally and socially struggling heterosexual man with the purpose of bettering him. Because queer men are assumed to have knowledge of style, grooming, and the desires of women that our outweigh those of their heterosexual counterparts, these five men become

the "gurus" of fashion, design, and etiquette. The public display of their queer sexuality became part of the mainstream cultural discourse. The same could be said for the characters of Will and Jack on *Will and Grace*, the character of Kurt on *Glee*, and the partnered male couple on *Modern Family*. The speed at which queer male identities have gained social acceptance is, in many ways, unprecedented and impressive.

This increase in public acceptance has, relative to the experiences of many other queer persons, mitigated much of the stigma around being male and queer. This in turn has lifted the numerous barriers that keep an individual from coming out. As one shares transparency around sexuality and gender identity with family and friends, there are many different ways in which those individuals could react. Many of these reactions are conditioned by social, cultural, and religious beliefs around queerness and same-sex desire. That gay white men are often readable as queer and also participate in communities that have partially normalized queerness greatly reduce the difficulties one might experience when coming out. This results in an increase in their numbers and constructs the appearance of their majority status.

The privilege of coming out is complemented by the socioeconomic and class privilege many queer white men experience because of their race and their bodies. As a class,

this group is likely to have more time to participate in local and national community activism. Their overwhelming participation in this activism leads to their domination of agendas, with issues they tackle typically affecting their community directly. Their privileges are increased and their social statuses are elevated, allowing the next generation of gay white men to take up the battle from an even more integrated position. A cycle of privilege begins, turning advocacy itself into a circle. This is what I call circular advocacy, a phenomenon that I believe is unique to queer communities. The process of coming out and shifting personal opacity has much power. That certain individuals can become transparent about their identities is central in the quality and direction that advocacy on their behalf will take. This community overwhelmingly subscribes to beliefs of heterosexual ethics and the virtues of classification, which I will demonstrate also influence the quality of queer advocacy.

### **HETEROSEXUALIZING ADVOCACY**

**Joseph:** You just referenced changing the way you express your gender or how you "wear" your sexuality. Tell me a little more about that.

**Interviewee:** Sure...[those with power] think that, because I am a man, I need to act masculine. I need to not really talk about anything sexual that happens to me. When I talk about issues, it is under the presumption that I want to be in a long-term, monogamous relationship regardless of the gender of that person. And, if I deviate from that, it will damage my ability to get whatever I

want to get done, done...if I downplay my homosexuality enough, they will perceive me as more masculine. So, yes - I guess I put on my "straight face."<sup>53</sup>

**Joseph:** You do a lot of advocacy in non-queer spaces. You are probably having a lot of meetings with people who are not queer. So, how are you presenting yourself in those spaces? How are your gender and sexuality being performed and worn? How are you making claims around inclusion?

**Interviewee:** It is so interesting...I lower my voice a little bit, I am a little more masculine - just embodying that maleness. A lot of it, I think, really is subconscious, and I don't even realize that I am doing it...even though the environment that I am in is very accepting, you feel uncomfortable expressing yourself in a certain way out of fear that you might be making other people uncomfortable or be implicitly judged by other people. It extends to how I present myself in non-queer contexts, such as at a [professional] meeting...I almost want to put them more at ease by showing them that "Hey, I am gay, but I am just like you." I really do feel like if you turn them off with your queerness you screw your own chance to have a platform from which to shout your message.<sup>54</sup>

Heterosexuality is more than an ideology that fortifies the extensiveness heteronormativity. It is also more than a system of sexual hierarchy that thrives on the demonization of difference and the otherization of queerness. It is a way of understanding an exchange of power through its performance. The snippets above include questions I asked all the queer leaders whom I interviewed. Very few had experience in advocating for their organizations outside of queer spaces. Thus, their

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<sup>53</sup> Interview 10.

<sup>54</sup> Interview 16.

reflections on changes in their gender expression contingent on location of the self were minimal. The two leaders above, however, spent most of their time working with either administrators or peers, all of whom likely identified as heterosexual. Those heterosexual persons had the power to positively respond to the advocacy efforts in which these leaders were engaged.

As the first mentions, alignment of expression and minimization of sexual queerness become vital in these exchanges if success is to be garnered. The "straight face" of presentation reorients typical heterosexual politics of exclusion by claiming total sameness - sexuality here is about the arbitrariness of preference and the absence of acting on desire. In performing this similarity, successful advocacy becomes possible. A leader must self-heterosexualize if he hopes to puncture the homophobic veil that oppresses queer communities. Their choices in doing so are partially understandable. An appeal to the preferences of those with power provides an opportunity to ingratiate oneself to the oppressor. Unfortunately, this choice reinscribes the hierarchy of power that oppresses the queer person and body. As the men I interviewed suggest, it often feels changing of oneself is an effort to please an individual with power. These men change

their behaviors in the hope that a person will reads this change as their willingness to be complicit to orders of power.

That such change in self-performance is done "subconsciously" is certainly a cause for alarm. It suggests in part that the oppressed have internalized the very consciousness of their oppressors. They have adopted heterosexuality as a coping mechanism for the rampant homophobia that demonizes and destructs their bodies, desires, and communities. Queer identities are so bound up in heterosexuality that liberty from that confinement engenders dissonance in queer spaces. This binding is deeply enriched by the overwhelmingly panopticonic nature of heterosexuality itself. Images of heterosexuality are so conditioning and pervasive that even in the creation of queer communities there can be no isolation from heterosexuality. It is fundamentally integrated into queer spaces because of its ubiquity and deep connections with other systems of oppression like sexism, racism, and capitalism.

Heterosexuality is thus one of the indigenous institutions that Cohen describes as influencing the particular norms and ideologies of marginal communities. Heterosexuality is far more than compulsory; it is a way of understanding relations between the sexes, what is natural about bodies and the acts in which they engage, and how society is meant to be organized along axes of differentiation. Heterosexuality becomes a community

apparatus to police expression and action, mutating into the dominant gaze through which queer persons self-evaluate. It espouses a system of values that causes queer persons to reconceptualize the self in an effort to align with those values.

Boundaries in the community shift such that those individuals who match the organizational and behavioral expectations of heterosexuality come to believe that they are closer to the core of the system's power. Those who fail to match the expectations are led to believe that they have been even further disenfranchised. This binary of moral rightness as social power and wrongness as social powerlessness only reinscribes the oppression that the reidentification of self had hoped to deconstruct. Heterosexuality's structuring as an indigenous institution is indeed voluntary. Its connection to the social power and status of normalcy which queer persons are conditioned to desire reifies it as a pillar of appropriate expression of queerness. It reorients the behaviors of queer communities by organizing them along the very lines of the heterosexual spaces that are responsible for its politics of exclusion.

This heterosexualization is again discernible in the agendas of many of the queer activist communities on Penn's campus. The Queer Student Alliance, for example, is described as

a "more social organization that ignores larger political issues"<sup>55</sup> by focusing on the creation of inclusive and queer-friendly spaces for members of the Penn community. Originally the only queer organization on Penn's campus, the QSA has a long history of liberatory politics and campus engagement.<sup>56</sup> As the quantity of queer organizations increased, the QSA's involvement in political work diminished. One of its few remaining and well-publicized advocacy efforts is an event called Freedom to Marry Day, which allows persons of "all sexual identities [to] come tie the knot."<sup>57</sup> In obvious protest of legislation such as the Defense of Marriage Act and social demonization of same-sex partnerships and marriage, Freedom to Marry Day is meant to reflect QSA's conception of equality and the actions necessary to achieve that status.

Without engaging in a critique of marriage equality too extensively, gay marriage has been lauded as a "magic pill that will cure all the ills facing contemporary queers."<sup>58</sup> The legalization of marriage between same-sex partners is argued to confer a status of normalcy among queer couples. This sense of integration will in turn expand across multiple public spaces, tackling the issue of homophobia with the rhetoric of sameness

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<sup>55</sup> Interview 1.

<sup>56</sup> Interview 2.

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/events/291541562843/>

<sup>58</sup> Nair, Yasmin. "Against Equality, Against Marriage: An Introduction." *Against Equality: Queer Critiques of Gay Marriage*. 2.

equality. In truth, the legalization of gay marriage is not the final step to a full and robust queer citizenship. In a neoliberal, capitalist state, marriage becomes a tool of the state to legitimate certain forms of kinships and relationships. It acts as one of the base units through which capitalism can distribute its benefits. Marriage becomes the marker of social worth, as evidenced by the more than one thousand benefits that marital status provides.

Freedom to Marry Day is a common celebration. Gay marriage is a widely recognized and desirable goal, and there is much truth in saying it is far more possible to achieve than any other kind of drastic social reorganization. It is, however, an exclusive objective. The rhetoric around marriage typically involves gays and lesbians, leaving out the many other kinds of queer persons who should benefit from the movement's work toward equality. It requires a familial organization that reinforces the necessity and desirability of monogamy and rewards those who are married as being "good queers." Web pages that support queer equality, such as Wipe Out Homophobia (WHOF),<sup>59</sup> directly link the achievement of marriage to an end to bigotry. The placement of certain queer persons closer to the center of social power will only serve to further alienate those already on the margins. That an organization such as QSA supports an event like this

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<sup>59</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/WHOF1>

without critical reflection on its effects on the *entire* queer community speak to which persons are intended to be the beneficiaries of its advocacy.<sup>60</sup>

The heterosexualization of queer advocacy is visible also in its intentional and pointed desexualization. As Michael Warner argues in *The Trouble with Normal*, an enormous part of the contemporary, neoliberal queer identity is the divorcing of sexuality from queerness.<sup>61</sup> This became apparent in an interview I had with a queer leader who worked with organization the purpose of which is to prepare queer persons for being "out on the job." He held a position of creating marketing materials for the organization, and for a particular event we discussed, his colleagues put together a montage of images for publication. These images were intended to be provocative by conventional standards, as they featured mostly nude persons engaged in physically affectionate acts with one another.

His colleagues were censured immediately for "not promoting an accurate representation of what LGBT life is like here at Penn,"<sup>62</sup> discipline with which he agreed because of the montage's

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<sup>60</sup> The queer leader whom I interviewed mentioned conflicts that have recently arisen around the work that QSA does. Its exclusionary nature is apparently becoming more manifest, as he mentioned a skirmish with a colleague that "pitched QSA as a monolithic, heteronormative group that was conforming to the conventional ideas of being LGBT but not the various other iterations of that term that have come to being." His response was that, of course, it is impossible to please all constituents and that the organization needed to consider how it would be perceived if it seemed fragmented in its work.

<sup>61</sup> *The Trouble with Normal*. Chapter 2.

<sup>62</sup> Interview 6.

"negative portrayal"<sup>63</sup> of queer bodies and homosexuality. His language described an implicit danger in the alleged oversexualization that was located not within the queer community for whom the event was organized but outside it. The fear was of the judgment that would be cast by the dominant gaze of heterosexuality. In an organization so oriented toward the integration of queer persons into primarily heterosexual spaces, this group's breaking with normative expectation severely jeopardized the sanctity of its mission.

This in-community policing again surfaced during a discussion of a new queer social space on campus, called "the brothel."<sup>64</sup> Although not intended to be used sexually, the space is described in a way connotes a location for unconventional sexual practice. This name was received poorly because of what images it would conjure about queer life at Penn.<sup>65</sup> That queers might enjoy sex that is unconventional (or even sex at all) is too dangerous a line to walk when trying to interface with the heterosexual public. Based on a model of socializing that had been in place several years ago, known as GFAC (Gay Fridays at Cliff's), the "brothel" is intended to be a space where people can meet and mingle without as much concern for sexual minority phobia. The only difference between the two is the name. That

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

such a name could be labeled as detrimental for the queer community delineates a clear belief in the danger of openly self-sexualizing.

The hierarchy in realm of advocacy is specifically one of sexual identity presentation. Again, those who most closely align to heteronormative performance of values - called homonormative values - are considered to be the most helpful queers in the production of a healthy queer community. Those who sexualize the community or admit that sexual variance might exist in queer spaces run the risk of derailing the collective political project of integration. To effectively anchor queerness in heteronormative domesticity and consumption, it must deradicalized; at the partial nexus of that radicalism is the sex in which queer persons engage. Successful heterosexualizing means casting attention away from the queer body and continuing queer integration into heteronormative structures. This in turn requires a divorce from the very content of sexuality. To appear normal, queers must behave normally. This means not engaging in acts of sodomy, public sex, or group sex. That this approach is a clear apparatus of community policing falls outside of the scope of attention of some queer leaders. To call it out as dangerous to the community is a violation of the norms upon which the community's attempts at garnering equality have been built. As one leader notes, "no

one wants to work with those kinds of radicals - they can't get anything done."<sup>66</sup>

### **SEXUAL MINORITY ERASURE**

That a specific population is privileged within queer advocacy efforts suggests that there must be populations that suffer exclusion. Because this exclusion is likely bound up in identity, I was very interested in seeing whether there would be in-community stratification around claimed sexual identity. Categorization is an integral part of queer movements at large. A person must either be gay or lesbian because of the clarity of those terms and the politicized nature of those labels. To be ambiguous with regard to one's sexual preference is often an invitation for derision. The reality of this experience combined with the increasing popularity of the term "queer" as both a sexual/gender identity marker and the new incarnation of the LGBTQIA acronym led me to believe that there would demarcations within queer advocacy around sexual identity.

Nearly all of the leaders whom I interviewed identified a strong preference for same-sex partners; only two identified themselves as sexually fluid. One of those two individuals identified himself as newly active in queer advocacy. He and his peers recently founded an organization meant to address the needs of those students whose sexual identities have been

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<sup>66</sup> Interview 9.

"personally excluded by other student advocacy groups."<sup>67</sup> As he noted in our conversation:

"I became increasingly frustrated with advocacy, work, and exploration around non-monosexual sexualities. There seems to be a lot of internalized homophobia going on, which is even an issue in non-monosexual populations. There doesn't seem to be real room for the ambiguity that is inherent in these sexualities because of an obsession with identification and labels. People are talking about a static nature to sexuality that doesn't really exist."<sup>68</sup>

An organization such as the Queer Student Alliance is meant to represent students of all sexual and gender identities, yet its politicized nature and requirements of personal disclosure reduce the safety of the space it intends to create. Its advocacy becomes skewed because of the assumptions it appears to be making around present populations because of their presumed absence. That the absence of this population might be a function of the behavior of the organization does not seem to have been a substantive part of the dialogue around where this group is failing its intended constituents.

The mainstream advocacy organizations that have been thus far available to queer students at Penn appear to be engaging in a process known as bisexual or sexual minority erasure. A conscious or unconscious effort, sexual minority erasure tries to alter or ignore the aspects of more fluid sexualities in an

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<sup>67</sup> Interview 7.

<sup>68</sup> Interview 7.

attempt to diminish their legitimacy or meaning. This erasure is a reification of the heterosexual/homosexual binary in which, I believe gay-identified men and women have an investment.

Although superficially surprising, the attempts of gay men and women to render sexually fluid persons invisible have strong connections to the sameness equality work in which many conventional queer organizations engage. Queerness is rhetorically touted as something natural and therefore acceptably essentialized. A person is "born" with strong same-sex attraction but ironically cannot be born with attraction along a spectrum of desire. To be bisexual or fluid is considered a strategy to retain heterosexual privilege. In doing so, one becomes less appropriately "queer" and disavows membership in that identity class. As one leader whom I interviewed notes, "...gender identity is allowed to be on a spectrum - so why should sexual identity need to be boxed in?"<sup>69</sup>

The idea that sexuality can be fluid or can evolve destabilizes the very categories that are necessary for the communication of queer advocacy's legitimacy. If queerness can change over time, or if desire can mutate as one gains new experience, the claim that sexual orientation is natural loses its authenticity. Queerness once again becomes a "lifestyle" that is depraved and abhorrent. As part of queer advocacy's

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<sup>69</sup> Interview 13.

integration efforts, sexual orientation has needed to be cast as immutable. Just like race or gender, discrimination on the basis of an immutable characteristic should be considered morally reprehensible. This immutability has an exonerative force, as it is typically behind the boundaries of our conventional moral code to punish a person for a situation for which she did not ask. Fluidness threatens the very foundation on which that immutability is built.<sup>70</sup> It casts desire as murky and unclear. It challenges monogamy and efforts at heterosexualized integration.

Much of my discussion with the leader of the new fluid sexuality advocacy organization revolved around his belief that current organizations on campus were not capable of representing this segment of the queer community. He identified a range of reasons, many of which spoke to the stigmas attached to fluidity that have been mentioned above. Monosexuality continues to reign as the naturalized queerness in advocacy. This leaves those who do not have the privilege of maintaining and experiencing that identity on the margins of the community that is supposed to include them.

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<sup>70</sup> It is incredibly frustrating as a queer person to hear this kind of thinking and realize that many persons consider it to be legitimate. Sexual preference is itself immutable because desire is in many ways out of the control of a person. This is not to say that individuals are not socialized to see certain bodies and identities as sexually desirable. In fact, I believe that more often than not significant aspects of our desire have been colonized by the multiple exclusionary ideologies that define our social experiences and interactions.

## EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Interviewees were asked to reflect on their own experiences with leadership and how they believed their executive boards and constituents viewed them. These questions were complemented by a thought exercise prompted by the following query - "Who is your ideal queer leader?" What I found in their responses was first the expectation of heterosexual virtue, with a specific focus on the righteousness and naturalness of monogamy and conventional sexual practice. The sexual ethics of leaders were constantly on trial, as was the content of their personal and sexual lives. Not surprisingly, the choices they made were publicly evaluated and criticized by their peers. I also noticed a strange dichotomy in those whom I interviewed regarding the person whom they considered to be the most effective queer leader. Their construction of this individual encapsulated as many oppressed identity classes as the respondent could imagine along lines of race, gender identity, sexual identity, ability, and religion.

I have already demonstrated that the chicness of heterosexual monogamy has begun to permeate queer values. It is visible in the fight for gay marriage and in the descriptions many have of good queerness. Not surprisingly, leaders who engage in advocacy for these values are expected to mirror them in their behaviors. One queer leader whom I interviewed

discussed at length the pandemic issue of queer "slut-shaming,"<sup>71</sup> wherein he was publicly ridiculed for having been transparent about having multiple sexual partners. He was chastised as being a "poor face"<sup>72</sup> for his organization because of his willingness to embrace those values that are "unbecoming of gay men."<sup>73</sup>

He described an overwhelming subscription of queer persons to forced monogamy, "as if it were the natural way that things should be."<sup>74</sup> This is yet another paradox of queer advocacy. The sexuality of queerness is repeatedly placed at the feet of the guillotine. Describing our bodies as sexual is an obvious social transgression and one that we cannot embrace. The only time that sexuality can be discussed, of course, is during a period of condemnation. When the values that have colonized queer advocacy are violated, discussion of sexuality is rampant and public. This is a blurring of the private-public divide. While it is understandable that the personal actions of leaders may be held to a different moral platform by constituents, it is baffling that being "unorthodox" sexually in a queer community could be subject to such significant censure.

Leaders are also expected to embrace the diminishment of their oppression. When interviewees were asked who their ideal queer leader was, responses typically constructed a queer,

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<sup>71</sup> Interview 2.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

female-bodied person of color, someone who was religiously or physically marginalized, or someone who fell within the fluid spectrum. Others suggested that it would be useful to have a trans person as a leader in the advocacy movement, as this person was the most deeply marginalized by external forces.<sup>75</sup> These desires were in conflict with what some interviewees referred to as "the reality of advocacy"<sup>76</sup> - the necessity of looking and behaving like those with power in order to puncture the barriers to accessing that power. Even if this kind of thinking did dominate the minds of queer leaders, it certainly did not always match the thinking of their constituents. As one queer leader of a central advocacy organization noted:

"I came to Penn thinking that being gay would make me unique and a really viable leader for advocacy efforts. Now that I have taken my position, I have gotten more flack for being a gay white male of privilege than I ever thought possible. I thought I would be perceived as a really competent leader. Instead, I think most people see me as a 'good ole boy.'" <sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> It is interesting to note that Penn has been a leader in trans healthcare for faculty, staff, and students and that students who do not identify as trans have predominantly led this work. There can be multiple explanations to this phenomenon, though I am of the opinion that this flagrant discrimination of having trans healthcare for students and not for faculty and staff was so easily accessible by queer leaders that it had to be on the agenda. Although much of my arguments in this discussion is about hierarchy within advocacy, this is not to say that leaders are not cognizant of their own privilege. When one person is minimized by depression and degradation, systems of power ensure that we are all diminished. Consciousness of this is very real for many queer leaders.

<sup>76</sup> Interview 3.

<sup>77</sup> Interview 5.

To be perceived as the most effective leader, an individual needs to be the least socially enfranchised. This requires embodying the identities that are constantly marginalized socially. This person would in turn be representative of the "broadest bases of people,"<sup>78</sup> drawing in a wide and varied identity constituency. There is something legitimizing, it seems, to be visibly oppressed in already oppressed spaces. This desire stands in contrast with the large number of white male queer leaders on campus. This dichotomy is worthy of further study, and while I cannot make confident conclusions about what this contrast means, it appears that the embodiment of certain characteristics (gay white male) suggests that leaders may be far more likely to barter away a movement's identity and culture because of their misunderstanding of true oppression.

### **THE ABSENT POPULATION**

Although it might seem intuitive, advocacy is in part able to be effective because of its ability to interface with its constituents. Queer persons can engage organizations on campus that represent their interest by attending their events or signing up to receive electronic information. On a national level, queer persons can attend marches and parades organized by local and national queer groups, as well as become members of queer organizations and be politically active constituents. All

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<sup>78</sup> Interview 1.

those who benefit by this advocacy certainly do not need to participate, but advocacy is able to be more effective when members of disenfranchised communities are able to share their experiences with marginalization. This helps to orient advocacy efforts toward successful representation.

The necessity of visibility and partial participation in advocacy presents a paradox for those populations that are effectively absent from advocacy efforts. Within a queer context, as one central queer leader noted, "this creates a truly difficult problem for us when we think about a group we don't really represent well - persons in the closet."<sup>79</sup> It is difficult to understand the needs of members of a community who "lose their membership in that community once they come out."<sup>80</sup> Advocacy for these persons can fall short, as even being identified "with the organized"<sup>81</sup> can alienate individuals from holding a mirror to the reality of their identities.

To serve a bigger swath of the community can, in part, require being part of queer life. This is the uniqueness of the queer minority situation. There is not another minority group that needs to go through a process of shifting personal opacity. While most other minority groups wear their difference quite visibly, queer persons must engage in an additional step of

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<sup>79</sup> Interview 4.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

self-identification that in turn invites oppression. For those individuals who are not discernibly queer, the idea that personal freedom can only be achieved through the welcoming of oppression and homophobia may appear too great a price to pay.

In pushing for safer spaces for coming out, advocacy organizations must keep in mind the hierarchies that already exist. That the "gay white male" partially dominates the advocacy agenda likely discourages the otherwise-identified from seeking refuge in spaces he occupies. It is the privilege of that body, as already argued, which keeps agendas from shifting toward inclusivity over time. As Lisa Duggan suggests, it is queer individuals placed at the bottom of the queer hierarchy, such as transsexuals, intersex persons, sexually fluid persons, and the non-gender identified, that are considered by this "gay white male" to be an impediment to elite homonormative individuals obtaining their rights.<sup>82</sup>

This kind of thinking is clearly mirrored in some of the advocacy that has been analyzed here. Structural inequalities in advocacy will directly complicate the process of coming out for a person who does not fit within the normative queer identity described. Instead of feeling safer in a space, a person who is trans may feel more ostracized by the need to label their sexual

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<sup>82</sup> Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon, 2003. Print. 60.

orientation within a binary of gay or straight, by social obsession with bodies matching gender identities, and by the medicalization of trans status.

## CHAPTER VII: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

### LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Although I believe that this study achieved far more than I had expected it to, it is vital to consider the limitations of its efforts and what steps can be taken to further its aims. To do so, I must first acknowledge the perspective from which I engaged in this study. I am a queer white male of privilege, the very collection of identities that I criticized extensively throughout this paper. Because of this, I must admit that my perspectives have been limited by my own privilege. The oppression I have encountered has been alleviated by my opportunity to engage in scholarship at a progressive institution. That I was able to spend months performing an analysis of queer advocacy where so many students are able to be open about their identities has been a tremendous blessing.

Methodologically, this study was very narrow. I interviewed only queer, male-identified students about their roles in advocacy efforts. I would be very interested to see the results if I were to engage a larger collection of advocates whose identities differed along multiple axes. Specifically, I would be very interested in seeing how queer women feel about queer advocacy efforts in general. The effects of socialization and the constraints of forced cultural femininity may have

connections to their leadership styles and the agendas they create. Examining those might be of interest to help illuminate the results of this study more clearly.

When originally creating this study, I felt strongly that there had to be something indigenously queer that affected advocacy efforts. My original query dealt with the relationship between pornography and advocacy, but after some speculation and review of data that I had, I realized that my assumptions about pornography's role in queering minds and bodies might have been overstretched. Nonetheless, I still believe that queer pornography represents an indigenous institution in queer communities and acts as a central pillar in what instructs persons on how to be normatively queer. I am very interested in learning more about the empirical and financial relationship between the queer pornography industry and queer advocacy. I say this because companies such as Playboy have been known to fund feminist projects and women's advocacy efforts to seem more sympathetic to persons who are critical of the pornography industry. While I am not sure of the nature of this kind of study or of what its findings would be, I believe that it is worth exploring.

Finally, and most importantly, I believe the direct next step in this research is speaking with constituents who benefit from queer advocacy efforts. I am very interested in learning

about the perspectives they hold of their leaders, the agendas of the organizations of which they are members, and whether in their opinion queer advocacy is truly inclusive. This will add significant clarity to the discussion around what has influenced advocacy efforts, as those persons who have been excluded will be able to explain where their disenfranchisement began and possibly why it continues.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

My time interviewing the campus' queer male leaders demonstrated a clear stratification of advocacy efforts based on both gender and sexual identity. This hierarchy in advocacy, while certainly not always intentional, is not easily explained by singular institutions or structures; likely, multiple sites of power and identity politics congealed to create the advocacy system currently in place. As already mentioned, advocacy organizations have historically been central in the struggle for representation of disadvantaged communities and interests in United States politics. They have been influenced by the constantly evolving sociopolitical landscape, have proven wildly effective at some junctures, and have proven woefully inadequate at others. This study intended to demonstrate that even among advocacy efforts ripe with good intentions, there can still be shortcomings.

Queer advocacy at Penn takes many forms. Individual representation to administration, collective protest and bargaining, and social, queer-empowering gatherings are all examples of the many manifestations of advocacy on the Penn campus. Leaders intend to make "positive social change"<sup>83</sup> and bring queer populations together in a collective effort to speak out against homophobia, gender-based bigotry, and structural violence against queer bodies. They rely on their own perspectives, information from queer institutions, and direction from the work and success of mainstream queer advocacy. In doing so, they inadvertently bring the many forms of privilege and disempowerment that mark their bodies to the tables of advocacy discussion.

If, as this discussion has demonstrated, the invisible integration of privilege into advocacy biases those efforts toward certain persons, identities, and bodies, we are faced with a question - how do we "queer" advocacy to ensure the representation of those identities that have been pushed far from the social center? While there are many logistical methods to redistribute the resources and efforts of advocacy,<sup>84</sup> I believe that the initial step must be taken on an individual level. Leaders must be willing to be deeply critical of their

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<sup>83</sup> Interview 12.

<sup>84</sup> Strolovitch suggests numerous in her final chapter.

own choices and actions and of the agendas their organizations represent and pursue. What this discussion has shown is that gender and sexuality are stratified in advocacy efforts. Those persons seen as most normatively queer are the individuals who are embraced by advocacy movements; those who deviate from homonormative standards suffer even more exclusion, stereotyping, and disenfranchisement. It has demonstrated that advocacy has been affected by the transportation of pervasive ideologies by those who sit at equality's table. Queer efforts are affected not just by systems that stratify along gender, race, and class but also by the ubiquity of heterosexuality itself. To correct for this, leaders must be willing to admit their own flaws and realize that all ways of thinking are influenced by social, political, and personal factors.

The path to effective representation is still unclear, I believe. But there are steps that can be taken to better engage those who have been marginalized. Unearthing those steps represents the beginning of a movement toward genuine equality. Achieving that kind of equality - one that is not based on standards, models, or others' beliefs, but is instead rooted in a deep appreciation of the individual - is the purpose of advocacy.



# APPENDIX

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) I selected you for an interview because I identified you as a queer leader involved in queer advocacy. Would you say that is fair?
- 2) What role did you play? In which organization? What was the purpose of the organization?
- 3) On whose behalf does the organization generally consider itself to be active?
  - a. Are there any particular subgroups whom you represent specifically?
  - b. How is this determined?
- 4) In your opinion, is there a specific queer person or body that is easiest to represent? Why?
- 5) It is understood that, at times, leaders must make choices about their agendas and what issues they will tackle. How did you navigate that?
- 6) What informed your ability to make those decisions?
- 7) What made you a good leader for queer issues?
- 8) How did you hope that others saw you?
  - a. Does expression of gender matter?
- 9) Which identities do you find most cherished in leadership positions? Which seem most desired by constituents? Do you see any of these patterns as problematic?
- 10) Are there some people that you think are not represented? Why do they not get represented? Are there issues or interests that don't get represented?
- 11) Who do you want to lead you?
- 12) In pushing for agenda items outside of fully queer spaces (for example, if you were in a meeting arguing for resources among multiple organizations, the others of which focused on issues outside the queer spectrum), how did you make those arguments? To what did you appeal?
- 13) How would you present yourself in those spaces?
- 14) What, in your opinion, represents power in leadership?
- 15) What, in your opinion, represents sexual power? Does sexual power inform leadership?
- 16) Do sexuality and leadership have anything in common?
- 17) What queer men have sexual power?

*Do not be overwhelmed by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now. Walk humbly now. Love mercy now. It is not incumbent on us to finish this task but neither are we free to abandon it.*

- The Talmud

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