LIVING IN TENSION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Notre Dame
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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April 2008
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Abstract

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In this grounded ethnography, I examine the University of Notre Dame's local gay and lesbian social movement field. My analysis of the GLBTQ-focused student organizations answers the question of how a GLBTQ social movement has not only emerged on a Catholic campus whose administration is generally resistant to the movement's goals, but arguably thrived, spreading across three major GLBTQ-rights focused organizations.

The first substantive chapter discusses the problems of emotional ambivalence among potential GLBTQ activists on the Notre Dame campus. Through a series of interaction rituals that begin at Freshman Orientation and continue throughout an undergraduate's four years at Notre Dame, the institutional structure of Notre Dame elicits strong feelings of pride and solidarity among students, particularly within residence halls. Conversely, heterosexism, homophobia, and the prominence of the controversy between GLBTQ rights and Catholic teaching on the campus lead to interactions that elicit shame and isolation in GLBTQ students rather than pride. These conflicting emotions leave GLBTQ students vulnerable to heterosexism, but conflicted.
about speaking up against their dormmates. However, students with access to alternate sources of emotional energy are able to overcome this ambivalence and join the Notre Dame GLBTQ movement.

The second substantive chapter examines what happens to GLBTQ-friendly students after they enter the activist scene at Notre Dame. Repeated failed attempts to mobilize through protest and other events drains non-heterosexual students of whatever emotional energy gains they would otherwise experience through mobilizing, leading to rapid burnout and temporary retreat from the movement; however, heterosexual students experience the failures less personally and are better able to sustain involvement with the organizations over time. Thus, straight allies become key to sustaining the organizations in the hostile institutional context of Notre Dame.

The third substantive chapter examines the three major GLBTQ rights organizations on the Notre Dame campus as entities themselves. I discuss the ways in which the organizations confound traditional categorization schemes used by scholars of social movements and explain that the apparent paradoxes the organizations present are a function of sociological focus, not inherent qualities of the organizations.
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1.1. An Introductory Story

“What is your interpretation of the Catholic teachings about homosexuality, and what is your perception of the university’s stance on homosexuality in relation to Catholicism?”

Oh, this is not a good way to start the evening, I thought to myself. I had originally attended this Town Hall meeting on heterosexism not intending to make it a field visit, but already I could tell that the site was the crystallization of several dynamics I had seen throughout the school. The Notre Dame student government body had held two other panels on discrimination the previous two nights—one on sexism, and one on racism—and after attending those two panels I (naively) believed that this meeting would continue in the same vein, with concerned activist-oriented students working towards ending discrimination on the campus. I would eventually learn that any time an issue related to sexuality was discussed in public, a certain core group of students would be there to “make sure the Catholic position is represented” (to use their own words).

At this particular meeting, the larger group of around 20 students that attended was split into several smaller groups of about eight students and two moderators each. I felt a little comforted when I recognized a couple of students my group, as both were...
active participants in the gay rights movement at Notre Dame, but also recognized a couple of other faces from a talk on the *Vagina Monologues*… people I wasn’t nearly as pleased to see: self-appointed keepers of Notre Dame’s Catholic character. By the end of my time in the field, I would literally fear hearing the phrase “I’m just here to see what the dialogue is…” because it was inevitably soon followed by something about “making sure the university keeps to its Catholic nature.” As a non-Catholic, I grew up mostly thinking of Catholicism in terms of their charity and good works; persons such as Mother Theresa and films such as *Sister Act* made me think being Catholic was all about caring for the less fortunate in society, supporting basic human rights, and spreading a gospel of love and acceptance. However, when these students referred to “Catholic character,” they had something else in mind.

“I just don’t think it’s very… loving to send ‘questioning’ students into the hands of a group with a gay agenda.” I recognized this fellow from his “lesbian pedophile” rant at the Monologues discussion. “The university shouldn’t be supporting groups that encourage homosexuality.”

“Our parents pay a lot of money to send use here, and they have an expectation of this as a Catholic institution… it’s supposed to be a bubble, protecting us during our formative years.” In other contexts, I would have found the absurdity of a 20+ year old male discussing being shielded from the issue of homosexuality laughable, but as I heard him say this with such sincerity, such passion… I realized that yes, a lot of parents and their children do believe this of the university.

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1 And singing in gigantic, gold-adorned churches, which held up to be pretty spot-on once I visited the Basilica at Notre Dame.
Fortunately, the other two gay students did have some impact on the proceedings; their descriptions of the level of harassment experienced by gay students surprised some of the straight students, who had not known that “things were that bad.” Everyone in the group, even the most conservative Catholics, agreed that harassing GLBTQ students is inappropriate, though I believed not everyone gathered agreed on exactly what constituted “harassment.” Still, most of the group seemed unable to understand the feeling of discrimination, and the consensus seemed to be: yes, Notre Dame is heterosexist… and as a Catholic university, it should be.

The atmosphere of the meeting had a smothering effect, one I felt keenly; normally I am quite vocal on GLBTQ rights, yet here I was subdued and made my points meekly. The straight students would sometimes challenge the gay students’ feelings of discrimination, saying that they shouldn’t feel discriminated against by things like heterosexual dorm dances and other assumptions of heterosexuality. The positive things that occurred—for example, a female heterosexual student’s immediate refutation of the idea of a “gay agenda,” or a statement that the university had to prepare students for the real world and couldn’t do so by denying homosexuals exist—were drowned out by a feeling that, in the words of one of the other gay students from the group, “there’s a thousand guns pointed at you.” The same student confessed to me that he often left such meetings feeling depressed, and I personally felt disappointed, outraged, and even paranoid at this meeting. In fact, while walking home from the meeting, I literally feared for my safety, irrationally to be sure—I knew no one was going to jump out of the bushes and assault me or anything—but still… the fear was there.
Less than a week later, the student government office held another meeting on heterosexism, but rather than making it an open invitation, they called specifically for members of the GLBTQ community on campus (talking with one of the moderators from the previous evening, I was informed that they wanted to hear the experiences of GLBTQ students specifically, something they didn’t get much of in the town hall meetings… “thing turned out a little, uh, ‘rough,’ you know?”). The discussion held here would be one I would later go through over and over again in meetings of the gay student groups, in public forums, and even in private discussion with other students.

“You can’t do that; this is a Catholic university,” student government representatives would say. “Well, you have to keep in mind that we’re Catholic…”—this from the gay and lesbian activists. It was nearly impossible to gain any traction arguing for GLBTQ student rights, such as the right to organize on the campus like any other student club. Challenging the perceived hypocrisy of the policies—“Well, why can they have a Jewish student organization but not a gay student organization, then? It seems like denying Jesus is the messiah is a lot more anti-Catholic than saying two men can get married.”—only resulted in hostility and charges of “not getting it.”

Over and over I was confronted with “the Catholic issue,” and eventually I had to ask myself: if all of these people were saying you can’t accomplish much in the way of gay rights at a Catholic university, then why were there so many activist groups on campus seeking to do just that? How did not one, but three GLBTQ rights groups emerge in this environment? How did the groups and their activist members sustain

\[2\] I say this both having made the comment myself and been on the receiving end of anger and having seen another student in another university-sponsored event making the exact same claim and also being rebuffed.
themselves in the face of failure and rejection? What social mechanisms are in operation for any social movement that is working in such a hostile environment, where failure is common and prospects for positive change seems bleak?

1.2. Introduction

This dissertation seeks to answer these questions. I began this study as a requirement for a class on qualitative methods; the site was convenient, I had some familiarity with one of the organizations, Outreach, from my first year on campus, and it seemed like a good excuse to get more involved in the gay community at Notre Dame. Eventually, the project expanded, and this final dissertation is the product of about three years of ethnographic fieldwork at Notre Dame. Through this time, my research question and interests evolved, my identity as a sociologist developed, and my beliefs about some of the fundamental principles of sociology and the social world solidified; truly, the development of this project represents my development as a sociologist.

1.3. Notre Dame as a Site

Notre Dame‘s campus offers a unique opportunity for an ethnographic study of social movement activity. First, the conservative Catholic nature of the campus has made the issue of gay and lesbian identity particularly salient to both the students of the university and the administration. The prevalence of Catholic discourse at the university means that nearly any time a gay-related issue arises on the campus, fervent discussion about the morality of homosexuality follows. Media coverage of the continued rejection of Notre Dame‘s gay-straight alliance‘s application for recognition as an official
university club further increases the amount of discussion about the status of GLBTQ students on the campus.

The second benefit to studying GLBTQ student mobilization on this particular campus is that the campus is, compared to other institutional contexts, somewhat insular. While the institution is not entirely a closed system, friendship networks among students rarely extend to individuals beyond the campus walls. The vast majority of students, around 80%, live on campus. The students eat, sleep, and even occasionally buy groceries on campus. While the students do have internet access and might (occasionally) watch the news, their “world” is mostly what occurs on campus, especially in the case of undergraduate students. Organizational collaboration between the student GLBTQ organizations and the local GLBTQ groups are practically nonexistent.

Using a relatively closed system for a research site allows for observation of the particular dynamics operating within the institution in a way that more open systems make prohibitive. The insular nature of the institution allows me to study multiple movement organizations within the constant context of the university itself. When students are exposed to or operating in a context larger than the university itself, it is easier to detect and model. This allows for greater validity in claims that any combination of dynamics operating within the context is actually causing the observed differences in patterns of organizational activities or variation among organizations, instead of some unobserved shift in or introduction of a larger context.

Also, Notre Dame as a site was convenient, since I was a student there; I could immerse myself in the culture of the school and the fieldsites while continuing my studies

3 http://newsinfo.nd.edu/content.cfm?topicid=15.
as a graduate student. Furthermore, as a graduate student, using my own university as a field site allowed for far more time in the field than I would have had if I had performed the ethnography abroad. Ultimately, the convenience of the site allowed for fieldwork that was both long-term (off and on for three years, with my living on campus throughout those years, excepting one summer) and broad in scope (involving a wide variety of GLBTQ-oriented campus events as well as the general campus culture). One of the advantages of such a long-term and broadly scoped field immersion was that it allowed me to observe patterns that would be harder to detect in the short term, such as how students who experienced activist “burnout” would return to other organizations later and in different positions. Furthermore, it allows for a macro perspective on a dissertation that is micro-focused; for example, the interplay between emotion and structure detailed in Chapter 3: Ambivalence.

1.4. Relevance of the Research Question

Returning to the research question: how does a movement sustain itself in an extraordinarily hostile context—one in which failure is apparently not only expected by most of the people involved, but seems to be written into the very rules of the institution the activists are seeking to change? The question hasn’t been fully addressed due to a number of reasons. First and foremost, the majority of the literature on social movements focuses on movements that are national- or state-level; even projects that focus on small-town politics, like Arlene Stein’s The Stranger Next Door, are usually about movements that have explicit groundings in larger political movements. Furthermore, social movement research is increasingly focusing on movements not just within nations, but globally, on coalitions across countries (Smith and Johnston 2002, Smith forthcoming).
In contrast, the organizations on the Notre Dame campus are quite focused on institutional change; while they may draw some of their repertoires from other GLBTQ groups on other college campuses or national GLBTQ groups, the focus is always on “the Dome”. The students at Notre Dame, like students in many high schools and colleges, tend to live as if their immediate institution was the most important thing in their worlds and little exists for them beyond this “bubble.”

This research also serves to join in the chorus of social movement scholars calling for a study of social movements that treats emotions and identity as equally important to resources and political opportunity structure in social movement research (Taylor and Whittier 1992, Bernstein 1997, Jasper 1997, Stryker et al 2000, Goodwin et al 2001).

Furthermore, as a grounded participant observation ethnography, this research provides a perspective on social movement activity that has traditionally been underutilized in current research. In doing so, it joins the work of Stein, Summers-Effler, Jasper, Patillo-McCoy, Lichterman, and other social movement scholars who use participant observation-driven data in their research.

Beyond the relevance of this research on an academic level, however, it’s important to discuss the relevance of the research question in more human terms: why, morally or pragmatically speaking, should the world care about this relatively small Catholic institution? There is a certain temptation to say, as many of the students on campus did, that the administration at a private institution should be free to enforce whatever brand of Catholicism they wish. Having seen how the policies of the university impact its GLBTQ population, however, it is impossible for me to say “live and let live” on this matter.
Others might argue that Notre Dame is such a small institution that attention would be better focused elsewhere, on more national or global issues. However, this stance neglects to take into consideration the fact that Notre Dame’s policies affect more than just the 12000+ students, hundreds of staff, and the highly active alumni population of the school. The students that graduate from Notre Dame spread are far and wide in the world and are often put in positions of power after graduation; thus, the policies they learn from as students move with them to the world outside Notre Dame. Furthermore, Notre Dame’s policies aren’t just a matter of internal policing; Notre Dame is arguably the premiere Catholic institution of higher learning in the United States, if not the most significant American Catholic institution, period. The effects of Notre Dame policies on GLBTQ issues reach across the nation. In fact, the university has been colloquially referred to in the past as the “American Vatican” and its basilica is the mother church of the Congregation of Holy Cross in the United States.

Furthermore, understanding the mechanisms in operation at Notre Dame may give insight into similar circumstances as they emerge in other contexts. Most obviously, there are many private schools with less-than-stellar policies with regards to GLBTQ persons that may have similar local gay rights mobilization. Some schools may be more generous than Notre Dame, as with Boston College, another Catholic (Jesuit) university that grants office space and meeting rooms to its local GLBTQ group even though it won’t officially recognize the organization. Others may be more conservative, as the numerous small colleges than refuse admittance to “out” GLBTQ students.\(^4\) Similar

\(^4\) Notre Dame lies somewhere between these two examples in terms of attitude towards GLBTQ students. There is no anti-discrimination policy, as that might require the university to recognize gay marriage, but there is a “Spirit of Inclusion” that states that the university recognizes and appreciates its gay
dynamics may operate in other near “total institutions,” environments where nearly every aspect of a resident’s life is controlled by the institution, such as jails or army bases, where a marginalized group seeks change within the institution. In short, the mechanics of mobilization at Notre Dame are not just about Notre Dame, both because the institution indirectly reaches farther than the campus itself and because the phenomena occurring there provide insights that can be extended to other sites.

1.5. Roadmap/Extended Abstract

Chapter 2 reviews the literatures relevant to this project, specifically the literature on identity, emotions, and social movement strategies and structures. It also lays out the primary sociological perspective used throughout the dissertation, a structural symbolic interactionism with a focus on Durkheimian ritual. Finally, this chapter includes a discussion of grounded theory and its implications for the substantive chapters to follow.

Chapter 3, “Ambivalence,” examines the emotional effects of the highly ritualized dorm and school life of Notre Dame’s students, particularly for gay and lesbian students who find themselves placed in heterosexist primary social groups—their dorms. The “high holy” rituals, like football games, and pervasive, mundane rituals, like eating in a dining hall almost every day, binds students to social groups (generally their dorm peers) and lesbian students. The university has consistently denied official university recognition to student-run GLBTQ groups, but there is an advisory council that includes gay and lesbian students. This “CORE Council” has held “coffee hour” types of activities for GLBTQ students for many years, but the university has yet to establish an official GLBTQ resource center. Students cannot be expelled for being gay or lesbian, but can be expelled for engaging in sexual intercourse outside of marriage (just as heterosexual students are forbidden to engage in premarital sex).

5 Or, in the classic example, insane asylums (Goffman 1961).
that are often heterosexist or hostile towards LGBTQ students. The combination of experiencing solidarity and pride through these interaction rituals and feeling shame and isolation because of the shame of being a sexual minority often leaves students in a state of emotional ambivalence about their peers’ heterosexist attitudes and behaviors. The chapter explains how structural factors, such as the availability of alternative pride-producing peer groups, can increase the likelihood that students will overcome their emotional ambivalence to achieve clarity in their GLBTQ-rights activism.

Chapter 4, “Sideways Entry,” continues to look at obstacles to mobilization, this time examining the challenges of sustaining involvement in a failure-prone “local social movement field.” This chapter details the interactions among movement involvement, identity, and emotional energy, and how the intersections of these categories shape the way students react to the setbacks the organizations experience. The theory developed in this chapter suggests that heterosexual allies are critical in sustaining involvement in a gay social movement organization operating in a hostile context because these students are more resilient to the emotional energy losses that come with mobilizing in such a hostile context. GLBTQ students, on the other hand, tend to burn out quickly once their mobilization efforts are stymied, leaving them to retreat from the social movement field (or the university as a whole) for a time before returning to “nonpolitical” organizations in the GLBTQ social movement field. However, the next chapter confronts this very concept of organizations in the social movement field as “nonpolitical.”

Chapter 5, “Paradox,” shifts analytic focus from the level of the individual in a movement to organizational structure and tactics as they are represented through the activists’ actions. In this chapter, I contrast the way each organization looks when
viewed from a macro, top-down perspective versus a micro, grounded perspective. I contend that the differences that appear among multiple sociological perspectives provides a challenge to dichotomous, either/or categorizations in sociology. The chapter concludes with an emphasis on the need to balance a priori sociological concepts brought into the field with “real life” as it is experienced by persons in the field.

Chapter 6 is a methods chapter. In this chapter, I use a reflexive autoethnographic style to describe the development of this research project from a class assignment motivated by a vague research agenda to a dissertation with a clear research question. I also use this chapter to address standard methodological questions about my fieldwork and Notre Dame as a site for ethnographic research in general. This chapter seeks to give the reader a sense of one way that ethnographic fieldwork can be conducted and to establish my “personal authority” as a researcher.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation by returning to the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter: How does a social movement sustain itself in the face of overwhelming adversity? I use this chapter to emphasize the importance of context and action in all aspects of sociology, including social psychology, the sociology of identities, and social movement scholarship. I also argue that grounded theory’s foundation of analytic movement back and forth between micro and macro levels of analysis is key to ethnographic research that seeks to balance sociological theory with the lived experiences of human subjects. I conclude with future research agendas that this research might spark.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Just as Notre Dame exists as an intersection among Catholicism, the American Midwest, and a university setting, this research exists at an intersection among many areas of sociological inquiry, including the sociologies of religion, identity, emotions, and social movements. This chapter explains the position of this research relative to existing sociological knowledge and explains the tenants of grounded theory and its implication for the theories developed across the three substantive chapters. I begin with a discussion of the sociology of religion, then move into the literatures on identity, emotions, and social movements before concluding with a discussion of grounded theory.

2.1. Sociology of Religion

Not too long ago, in social movement scholarship, discussing the place of religion in a social movement was unusual; religious groups and beliefs were left out of the equation entirely or treated as a residual category (Smith 1996). Smith notes that there are many possible reasons for this “curious neglect”: secularization theory’s prominence in the social sciences; structural-functionalism’s relegation of religion as a mechanism for consensus; the general fragmented nature and lack of communication across disciplinary boundaries in the social sciences; the move in the 1970s away from irrational/affective models of social movement behavior towards rational, strategic, and instrumental
understandings of social movement behavior (religion often being considered irrational); and the apparent lack of religious factors behind many of the movements that led to said shift of sociological inquiry towards rational actors in social movements (excepting, of course, the civil rights movement). Smith makes the important point that while these factors may explain why religion is often discounted in social movement literatures, it does not excuse it (Smith 1996:2-5).

Religion provides various assets to a burgeoning social movement, including motivation to mobilize or stay in a social movement, motivation to behave altruistically, material resources through a church or organization, communication networks, a sense of identity among participants, and so on (Smith 1996:19-22). For the most part, Smith presents all of these factors as if they are uniformly a boon to a movement; however, my findings suggest that the same aspects of religion which can make it a powerful force for social change in certain circumstances are actually quite constraining at times, especially when members of a certain faith find their social movement activism running contrary to the larger institution of the church itself. For example, Smith notes that religious leaders are often experts (through training or experience) in interpersonal communication and enjoy a privileged position in their social network, with followers that look up to them, ties to other religions leaders and colleagues, relative autonomy in their workday, and contact with broader communities (ibid:13-14). While these ties are often a resource that can be brought to bear on an issue, they are also an audience that can judge and the behavior of an activist, even to the point of formal censure should they decide that the
activist is toeing the party line too closely. Other contributors to Smith’s edited collection also look at the ways in which religious affiliation can constrain activism through symbolism or ideology (Sikkink and Regnerus, Williams and Blackburn).

Ultimately, religion can function both as a motivation or resource, and as a limitation or constraint. By examining a context where devoutly religious persons are set against the beliefs and policies of the higher-ups in their institution, we can see how religion can leave activists “living in tension,” balancing what they believe in their heart is right, what they believe scripture to be saying, the interpretation of scripture by those in power, and the beliefs of their those around them (including secular believers).

2.2. Identity

Identities are “self-conceptions based on social positions that are enacted in ongoing, reciprocal role relationships and are accepted as self-descriptive” (Thoits 1992: 237). This means that identities are a way individuals think about themselves (self-conceptions that are self-descriptive), structurally informed (social position), and dynamically shaped by social interaction (ongoing, reciprocal role relationships). Gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgendered identities in particular are social identities: “that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1981:225)—that is, they are tied to a sense of belonging to a certain category of persons. Tajfel’s definition also explicitly

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6 The discussion of the CORE Council in Chapter 5, “Paradox,” goes into more detail about this phenomenon.
mentions that these identities are not just roles or cognitions; they come with a set of values and emotions.

Identities are carried across situations, are self-reinforcing, motivate people into action, and have an autonomous effect on behavior independent of relations supporting the identity (Stryker 2000:28). They vary across context, time, and space. For example, Brekhus examines how space is a resource for creating identities; a gay rights meeting is not just a place to that brings a gay identity to the forefront of one's self-concept but also provides cognitive and social resources for the shaping and expression of that identity.

Brekhus divides social identity into three dimensions: “duration,” or the proportion of time one spends expressing that identity; “density,” or the intensity of that expression; and “dominance,” a product of the previous two dimensions that affects how much that identity is allowed to constitute one’s self-concept. Brekhus develops a typology of gay identity based off of variations in gay identity across these three dimensions: “peacocks,” those who are all-gay, all the time; “chameleons,” those who ardently express a gay identity but only in a small proportion of their lives (for example, someone who only expresses their gay identity when they go out to gay clubs in town but keeps quiet about their sexuality in their suburban community); and “centaurs,” those for whom their gay identities aren’t highly dominant and fall low in their self-schema (Brekhus 2003).

Brekhus is not the only researcher on GLBTQ identities to create a typology. While an exhaustive categorization of gay identities is beyond the scope of this work, it is necessary to note that there truly is a plethora of ways to conceive of one’s self and express one’s identity as a person who experiences same-sex desire. For example, Dilley’s 2002 *Gay Man on Campus* alone presents the following categories of “gay
men”: homosexual, closeted, gay, queer, regular or normal guys, and those who divide their social and sexual lives as separate spheres. Something as “simple” as the age of the actors can have a huge impact, as well; Rosenfeld, for example, noted a generational difference between an “old guard” of homosexuals who saw a gay identity as shameful and a new wave who saw gay identity as a strength, even though both groups recognized heterosexuals as their oppressors (2003).

Ultimately, while this research collapses the multitude of marginalized sexual identities into a single concept—LGBTQ, or sometimes simply “queer” or “nonheterosexual”—it still recognizes that there is no single identity shared among the many individuals captured under this umbrella term. However, all these identities are informed by similar social mechanisms and constitute a considerable portion of the self-conceptions of the non-heterosexual subjects of this research.

Along those same lines, it is important to note that the GLBTQ population of Notre Dame is not the same as the GLBTQ “subculture” of Notre Dame, and neither are entirely coterminous with the GLBTQ social movement field at Notre Dame. In fact, members among the three groups may be antagonistic towards others, with activists decrying “the apathetic queers,” out but non-activist gays joking about “closet cases” and wondering why the activists are so “angry,” and closeted gay students wishing that the gay issue would disappear from the public realm at Notre Dame. Fine and Kleinman (1979) note that a subculture is defined by shared cultural knowledge, not by structure or demographics. Along those lines, all persons who feel same-sex attraction are not part of a GLBTQ community, and all members of a GLBTQ subculture may not be activists or even aware of the activities of a local social movement. Even among the various
organizations in a single movement, different cultural perspective on being gay and
lesbian and appropriate methods of protest lead to considerable divisions among groups.

Of course, GLBTQ students are not “just” gay and lesbian—they are also students,
“Domers,” dorm members, sons and daughters, teammates, Catholic, atheist, agnostic,
and so forth. While being gay or lesbian is, for most students, a huge part of their self-
concept, it is not the only (or necessarily even the most important) identity governing
their lives. However, as a marginalized identity, it is one that leads to a certain amount of
tension in a conservative Catholic university.

Gay and lesbian students are often stuck “living in tension” between their Notre
Dame (and sometimes Catholic) identities—the privileged identity—and their
nonheterosexual identities—the marginalized identity. The students generally possess
what Du Bois refers to as a “double consciousness”: “a sense of always looking at one’s
self through the eyes of others” (Du Bois [1903] 2006: 3). In other words, they are
always viewing themselves as non-heterosexual students through the eyes of the
heterosexual majority. These ideals are sometimes indeed at war within a student, as the
desire to be a “good Catholic student” comes up against a desire to be true to “how God
made me.” Furthermore, as Du Bois points out, the students don’t wish to abandon either
identity; as a graduate student once told me, “I could no sooner give up being Catholic
than I could give up being gay.”

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7 Chapter 5, “Paradox” details some of the cleavages across the GLBTQ movement at Notre Dame.
2.3. Sociology of Emotions

In a 1990 article, Collins called for bringing the sociology of emotions into the central question of sociology (27), as part of a core sociological theory when combined with structure and cognition (28). While emotion is discussed in early sociological works—Durkheim, for example—Collins argues that emotions are rarely discussed explicitly, partly because of the macro focus of sociology at the time (28). However, Collins contends that even early microsociological theorists, such as Mead, Schutz, and Goffman, do not treat emotion as central to their theories. Still, the work of Goffman and Durkheim especially emphasizes the role of “...solidarity, feelings of membership, and in Goffman’s case, feelings about one’s self” in organizing social life; sentiments which are persistent if varying in “tone” between highs and lows (31). “Solidarity feelings, moral sentiment, the enthusiasm of pitching oneself into a situation, or being carried along by it; and at the other end, depression, alienation, embarrassment” are all long-lasting emotions (31). The main fabric of social life consists not of the dramatic, disruptive emotions we experience, but the long-term “tones” that we carry with us through our lives, and for Collins, it is these latter emotional states that are of the greatest importance (31).

According to Turner and Stets, the systematic study of emotions in sociology began in the 1970s with the works of Heise, Hochschild, Kemper, Scheff, and Schott and is now and, despite Collins’ concerns in 1990, the forefront of microsociology; “increasingly, emotions are seen as the crucial link between micro and macro levels of

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8 However, the concept of “embarrassment” is central to Goffman’s theories of human interaction, so arguably emotion is central to Goffman’s research.
social reality” (Turner and Stets 2005:1). Like Turner and Stets, I take the approach that emotions are products of biology, cognition, and socialization. My treatment of emotions in this dissertation combines structural, symbolic interaction, and ritual theory perspectives on emotion. The structural component comes from my consideration of “how the location of individuals within social structures influences the flow of emotions”; the symbolic interaction component emerges as my theories “emphasize the importance of identities and self-conceptions as regulators of behavior”; and the ritual theory is represented by my focus on interaction processes and people’s emotional responses to each other.

Four terms in particular dominate the first two substantive chapters of this dissertation: shame, pride, interaction rituals, and emotional energy. I give these concepts such primacy because I believe, like Scheff, that “…maintenance of bonds {is} the most crucial human motive” (Scheff 1990: 4).

First, what is pride and shame? In the words of Scheff, “…pride and shame are the primary social emotions… pride is the sign of an intact bond; shame, a severed or threatened bond” (15). Pride and shame are automatic and bodily, and both are visible to observers: physical indicators of pride include “holding up one’s head in public and looking others in the eye” (with deference cues like turn-taking and looking away as well, to indicate respect), while shame includes shrinking, “averting or lowering one’s gaze, casting only furtive glances” or staring, “attempting to outface the other,” depending on whether the shame is overt or bypassed (15). Other indicators of unacknowledged shame that Scheff mentions, originally catalogued by Helen Lewis, include stammering, lowering of the voice, repetition or long pauses in speech, and self-interruption (16).
Scheff also argues, with evidence from Cooley, Goffman, and Lewis (a research psychoanalyst), that in certain cultures (including modern American culture) individuals have been socialized to repress feelings of pride and especially shame. Scheff goes into great depth about Lewis’s research in particular, including how respondents would use a wide variety of words like “insecure,” “awkward,” or “uncomfortable” (approximately 100 in total) to describe high-shame situations rather than acknowledging shame by name: “the denial of shame is institutionalized in the adult language of modern societies” (16, 86).

Scheff takes some of the ideas of Goffman and Lewis to propose that shame is often recursive, leading to “shame spirals” (18). Goffman provides a model of shame contagion among participants in an interaction, while Lewis proposes a model of shame-spirals within an actor; Scheff combines these two models to create a concept of shame that is both contagious within and between interactants- the “triple shame spiral,” a shame-state that can continue indefinitely.

One of the strengths of Scheff’s theory of shame and the social bond is that by building off of Lewis’s research, it provides a testable model- observable markers and the causal change which is alleged to cause them (88), a model which Scheff himself examined by analyzing the 1956 Asch study of conformity to group decisions (89-94).

Scheff examines conflict as well as consensus in his theory of pride and shame; he states that “…conflict will be constructive to the degree that the parties are attuned, and destructive when they are not” (Scheff 1990:7). Attunement is “a mutual understanding that is not only mental but also emotional”- “empathic intersubjectivity” (7), a shared focus of attention. “…even in the heat of anger, one identifies the opponent as a person
like oneself” (7), at least until the bond among participants has become severed or “so threatened that one is willing to risk that it will be cut completely” (7).

Scheff’s deference-emotion system also comes into play in this research. The relevant point in this system is that there are rewards in the form of deference and pride (for adhering to norms) and punishments in the form of lack of deference and shame and that this system compels conformity (71-72). The implication of this is that any attempt to breach norms, such as by taking social action against an established institution that one’s peers ascribe to, is inherently an action that invokes shame in the actor; if the action “fails” for some reason, then the actor experiences all the shame of norm-breaching but without the balance of pride from other sources. As Scheff notes, this is the case even in the absence of formal censure (or reward), so even if the actor isn’t “caught” they still feel the shame.

Under this backdrop, Collins presents his theory of interaction ritual and emotional energy (henceforth IR and EE). He states that an interaction ritual consists of a group of at least two people, in face-to-face proximity, with a shared focus of attention and an awareness of that shared focus among participants, that are sharing a common mood (regardless of the emotion present at the outset of the IR). When this happens, the group itself becomes a focus of attention as individuals get caught up in the group activity⁹ and, through a process of rhythmic entrainment (Chapple, 1981; McClelland, 1985), “the emotional mood becomes stronger and more dominant; competing feelings are driven out by the main group feeling” (Collins 1990:32).

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⁹This creates a “transindividual reality, influencing members from outside while permeating their consciousness from within” (Collins 1990: 31)
The outcome of a successful IR is a feeling of solidarity, “a feeling of attachment to the group that was assembled at that time,” which Collins refers to as emotional energy (EE) (32). EE “is a continuum, ranging from a high end of confidence, enthusiasm, good self-feelings; down through a middle range of lesser states, and to a low end of depression, lack of initiative, and negative self-feelings” (32). At the high end, one wants to be with the group and may even emerge as a leader within it; at the low end, “one is not attracted to the group; one is drained or depressed by it; one wants to avoid it. One does not have a good self in the group. And one is not attached to the group’s purposes and symbols, but alienated from them” (33). Persons with high emotional energy feel righteous about what they are doing; persons with low EE feel badly and may label these feelings as guilt or evil (33).

2.4. Sociology of Social Movements

While an extensive overview of the history of social movement scholarship is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is helpful to begin the discussion on classical theories with a short discussion about the historical context of early research on collective action, as well as why these theories fell into decline. For social movement scholars in the 50s, collective behavior was seen as a problem that needed to be explained- it was viewed almost as a social psychological disorder, rather than as an instrumental tool used to achieve change extra-institutionally. Part of the error, according to Guigni, was the failure of the researchers to understand that not all sectors of society had equal access to the polity. While Guigni points out that Gamson’s 1975 work did much to debunk the myth of the “open polity,” earlier social movement scholars were not generally socially equipped to understand that groups were systematically disenfranchised in the United
States, and that extra-institutional forms of action were the only things available to
groups seeking change.

Another reason for the conservative bias in social movement scholarship was that
the forms of collective behavior they were interested in were of the “darker” variety. For
example, Hannah Arendt was deeply concerned with the problem of totalitarian regimes,
and how regimes like those of the Nazis could lead ordinary people into unspeakable acts,
such as mass murder. Coming off of World War II, many social movement scholars were
similarly frightened of what collective behavior could lead to.

Because of biases such as these, classical scholars generally looked less towards
structural factors (Arendt being a notable exception, along with Smelsner), and more
towards psychological factors or emergent factors. Protesters were psychologically
troubled; reasonable, rational people would not participate in protest.

However, through the 1960s, many of those who studied social movements
became enmeshed in the Civil Rights movement and began to see how protesters were
not only not “crazy,” but were actually rational. Similary, as social movement scholars
became more aware of the plight of the Southern blacks in America, it was harder for
them to claim that all Americans should express their displeasure with the government
through voting and other institutional means. One major turning point in the literature
was with Mancur Olson’s book *The Logic of Collective Action*, where he described how
protest participation could be rational, under the correct circumstances.

Olson started with the premise that it was generally irrational for an individual to
work to secure a collective good because, if a movement secured the good, they would
benefit whether he participated in the movement or not (the “free rider problem”).
However, it would be rational for someone to join if there was a non-collective good he/she could gain from participation—in Olson’s words, a selective incentive, something that the individual would only gain through pitching in.

This turn towards protesters as behaving rationally led to a reexamination, then rejection, of many classical theories of social movement behavior. From these roots came resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald), which focused on the necessity of having resources like money, time, and staffing for a movement, and political process theory (McAdam), which looked at the ways in which shifts in political opportunity structures hindered or helped prospective movements. However, in this shift towards rational theories of protest behavior, emotions were left out of the equation; Goodwin et al attribute this to the reaction against the flawed early social movement theories and a tendency to set rationality and emotions as opposite forces.

However, modern social movement researchers have again turned their attention towards emotional motivations for social movement behavior (Jasper 1997, Britt and Heise 2000, Goodwin et al 2001). The reasons for this shift are many: the Cultural turn in sociology, the rise and fall of New Social Movement Theory, the increasing focus on identity-based movement such as the gay and lesbian rights movements, and a general increase in research on culture, identity, and emotions (Pichardo 1997). However, researchers on emotions in social movements have learned the lesson of the turn towards rational choice; rather than abandoning the advances in the field offered by rational choice theories, these researchers see their work as complementary and additive.
2.4.1 Social Movement Strategies

On major focus of this dissertation is on the multitude of strategies that have emerged on the Notre Dame campus, the diversity among the various organizations and activists. The earliest work on social movement strategies was less concerned with why movements used different strategies and more interested in the relative effectiveness of various strategies (for example, see Gamson 1975). Guigni points out that “one of the prevailing themes in the research on the consequences of social movements is whether disruptive tactics…” or “…moderate actions are more effective” (Guigni 1997:xvi). Also, in the past fifteen years significant research has been devoted to explaining tactical innovation in movements and how macro contexts shapes SMO structures (and indirectly their tactics) (Clemens 1993; McAdam 1983; McCammon 2003; Patillo-McCoy 1998; Staggenborg 1988, 1989, 2001), but much less focus has been placed on the micro dynamics lead to the emergence of multiple movement strategies, particularly as they occur simultaneously within a single movement. I will attempt to outline the relevant literature on strategies here.

Research on social movement strategizing that is not focused on the consequences of specific strategies for achieving movement goals instead asks, “When, how, and why do new strategies emerge?” To put it in cultural terms, this branch of SM research explains how movements add strategies to their repertoires.

McAdam provides an account of tactical innovation that includes consequences of innovation as a component (McAdam 1983). McAdam notes that the pace of an

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10 Chapter 5, Paradox, in particular examines organizations' strategies and covers some of the literature that refers to finer points of social movement strategies.
insurgency is determined by a sort of chess game between insurgent activists and their oppressors— a movement develops a new strategy that works despite the insurgents‘ marginal position, then their opponents develop counterstrategies to neutralize the new efforts of the movement. During the period immediately following a tactical innovation, before a counterstrategy is developed, the movement experiences a boost in activity; when the movement’s opponents develop their counterstrategy, the movement experiences a lull in activity. In this account, tactical innovation occurs pretty in part because it must— the movement’s other options are ineffective.

McAdam explains innovation as a product of conflicts between a movement and its opponents: in his account, the impetus for tactical innovation lies in forces mostly external to the insurgency itself. Elizabeth Clemens, on the other hand, claims that innovation is a result of processes occurring primarily within a movement. Clemens argues that occupying a marginal position in an institution is motivation for developing a new strategy of resistance, which may then diffuse to other sectors of a movement and be added to “organizational repertoires” (Clemens 1993:758). Clemens argues that new tactics are developed not at the core of organizational fields, but instead at their peripheries, and that the causes for tactical innovation were less often exogenous to a movement than they were a result of dynamics operating within a movement (Clemens 1993).

Somewhere between these perspective lies Holly McCammon’s work. McCammon argues that “political opportunities have little to do with major changes in movement tactics” and that organizational readiness is not the “critical movement characteristic spurring movement actors to try new forms of activity” (McCammon
2003:788). Instead, McCammon claims that a combination of defeat when using one particular tactic and movement characteristics such as “organizational diversity and decentralization and conflict in the movement organizational field…will spark new forms of collective action” (ibid:788). McCammon’s work is less a refutation of previous research on innovation as it is a refinement of prior arguments, but again it cannot fully explain how movement participants choose from among the (growing) repertoire of activities after the tactics emerge.

Other authors place culture more explicitly front-and-center in their analysis of social movement strategizing. One example is Mary Patillo-McCoy’s study of church culture and civic engagement in black communities (1998). Patillo-McCoy describes how culture can frustrate or facilitate civic engagement (which lays the groundwork for understanding how culture can shape the goals of a movement community or the very “meaning” of civic engagement itself). Church culture provided black activists with a “blueprint” for civic participation, including the use of prayer, Christian imagery, and “call-and-response” interaction (Patillo-McCoy 1998). Polletta mirrors some of these claims, albeit in simpler language, when she explains movement structuring is sometimes a result of what is “familiar” to participants: it’s appealing “because it is similar to what we are used to” (Polletta 2002:21).

Two authors similarly utilize cultural sociology to understand social movement dynamics at the level of organizational style and strategy: Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman. Their co-authored work on culture in interaction describes how groups use collective representations in their everyday lives in ways that create “group styles” – meaningful, shared ground for interaction (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003:737). For
example, the taken-for-granted assumptions about the responsibilities of group members in the “ACES” environmental organization, particular the emphasis on being a responsible member of the Airdale community focused attention in group interactions away from deep confessions of feelings, but instead on privacy and consideration for other Airdale community members, allowing a diversity of “ideologies” (“New Age,” anti-capitalist, “good citizen”) to coexist in the organization (ibid:752-753). Breaches in group style are met with uncomfortable silence at best, as was the case for the ACES member who proselytized for his own radical stance to other members (ibid:753).

Furthermore, the very meaning of “civic participation” is shaped by culture; an earlier work by Lichterman discusses a concrete example of the effect of differing meanings of “commitment” among activists on organizational style (Lichterman 1996). Self-fulfillment through commitment was different for those whose cultural repertoires were built around a social identity that highlighted the “individual person as an important locus of political efficacy” compared to those for whom commitment was rooted in their relationship with the local community (ibid:24). His research allowed him to provide the social contexts that helped to explain why some activists tended to personalized commitment styles over communitarian styles, such as the fact that personalized commitment strategies built on cultural skills that were more readily available to professional middle-class activists (ibid:28). This in turn led to different patterns of interaction among the organizations Lichterman studied and ultimately the strategies the groups used.

Francesca Polletta presents research that most unifies the various strands presented here into a book that attempts to answer the question, “why do (activists)
decide to adopt a particular tactic, target, ideological frame, or way of making decisions- and decide later to modify or abandon it?” (Polletta 2002:5). Polletta moves beyond mere instrumental or ideological explanations of strategic choice to include familiarity, identity, and symbolic association as motivations for strategic choice. Activists choose strategies that they are used to, that fit with how they see themselves, and that are associated with organizations or other symbols that they value (Polletta 2002). Polletta concentrates how these forces shape decisionmaking processes in the various organizations she compares; she emphasizes how participatory democratic organizational forms of decisionmaking are chosen by organizations, and what participatory democracy means to different SMOs.

While previous research on social movements has acknowledged the fact of diversity in strategies of social movement activity (Jasper 1997; Freeman 2003) and the varying effectiveness of different strategies (Gamson 1975, Giugni et al 1999), less empirical work has been devoted the explanation how multiple strategies emerge. Research that is concerned with the emergence of strategies of resistance has generally focused on explaining strategic innovation as a product of variation in contexts and has paid almost no attention to cases where multiple patterns of resistance emerge in a movement operating under a single context.

Furthermore, the organizations and very phenomena which are labeled as “strategic” have been limited by biases in the literature. Because of the liberal reform bias in research on social movements, sociologists miss strategies like SNCC‘s leadership building programs or efforts to create enduring local movement organizations found in Polletta’s research (Polletta 2002). Focus “on mass mobilization aimed at national
political authorities” *ibid.*:203) has led to under-representation of support-based strategies and organizations in social movement literature (with notable exceptions, such as Taylor’s 2000 article on the women’s self-help movement).

The “problem” with the literature, in Polletta’s words, is that:

… the dominant theoretical models of strategic choice, movement leaders choose among competing options either by rationally assessing their potential to further such instrumental tasks as winning allies, avoiding repression, and sustaining rank-and-file enthusiasm or by determining how well particular options match their prior ideological commitments (Polletta 2002:5).

Instrumentality isn’t “the enemy” of sociological research, of course; it only become problematic when researchers unreflexively apply their own values in determining what is instrumental to activists. It is not “common sense” what choice is most “rational” or “instrumental”: “our very criteria for establishing what is instrumental, strategic, efficient- out conceptions of instrumental rationality- are based on the social associations underpinning those conceptions” (Polletta 2002:22). Furthermore, ideology, culture, and expressive needs are at least as important as instrumental calculation in activists’ strategic choices.

Our very notions of what “counts” as resistance has likewise been limited; as Polletta points out, to some activists, even using nontraditional organizational structures is “resistance” to its members (Polletta 2002:219). For example, at Notre Dame both Outreach and AllianceND are consciously structured so that they have two “co-chairs,” one male, one female; representation of the lesbian perspective were topics of discussion during meetings of both Outreach and the CORE Council. Small things like these conscious rejections of male-dominated hierarchies are meaningful forms of resistance to
activists in the organizations, but one that many approaches to understanding strategy treat as “just organizational style.”

The narrow conceptual categories upon which the social movement literature has largely relied is unfortunate because it leaves us unable to answer (or, at times, even ask) vital questions about “how movement groups set agendas, how they select among the tactical options available to them, why they choose particular frames, slogans, narratives, and images with which to represent themselves, and when and why they modify any of the above” (Polletta 2002:225). Contributing to our inability to accurately explain these questions is the inclination of social movement scholars to “see organizations as actors rather than as made up of actors and their interactions” (Polletta 2002:225).

Our limited understanding of these phenomena is unfortunate since there are serious consequences to strategic choice in movements. First, when a movement is divided in terms of strategy, it can lead to organizations with similar goals working against each other instead of with each other. Jasper’s account of two antinuclear movements working to stop Diablo Canyon illustrates a case where groups with different “tastes in tactics” are merely unfriendly—said one group of the other, “We don’t deal with them more than we have to, ‘cause they drive us crazy” (Jasper 1997:229).

On the Notre Dame campus, the situation is more extreme; during the 2004-2005 school year, the organizations were competing for limited finances from the Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association and time from overworked students. Despite considerable overlapping membership across the organizations, students involved in the various groups were quick to make disparaging comments about the activities of the other organizations. While the groups this year enjoy a more amicable relationship, members
of Outreach joked that relations between them and AllianceND were “not as friendly (then) as they are now.”

Diversity in strategies within a single movement also has the potential to shape the public’s perception of a movement as a whole. The presence of a “radical flank” of a movement can “undermine public tolerance for a movement as a whole,” thus making the public less receptive to the movement’s activities. On the other hand, the “threat” of the radical flank can cause liberal organizations to appear more palatable to policy-makers (Haines 1988).

2.4.2 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory refers to both a final product as well as the process by which that product is created. Grounded theory is an approach to theory creation in the vein of the Chicago School. It was “founded” in the late 1960s by Glaser and Strauss as a flexible series of propositions that their founders claimed were the most efficacious way to create new theory. In the words of Charmaz, “grounded theory methods are a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle-range theories though successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development” (Charmaz 2005:507).

The fundamental premise of grounded theory is that theory and the concepts used to construct theory should emerge from empirical data rather than from armchair philosophizing or literature reviews. This groundedness is contrasted to “‘grand’ theory that is generated from logical assumptions and speculations about the ‘oughts’ of social life” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:35). The researcher should not enter the field with preconceived categories and propositions; as King, Keohane, and Verba put it, “…we
need not have a complete theory before collecting data, nor must our theory remain fixed throughout” (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994:46). “Merely selecting data for a category that has been established by another theory tends to hinder the generation of new categories…” and forcing “our round data” into “square holes” is counterproductive (Glaser and Strauss 1967:37). Categories, properties, and propositions should be a product of the field work, not concepts external to the data or propositions that the fieldwork is attempting to test. Glaser and Strauss even go so far as to say that the most effective strategy is to basically ignore the relevant literature when one is starting a project (ibid 37).

Grounded theory is motivated by many of the same principles endorsed by the Chicago school, particularly the emphasis on contextuality (Abbot 1997, Charmaz 2005). Basically, the Chicago school states that “one cannot understand social life without understanding the arrangements of particular social actors in particular social times and places… no social fact makes any sense abstracted from its concept in social (and often geographic) space and social time” (Abbot 1997:1152). Research in the Chicago tradition seeks “to tell us what are the crucial actual patterns, not what are the crucial variables” (Abbot 1997:1168).

By constructing theories that arise from the patterns of interaction as they are observed, “one can be relatively sure that the theory will fit and work,” at least for the specific context being observed (Glaser and Strauss 1967:3). Research that takes a set of propositions then seeks to “test” those propositions by either finding a counterexample to “falsify” the proposition or a mountain of cases that support the proposition, rather than seeking to fully explain a single specific context, results in “well-tested theory fragments,
that can only partially account for what is happening in the researched situation” (ibid:27). Moving away from a “testing of hypothesis” model of research allows for the creation of fuller, denser theories and instead allow for an accumulation of data across research that builds more abstract and accurate theory.

Furthermore, finding a case that runs counter to the resulting theory does not, in grounded theory, indicate that the original theory is flawed- again, since the theory is seeking initially to fully explain a single context, it is not surprising that other contexts would result in different results. Instead, as new evidence is collected, the theory is modified to answer what it is about the new context that led to the observed differences. “Evidence and testing never destroy a theory… they only modify it. A theory’s only replacement is a better theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:28).

Comparison is still a vital part of grounded theory, especially for the generation of more formal theory over more substantive theory, but comparison is not about proving or disproving a proposition. Instead, comparing differences and similarities among groups quickly leads to the generation of categories and to the relationships among those categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967:39). These relations among categories provide the core of the emerging theory. Comparison is also about testing the limits of a theory or proposition within the theory- how far can the emerging theory go in explaining something before the researcher must modify it? This can involve “most similar” and “most different” comparisons, or “natural comparisons.” Situations structures, or contexts that are almost identical to a case that a theory fully explains, but which have significantly different outcomes, allow for easier understanding of what aspect of a context might lead to a different outcome; cases that are radically different from the
original case, yet result in the same outcome, allow for broadening of specific, substantive theory to more formal theoretical statements (Glaser and Strauss 1967:55-58).

All of these aspects of grounded theory- generating categories, establishing relationships among categories, comparing cases to examine the limits of emerging theory- are ongoing processes that occur throughout the entire research project. In an ethnographic project, this means that the researcher is constantly entering and reentering the field, refocusing their attention on more and more specific aspects of the site, carefully selecting more comparison cases, relentlessly analyzing and reanalyzing the data. This occurs until the researcher reaches “theoretical saturation”- the point at which “no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of that category” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:61).
CHAPTER 3
AMBIVALENCE

3.1. Overview

Before looking at the dynamics of GLBTQ mobilization at Notre Dame, it is important to first address why there is relatively little GLBTQ mobilization on the campus. The easy answer is that, well, it is a Catholic campus, and this clearly plays a role in many GLBTQ students’ experience of themselves and the university. However, the organization of social life at Notre Dame\(^\text{11}\) plays at least as much of a role as religious ideology in presenting an obstacle towards mobilization by providing a fertile ground for feelings of ambivalence where there might otherwise be mobilization-encouraging anger.\(^\text{12}\) Instead of anger at their second-class citizen status at the university, many GLBTQ-identified individuals end up depressed and experience a malaise that often leads them to drop out of the university rather than mobilize for change. However, interaction ritual theory would predict that these students would have high emotional energy and

\(^{11}\) Notre Dame is organized, in part, on the French residential university model. Dorms are single-sex with “parietals” (at a certain time each night, any visitors of the opposite sex must leave the dorm), freshmen are required to live in the on-campus residence housing their first year and most students live on campus their entire four years. Also, there are no sororities or fraternities on the campus; however, the dorms themselves function in some ways like contemporary fraternities and sororities.

\(^{12}\) For one role anger can play in mobilization processes, see Britt and Heise 2000.
solidarity as “Domers” instead of depression and estrangement from those around them, since they are exposed to so many IRs during their time at Notre Dame.

This chapter seeks to answer these questions: how can these students, exposed to so many solidarity-building rituals, still feel so lonely and isolated from those around them? In other words, what creates ambivalence towards GLBTQ issues? Furthermore, how can students overcome ambivalence and mobilize for change?

It is no secret that Notre Dame as an institution, like many universities, encourages a sense of “school pride” and that students who attend Notre Dame can expect a certain amount of pressure to think of themselves as not just college students getting a degree, but as Notre Dame students. Furthermore, students are encouraged to support the “brotherhood” or “sisterhood” of their dorms, many of which have a sense of history and tradition as old as Notre Dame itself. As both students and dorm residents, Notre Dame undergraduates are exposed to a plethora of solidarity-building rituals, potential sources of power and support for social justice activities. These students are exposed to three major classes of Interaction Rituals through their time at Notre Dame: infrequent but intense top-down “institutional” identity development rituals focused primarily on the transition from high school graduate to Domer, while also encouraging the formation of a dorm identity (such as the mandatory Freshman Orientation week); mundane but pervasive ground-up, day-to-day interaction rituals that reinforce dorm

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13 The 2006 Kaplan College Guide quotes Dan Saracino, the assistant provost for enrollment at Notre Dame, as saying, “When we survey students and ask the three things they think about when they think of Notre Dame, they’ll say tradition, faith and academics.”: http://www.webco.cc/Miscellaneous%20Tips/America's%20New%20Elite%20Ivies%20Kaplan%20College%20Guide%20MSNBC...pdf
identities; and repeated, formalized “high sacred” rituals, like the football game described later on in this chapter.

Although these various types of rituals appear to be deeply emotionally satisfying for many of the students, the pervasive heterosexist and homophobic assumptions that permeate all of these types of rituals present particular challenges for GLBT students. What happens when a student’s self-concept as a gay or lesbian person conflicts with the expectations thrust upon them by a group of people, such as their dormmates, with whom they experience such great solidarity? For many students, the result is a state of ambivalence about homophobic and heterosexist actions they encounter, an ambivalence which undercuts the motivation to mobilize to improve the lives of GLBTQ students.

This chapter begins with a short story intended to elicit in the reader some sense of the power of an interaction ritual—in this case, a football game—to create a sense of solidarity. I then describe three major classifications of interaction rituals that Notre Dame undergrads are exposed to during their time as students and how these rituals create bonds among students, both as “Domers” and as dormmates. From there, I present aspects of life at Notre Dame as experienced by a sexual minority (both in terms of experiencing homophobia and heterosexism and in trying to cope as a queer student in a heterosexual institution) and examine what happens when feelings of pride and shame are evoked in the same interaction. I conclude with a theory of emotional ambivalence as a potential outcome of structural conditions that generate moments when these two opposing forces overlap, and present a model for predicting whether or not students will succumb to or overcome ambivalence depending on whether or not they have access to social groups outside of their dorms that can provide emotional energy boosts.
3.2. “We are ND”

As you walk around campus, the crowds of people buzz with energy; chatter fills the air, little kids throw footballs back and forth, concession stands litter the campus, families stare in awe at the Basilica, Main Building, and Grotto, and every direction you look, you see Notre Dame Football shirts. If you head to the right quad at the right time, you can see the Irish Guard-tall, solemn, and dignified- performing a drill in front of a crowd of alumni. The cloying scent of bar-b-q and hot dogs is everywhere- everywhere except the tailgating parking lots, where a scent of beer dominates the proceedings. Through it all, people are smiling, talking, joking, laughing; there’s camaraderie shared among these strangers, from the students who attend every football game, to the alumni who remember the good old days of Notre Dame, to the tourist for whom going to a real Notre Dame football game has been a dream of theirs for years, to the local Michiana residents who can’t afford a ticket, yet adore ND football so much that they tailgate anyway. It feels like a giant family reunion: even though you don’t know everyone around you, you know that you are all blood, all related, and this sense of … means more than distance, class, or even knowing their name.

For the dilettantes and the outsiders, the pregame ritual starts up maybe a couple of hours before The Game- tailgating, having a few drinks with friends and maybe catching the marching band heading up to the stadium. For the “real” Notre Dame Football fans though, the game really began the day before. The massive pep rally is followed by a “kegs and eggs” party- drinking all night, crashing at the party site, and then grabbing breakfast before the tailgate. Either way, long before fans even start to pile in to the stadium, the air is electric.
About an hour before kickoff, some silent alarm seems to go off. First in a trickle, then in a deluge, people start to migrate towards the stadium doors. Elderly gentlemen who volunteer their Saturdays for love of the game check your ticket and your student ID- only a cursory glance, of course, as hundreds of borrowed ID cards bring friends and family members into the student section each game. You navigate the concrete cavern, up the tunnel to the stands, where you once again are struck by the sheer size of the stadium, the massive number of people all piling in. You check your ticket for your seat number, or more likely just find some friends, sit next to them, and hope the ushers don’t harass you. The seats are rough, unforgiving wood and about as uncomfortable as anything called a “bench” could be called, but that doesn’t matter, because you know you will be standing the whole time anyway. Right now, you are taking in everything, talking with your friends, and mingling… but as soon as the players file on to the field, they have your (and everyone else’s) full attention. The first cheer begins with the first kickoff- a long, drawn out “whooooo-oo!” The crisp autumn air stings your lungs a bit as you inhale before the next chant. The press of the thousands of people around you feels almost comforting rather than claustrophobic… it simultaneously feels as though the game is being played just for you and as if you are a single but critical piece in a giant human machine. If you don’t cheer loud enough, then it’s your fault if the game goes poorly for your side.

To insiders, the home football game relieves mundane student stresses in a moment of collective pride. To an outsider, however, the home game ritual could seem like potentially dangerous mob-like behavior. Participants drink copious amounts of alcohol, often consumed starting the night before; wear the same shirt; alternate chanting
cheers such as “kill, kill” while making stabbing motions; and generally suspend reflexive awareness.

3.3. Ambivalence

“Yeah, I get called “faggot” by strangers when jogging around campus with my friend.”
“What? That’s so wrong! Why would they do that!?!?”
“You know—it’s just how guys are.”

-Exchange between Ricky and Amy, heterosexual couple and civil rights advocates, at the local student radio station

Throughout my time in the field, I discovered many students seemed to hold a double standard: yes, homophobia causes me pain, but when the people I live with do it, it’s not really homophobia, it’s “just guys being stupid” or “something you have to live with”—“this is a Catholic campus, after all.” I was shocked anew each time an on-campus gay student told me some horror story about a dorm experience, then turned around and defended their dormmates—again, reinforcing the importance and salience of dorm identity to undergraduates. I originally believed that I was either misunderstanding the undergrad activist culture on campus, something I was prone to anyway, or that the students had become somewhat inured against the slurs and harassment they dealt with in their daily lives. But then, if casual homophobia was just part of life as an undergrad at Notre Dame, why was Amy so outraged at it, while her boyfriend was so blasé?

As I examined my fieldnotes for situations where students either spoke up against the students they were living with or defended them, I noticed certain patterns. I came to the realization that defending one’s aggressors, particularly when the damage they inflict comes from passive, environmental hostility rather than direct action, is sometimes the only strategy left for these students when coping with homophobia. Switching dorms
voluntarily to move to ones with less homophobic cultures was something that undergrads “just don’t do;” ironically, for gay and lesbian students, moving off-campus or dropping out entirely seemed a far more likely outcome. Rather than getting up in arms about homophobia occurring in one’s own backyard, many students were more likely to shrug off homophobia and heterosexism from those they lived with.

Ambivalence in the homosexual community (as with any marginalized community) is a well-documented phenomenon, one that “arises from and is reinforced by the social relations of marginalization” (Gould 2001: 137). As homosexuals experience Du Bois’s “double consciousness”—“this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others,” the majority, this ambivalence can be directed at oneself, as homosexual desires are linked with guilt and shame (Du Bois 1989 [1903]: 3). It can also be directed at heteronormative society, as queer persons are in equal measure attracted to and repulsed by the privileged surrounding them; simultaneously, GLBTQ persons and their allies are (excepting perhaps specific gay ghettos) still part of heterosexual society (Gould 2001). Either way, ambivalence can pose a major obstacle to political mobilization, as strong, clear emotions are often critical for mobilizing marginalized groups (Gould 2001; Britt and Heise 2000). However, most previous research on ambivalence has taken a macro view of the issue, stating that empirically it exists and theorizing how it emerges from the relationships between the marginalized group and their privileged counterparts. I seek to specify both how ambivalence develops in marginalized communities on a micro level—via competing experiences of pride and shame—and how more macro structures allow for individuals to escape ambivalence.
sans conscious manipulation of emotions via activist organizations (Britt and Heise 2000) or moral shock (Jasper 1997).

3.4. Interaction Rituals Build Pride and Solidarity

The concept of “ritual” is key to the theories I will develop over the next couple of chapters. Ritual theory begins with Durkheim (1912). Using the example of Australian aboriginal culture, Durkheim created a theory of ritual as foundational to division between the “sacred,” or transcendental, and the “profane,” or mundane. Sacredness is represented in group symbols and totems, focused on unity within a group, while profanity is less group-oriented. He distinguishes between the “negative cult” and the “positive cult”: the negative cult being a system of prohibitions designed to keep sacred entities from “leaking” onto the profane, since “even the most superficial or indirect contact is enough to extend sacredness from one object to another,” leading the sacred to “contradict its domain” (p. 237); and the positive cult being a set of rituals—celebrations, sacrifices, and feasts, for example—that maintain the status of the sacred.

Durkheim notes that these rites gain their power by eliciting emotions towards the sacred, which are then amplified by the force of collectivity: “the sharing of these feelings has, as always, the effect of intensifying them” (p. 302). Chanting and rhythm entrain the participants until a “collective effervescence” is generated: a shared emotional state that generates solidarity among participants and, when focused on a particular object, makes a sacred symbol out of that object for the group.

Following in the Durkheimian tradition, Irving Goffman theorized about interaction rituals as they occurred in day-to-day life, though mundane interactions with other individuals (Goffman 1959, 1967). For Goffman, in these smaller, face-to-face
interactions, \(^{14}\) man himself was often the sacred object—or more specifically, the presentation of one’s self, or their “face,” was sacred (Goffman 1967:10, 31). Thus, the mundane interactions that make up the bulk of social life become sacred rituals where the “face” or sense of self is the sacred object that is protected, venerated, and elevated through the ritual, as the participants strive to avoid damaging each others’ face or eliciting embarrassment.

Scheff has made important contributions to these two theories by highlighting the negative emotional dynamics that parallel the positive ones that Durkheim and Goffman describe. That is, where Durkheim emphasizes the creation of solidarity, or “pride” in Scheff’s terms, \(^{15}\) and Goffman focuses on mundane rituals as cooperative endeavors among participants who are trying to elevate (or at least preserve) each others’ “face,” Scheff adds in the emotional sanctions of “shame”—an awareness of a threatened or severed social bond (Scheff 1990).

Collins further advanced these previous scholars’ work by formalizing the emotional dynamics discussed by Durkheim and Goffman, enabling sociologists to think in more complex ways about emotional processes and allow us to anticipate the emotional attractions and repulsions that structure the day-to-day experiences of social actors. To briefly re-summarize Collins’s Interaction Ritual Theory (as discussed in more depth in the literature review chapter), Interaction Rituals (IRs) occur when a group

\[^{14}\] I generally refer to these rituals as “mundane,” to contrast them with “sacred” rituals; Collins, however, refers to these as “natural” rituals (Collins 1990:28). Furthermore, Collins regards not the “face” as the sacred object reinforced by these interactions, but instead claims that “conventional social reality” is the sacred object (ibid:29). However, this formulation lacks certain theoretical leverage—for example, in examining identities and roles as central phenomena in these interactions as potential sacred objects, as I discuss in this chapter.

\[^{15}\] Scheff viewed pride as an awareness of the strengthening of a social bond (Scheff 1990).
of people, sharing a common mood and a focus of attention, get caught up in the group activity; the result of a successful Interaction Ritual is a feeling of solidarity among the participants, which leads to the generation of Emotional Energy (EE), high levels of which are experiences as positive emotions like confidence and enthusiasm (Collins 1990, 2004)\textsuperscript{16}—Durkheim’s sacred rituals that result in collective effervescence (Emotional Energy, pride) and the creation of holy symbols. Individuals are drawn into situations where they can build emotional energy and away from experiences where they would lose emotional energy, thus largely structuring social life as individuals pursue opportunities to gain emotional energy moment to moment; furthermore, as emotional energy levels persist as a level across time, emotional stratification can emerge where the emotional “haves,” those who dominate or who are the center of attention at EE-building rituals, use their higher emotional energy levels to “recreate their power from situation to situation,” leaving low-EE individuals as followers and subordinates (Collins2004:131).

When these Interaction Rituals are built around an institution that espouses a certain identity,\textsuperscript{17} such as “Notre Dame student” or “member of X dorm,” it could be said that the IRs are reinforcing or building on that particular identity; thus a repeated dormitory chant reinforces a student’s identity as a dorm member. These identities become the sacred objects of the interaction rituals, a particular type of “totem.” Furthermore, since these totemic identities are the product of interaction rituals where the

\textsuperscript{16} It is somewhat important to note that emotional energy is, for Collins, a “strong, steady emotion” and that it allows individuals to act with “initiative and resolve, to set the direction of social situations rather than to be dominated by others…” (Collins 2004: 134). EE is a long-term consequence of a successful IR, but it is not the solidary/attunement itself.

\textsuperscript{17} Identity: “self-conceptions based on social positions that are enacted in ongoing, reciprocal role relationships and are accepted as self-descriptive” (Thoits 1992: 237).
symbol is charged by group membership rather than anonymous crowds, the symbols are resilient beyond the interaction ritual that is charging them and the interaction ritual prolongs group membership (Collins 2004:83-84). However, as Durkheim noted with aboriginal totems that represented particular animals, the idea, image, or representation of these totems becomes more sacred than the entity it is representing (Durkheim 2001[1912]:104). That is, the ideal of a Notre Dame student is more sacred than any particular instantiation of the category, thus sometimes leaving actual students—particularly students who fail to live up to the totemic ideal—as the losers in any conflict between the ideal and the real.

In my general observation both during my time in the field and in my personal experience, just as successful IRs produced feelings of pride and solidarity, failed IRs, specifically IRs where a participant is either unable to share the mood of the group or one where a participant is excluded from the proceedings, generate a sense of shame for the participant who is “left out” —a sort of negative Emotional Energy. Here, I break a bit from Collins. Collins’s Interaction Ritual Chain theory covers failed, empty and forced rituals (Collins 2004: 51-53). Collins states that failed rituals are marked by “most immediately… a low level of collective effervescence, the lack of momentary buzz,” and little or no shared entrainment, and the output of such failed rituals creates “little or no feeling of group solidarity; no sense of one’s identity as affirmed or changed; no respect for the group’s symbols; no heightened emotional energy” (ibid 51). The final effect of a failed ritual can range from a complete lack of effect by the ritual to depression and interaction fatigue, depending on how badly the ritual failed. For him, rituals fail mainly because of a lack of shared attention and shared emotional state among participants, and
while successful rituals generate emotional energy, “…failed rituals are energy draining” (ibid 53).

However, Collins refers to rituals as if they are successes or failures for all parties involved: in a successful ritual, all participants gain emotional energy and experience solidarity and an affirmation of their group identities; in a failed ritual, all group members are drained of energy. Individuals who are explicitly excluded from a “successful” interaction ritual—say, a gay student not being invited to a dorm party in his residence hall—are obviously deprived of a certain amount of solidarity by the very fact that they miss out on the solidarity and EE-building of the IR. However, a single interaction ritual can be both EE-generating and energy draining. Participants who are part of a “successful” IR but who are not part of the shared focus of attention and emotional state can end up drained of energy even as those around them experience solidarity and EE boosts. It is not entirely dissimilar to Collins’s concept of “forced rituals,” where a participant is able to create a successful interaction ritual but ends up personally drained—Collins provides the example a host of a party consciously attempting to liven up a party. Here though, Collins still states that the IR as a whole suffers from an “unnatural, overly self-conscious” entrainment, rather than focusing on the varying effects across participants within the ritual and, indeed, within participants themselves (ibid 53).

Whenever an individual is part of a “successful” interaction ritual, but personally does not share the same focus of attention and mood as the other participants, they are exposed to both the solidarity-building and energy-draining effects. These “mixed” interaction rituals are both pride-evoking and shame-inducing for these individuals,
leaving them feeling strong social ties to the group, but also vulnerable to feelings of
shame for their inability to fully participate in the IR with the group. It is as if the same
rituals which make that social group so important to a GBLTQ person’s identity also
gives that group inordinate power to elicit shame; it’s the difference between hearing a
bishop who you’ve never met rail against homosexuality and having your best friend
mention, even casually, that they are against gay marriage. Just as with black Americans,
non-heterosexual Notre Dame students experience Du Bois’s “double consciousness,”
judging themselves by the standards set by the totemic identities created in the interaction
rituals, using the standards of the privileged heterosexual majority (Du Bois 2006[1903]).
These mixed IRs can also emerge when a GLBTQ student feels as if they themselves are
the focus of attention when their peers are discussing GLBTQ issues around them or
when GLBTQ students face heterosexist or homophobic IRs, like certain dorm dances.
Both of these situations are discussed in the various “life as a gay students” subheadings
below.

These mixed interaction rituals are often marked by conflicting expectations for
behavior: “incompatible definitions” of oneself, to phrase it in Goffmanian terms
(Goffman 1956)—again, like a “Negro” and an “American” for Du Bois, and as non-
heterosexual and a Notre Dame student or member of a particular dorm where
heterosexual prowess is especially revered. These situations lead to “embarrassment”:
“blushing, fumbling, stuttering, an unusually low- or high-pitched voice,” and so on (ibid
264). Scheff takes this concept of embarrassment, ubiquitous in Goffman’s sociological
view of the world, and refines them further, further develops Goffmans’s work on the
“the social aspects of embarrassment…what is going on between interactants” to include
a theory of shame that describes a system occurring both “between and within interactants” (Scheff 1988: 396, original emphasis). “When there is real or imagined rejection on one or both sides (withdrawal, criticism, insult, defeat, etc.),” it can lead to an ongoing process of shame with “no natural limit to the intensity and the duration of arousal.”

For Scheff, it is shame, not embarrassment, that is “the most frequent and possibly the most important of emotions” (ibid 397). In fact, Scheff claims that it is the constant use of terms such as “embarrassment” or “being uncomfortable” in social life that renders shame nearly invisible. Scheff, utilizing a secondary analysis of Asch’s 1956 conformity study, further breaks down “embarrassment” into two forms of shame: overt, undifferentiated shame (marked by “hiding behavior” like speech disruption, blushing, and averted gaze) and unacknowledged, bypassed shame (marked by “obsession” with the shame and rapid but rambling thought and speech patterns). Scheff and Goffman, both influenced strongly by Durkheim, both agree that nonconformity to social expectations leads to this embarrassment or shame; Scheff would add that, conversely, conformity to norms leads to pride (ibid 405).

To return to the question driving this chapter: what happens when marginalized or oppressed people’s interactions are structured so that not only do the experience intense and often rewarding interactions with those who would or do marginalize them, but in fact these moments of solidarity are inextricably tied to institutions and norms that marginalize them? In other words, what happens to non-heterosexual students when their

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18 Unlike Collin’s “emotional energy,” which is always long-term, Scheff’s shame (and, implicitly, pride as well) can be both momentary or transient and enduring or long-lasting.
emotional-energy generating interactions are structured by an institution which is espouses heterosexist norms? Durkheim and Collins explain that the sacred symbols of the interaction, the (heterosexual) totemic Notre Dame identity, is created in the interaction rituals the students, through the structure of the university, are forced into participating in. Goffman and Du Bois provide a lens for examining what happens when the student's homosexual identity is placed against the totemic dorm or Notre Dame identity—the student experiences double consciousness and incompatible definitions. Scheff provides the consequence of this situation: the creation of shame, or in Collins’s framework the loss of emotional energy. Further interaction rituals are often “mixed” for the student, as they experience pride and emotional energy from inclusion in a group and a “successful” interaction ritual but suffer shame and emotional energy drains as they are sometimes excluded or are aware of their failure to meet the totemic identity’s standards because of conflicts between the heterosexist or homophobic nature of the rituals and totemic identity against the student’s non-heterosexual status.

For example, during a typical dorm video game gathering, a gay student can experience solidarity through playing a competitive first-person-shooter game with his dormmates as they team up on a single console against anonymous opponents online. The players’ team becomes a holy symbol, as does their dorm membership (“Let’s show them what ‘X dorm’ can do!”), and the gay student feels pride as his team racks up wins. However, throughout the match, anti-gay slurs are tossed about profusely by the opponents and his own team (for example, “someone get that faggot sniper!”), creating shame in the gay student as he plays, even if the slur is followed up with a “no offense.” These moments simultaneously engender pride and shame for GLBTQ students.
The following three sections detail three categories of interaction rituals that structure Notre Dame life for undergraduate students: transitional, institutionalized identity-development interaction rituals a student experiences primarily when they enter the university as a freshman; mundane, micro, Goffmanian day-to-day rituals that make up the majority of social life as an undergraduate student; and “high holy” rituals that mirror Durkheims sacred rituals, like football games and pep rallies.

3.4.1 Entrance and Transition: Institutional Identity-Development Interaction Rituals

Frosh-O creates a huge, week-long interaction ritual that, while only experienced once a year and only fully experienced Freshman year, colors the expectations, friends, and general life experience for the rest of many students’ time at Notre Dame. At Frosh-O, the bonds between a student and their dormmates is established, and this bond is one of the strongest I’ve observed at Notre Dame; those who compare the dorm structure at Notre Dame to Greek fraternities are not far off the mark. Furthermore, on paper, the administration and dorm rectors are both aware of this effect and seek to encourage it; for example, the reasoning behind parietals is that the “community” (of a dormitory) must be restored at a certain time each night. Similarly, I was refused access to the majority of Frosh-O events of four separate dorms, two men’s dorms and two women’s dorms, on the grounds that I was not part of the community being built.19

While I was unable to gain access to Frosh-O as a participant, I was able to collect many stories from students as well as schedules and promotional materials for the events. At the time of this study, the university was in something of a transition regarding Frosh  

19 One dorm did grant me “access” to some of their events, but only those events that were “public” to begin with, e.g. campus-wide activities that occurred mostly outdoors.
O, so the stories I heard from students about their experiences four or more years prior differed quite a bit from some of my first-hand experiences as a volunteer working for the Gender Relations Center during one year’s Frosh O.

For example, as a volunteer for the GRC, I was asked to run slides for the College HAS Issues program (a student safety presentation held for the entire Freshman class in a large auditorium) HAS was an acronym for Hook-ups, alcohol, and safety). The program was in its second year, and was mandatory for students who wanted to get their football tickets- about 2000 students, total. The students came in by dorm, nearly all wearing dorm T-shirts, and while waiting for the event to start would chant various dorm cheers. In just a day and a half, the students had already mastered quite a few chants per dorm, and during most of the chants, one member of the dorm would stand up and direct the rest of the students by keeping tempo or clapping. These interactions rituals combined a focus of attention on the leader of the cheer with rhythmic entrainment, a synchronization of body movements, to bolster the sacred symbol of a specific totemic dorm identity (Collins 2004:77). All of the chants I could make out from my position behind the projection screen invoked dorm identities rather than Notre Dame identities, identities I would often hear in other contexts referred to as the “brotherhood/sisterhood” of a dorm (“that’s no longer part of our brotherhood,” or “tolerance is part of our sisterhood”). Notre Dame identity was also invoked often by speakers on stage once the event started, both subtly (constantly using “we” words) and explicitly, as when the student body president referred to everyone gathered in the hall as “family,” or comments during the presentation that stated “we at Notre Dame are X…”
The setup for a freshman-class wide Interaction Ritual was already set; there was a clear focus of attention (on the stage) and a shared mood (sometimes humor, but realistically, mostly anticipation for getting football tickets and frustration at being forced to sit through a long program about things that the students, as the made clear through their reactions throughout the presentation, did not believe applied to them). Each chant also was a small IR, focused on the chant leader and consciously attempting to build dorm solidarity. All the fumbling around, trying to act as a “real” Notre Dame student that occurs during this first week also builds solidarity with their peers—and especially their dormmates—soon to be bolstered by the introduction of the upperclassmen and co-occurring (for male dorms) hazing and drinking rituals. Furthermore, at this stage, all the students share a similar position—they are all new to college, experiencing life as a Notre Dame student for the first time, and likely all are scared, excited, and anxious about the experience. However, for all its intensity, it is just one week of ritual, one that is replaced by day-to-day living and punctuated by the occasional high sacred ritual.

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20 One large group of students kept talking to one another through the presentation until a GRC staff member finally just stood next to them to intimidate them into silence. Meanwhile, every mention of football tickets led to a large whooping or cheer from the crowd, only to be followed by boos and hisses when the presenters made it clear that the students weren’t getting the tickets quite yet. This expression of emotions is essential in transforming the event from a lecture into an interaction ritual. As Britt and Heise point out, just watching makes a group an audience; “individuals have to demonstrate their emotions and actions to one another” to create solidarity through the experience (263).

21 For example, several men’s dorms take all the freshmen students binge drinking before the first day of class.
3.4.2 Sustaining Solidarity: Mundane, Day-To-Day Interaction Rituals

As with many universities, the dining hall of the Notre Dame campus provides a major structuring force on the social lives of the students. Students who live in the dormitories on campus are, in many circumstances, required to purchase a dining hall meal plan and thus tend to eat most of their meals at one of two sites (North and South dining halls); with all of the freshman class required to live in the residence halls and about 80% of the total undergraduate student body living in one of the 27 single-sex residence halls on-campus, this means the vast majority of students will be spending most of their mealtime in these dining halls.

Dining hall provide bonding interaction rituals in two ways. First, the actual process of getting one’s food is a small interaction ritual, albeit one that is perhaps less powerful and more diffuse than the rituals normally referred to in IR theory- students disperse across various food stations, gather their food carefully on trays (sometimes making it a contest of artfulness to get as much food as they can in a single circuit of the dining area), then gathering with their friends, scouting a place to sit, and eating their food. Once the students have sat down with their trays together, the second and more important aspect of dining halls comes into play.

The dining halls are a site for conversations among students, encounters with other students one doesn’t know well, and reading the Observer with friends. Here students are perfecting—and being judged on—their competency at talking (Goffman

22 According to Notre Dame’s undergraduate admission page: admissions.nd.edu/

23 Off-campus and graduate students do not have to buy a meal plan, and given the cost of dining hall visits without a plan these students are less likely to eat there with any regularity
1981), as well as working on perfecting their Notre Dame student “face” through their presentations of selves (Goffman 1959). The highly public-yet-personal nature of the dining halls creates an environment where students are hard at work conforming to or defying the expected behavior of a Notre Dame student, further reinforcing the totemic Notre Dame identity, while the tendency to eat with dorm members reinforces the power of the dorm peer group to create and drain emotional energy for students.

As for the relevance of dining room interactions for undergraduates, for students who frequent the dining halls, a huge proportion of their stories about their days begins with, “At the dining hall…” More than in classrooms or halls, more than in dorm rooms, and only exceeded by talking of things that happened “during practice” for members of the band, cheerleading squad, or sports teams, students tend to talk about their experiences at the dining hall. For off-campus/graduate students, there is another site where they often eat, the LaFortune Student center. However, this site is far smaller than the dining halls and the groups there tend more towards students studying or working on homework as much as groups of friends socializing over dinner. Many students who rarely see each other elsewhere on campus will meet at the dining hall, and the dining hall so shapes their lives that students will sometimes categorize themselves by which dining hall they go to- sometimes to the point of excluding other people (“yeah, we never see her anymore, since she goes to South Dining Hall now…” “We never hang out anymore, you never go to the dining hall…”).

It is this self-categorization, combined with the multiple small interaction rituals that occur while eating (the substance of which becomes the stories people later tell about their day), the ritual of getting and eating the food itself, and the socialization with
friends and peers in a large social space, that makes the dining hall experience one of social bonding. The friends and dormmates one goes to the dining hall with become more relevant in a particular student’s life, as eating with the same group of people several days a week makes them prominent fixtures in one’s life.\(^{24}\)

Compared to the intense Frosh O events, these day-to-day IRs seem mild and unstructured, almost to the point of seeming irrelevant. There’s no powerful rhythmic entrainment, as with the chants and large crowds of Frosh O, and there’s less of a sense of transitioning between states (with the commensurate sense of fear and anxiety that changing roles often brings). On the other hand, though, in these interactions there is more potential for feeling observed rather than anonymous—a certain intimacy that’s lacking from the other categories of IR described in this chapter. Furthermore, whereas other IRs are strongly rooted in top-down, institutional prescriptions (rules, regulations, expectations), here the IR is more based in peer groups and in what “other students” say and believe—both relatively distance students in the Observer\(^{25}\) and more familiar face across the table.

The dining hall structure lends itself towards what Goffman refers to as “unfocused interactions” (Goffman 1963), interactions where there is no clear focus of attention. Rather than communicating a clear discursive message through speech about, for example, what it means to be a Notre Dame student, these interactions rely on a body symbolism to represent “an actor’s social attributes and… his conception of himself,”

\(^{24}\) Eating alone in the dining hall leaves you with a sense of isolation and loneliness despite the crowd—students will generally either use “grab-and-go” (basically a bag lunch option at the dining halls) or eat at the Student Center rather than venture in the dining halls alone and risking the associated shame.

\(^{25}\) Though, students are, of course, delighted when one of their friends is quoted in the Observer
presented for everyone in the vicinity (ibid: 33-34). Here, the relationship among the actors takes center stage more than the totemic symbol of identity; on the other hand, as the individual’s representation of themselves to the general public becomes more important, so does their deviance from the totemic identity they are attempting to represent. Just as in high school, the “cafeteria” can be a site of judgment and condemnation as much as a site for engendering solidarity or pride. Furthermore, the risk of conscious exclusion is higher in these settings; whereas in large-scale interaction rituals, individuals who disengage themselves from the proceedings remain largely anonymous and mostly miss out on potential emotional energy and solidarity, here individuals can be called out publicly and explicitly shamed for failing to live up to the expectations of the ritual or totemic identity.

Thus, the structure of daily life as a Notre Dame student encourages mundane interaction rituals they reinforce dorm and Notre Dame totemic identities and empower particular social groups—the people a student eats with—as a primary source pride, and solidarity, and, through focused interaction rituals in other locations, emotional energy for that individual. Later sections will discuss how these interaction rituals can also generate shame; for example, when happens when a non-heterosexual student is with friends who are talking constantly about the morality of homosexuality or gay-related issues because the topic has been reported on by the student newspaper multiple times that week. Thus potential sources of pride and solidarity can generate equal amounts of shame and self-consciousness.
3.4.3 High Sacred Rituals: Football Games and Pep Rallies

In both popular and campus culture, football is intrinsically tied to Notre Dame as a university. It draws in huge profits for the university, is shown live on television across the nation, and is a common reference point students, professors, and administrators use when talking to other Domers. More than that, though, the entire football experience, as with sports experiences as many schools is, in many ways the stereotypical Durkheimian sacred ritual (Durkheim [1912] 2001), and one that occurs at every home game. If you go to a Notre Dame game and throw yourself into the proceedings, you will experience a sense of solidarity and belonging— that feeling of “being” Notre Dame (a Notre Dame identity, if you will) - that, in the moment, rivals any other identity you may hold. Conversely, if you go to a football game and distance yourself from everything by, say, taking field notes, sitting through most of the game, and not cheering, by the time you leave you are left with both a “what was the big deal” feeling and an awareness of a huge gap between yourself and the other people who were physically present next to you— but were miles away in experience. This experience is only magnified for the many undergraduates for whom football weekends become one extended ritual of parties, hanging out with their friends, and (generally) drinking.

In some ways, these high sacred rituals are quite similar to the freshmen orientation activities; they reinforce the institutional Notre Dame identities as much as (or more than) dorm identities, and there is a strong sense of rhythm, encouraged by local chants, cheerleaders, and the natural flow of the game. Here, rather than building a new identity or helping students transition into Domer status, the interaction rituals serves more to reinforce a generalized “Notre Dame” identity, one that is shared with other
football fans. There's also opportunity for both intimate rituals with friends (pregame activities, confrontations with fans of the other team, standing with your friends cheering, or possibly throwing marshmallows) and anonymous rituals with half a football stadium, where individuals just ride the wave of emotions being generated. Here, there is far less of a sense of being told what belonging to Notre Dame means, and instead is just a sense of belonging to Notre Dame.²⁶

3.5. Notre Dame and Dorm Identities

All of these IRs culminate for many students in a powerful sense of solidarity with their dormmates and Notre Dame at large and, in many cases, a strong Notre Dame-and (especially) dorm- identity. This dorm identity is so strong that at most gatherings of strangers, like at the first meeting for most clubs, the students go around the room and tell their name, major, year, and which dorm they live in. However, just as there is a huge potential for pride and solidarity in these interaction rituals, certain forms of these rituals contain an equally huge risk of shame and exclusion for GLBTQ students.²⁷ Some of the rituals, like Frosh O and dorm dances are embedded with heterosexist assumptions, while other rituals, like the day-to-day IRs in the dining halls, take on a different tone when the topic of conversation is, in abstract, the student themselves, and how much they live up to or fail to meet expectations as Domers and dorm members. Thus, the students are placed between the Notre Dame or dorm totemic identities reinforced by the multiple interaction

²⁶ Of course, implicit in the football games is that part of being a Notre Dame student is attending football games, caring about the outcomes, and so forth.

²⁷ This is not to say that many other students may be marginalized by the interaction rituals occurring around them; for example, Protestant students are “left out” when it comes to Catholic Mass, or students from less wealthy backgrounds can feel shame when students around them blithely talk about their latest iPod or $600 purse.
rituals and their awareness of themselves as GLBTQ students; they feel pride and belonging to the groups, but shame for not living up to the expectations of the group.

3.6. Life as a Gay Student

The following sections discuss the many ways in which the interaction rituals described above reinforce a heterosexual identity and how these interaction rituals are experienced by gay and lesbian students. Whereas the previous sections presented the interaction rituals largely from a perspective of the privileged majority, these sections present the rituals from the perspective of the marginalized students that experience them. I cover four aspects of student life as experienced by non-heterosexual students and their allies: the norm of heterosexuality, or heterosexism; outright homophobia; stereotyping; and “being the issue.”

3.6.1 The Heterosexual Norm

“It just stings when you go to the bathroom and see the ,boy of the week” plastered on the walls... just once I wish it were a ,,girl ofthe week.”
-Sophomore, lesbian, conversation while walking to her dorm room

One common critique I heard about “Frosh O”- particularly from GLBTQ and female students- was that the experience often felt like a sexist and heterosexist attempt to create dating couples. The brother-sister dorm combinations, the sheer number of events where a male and female dorm would interact, and the actual form of that interaction left many students feeling pressured into dating. One female student confided in me that during her Frosh-O several years ago, “…some of the girls were crying because they didn’t meet anyone {at the dances}”- a reaction she herself found ludicrous
in the abstract, but understandable, given the context. I heard stories about “tie” and “shoe” dances from various students, again mostly female or gay, where males would throw their ties or a shoe into a pile and the women would grab an article of clothing, find the man that the object belonged to, then dance with that person.\textsuperscript{28} At the town hall meeting on sexism, students discussed Frosh-O quite a bit, especially how it made female students feel like they were being pushed into “an MRS degree” and led to a “ring before spring” culture, a culture the Gender Relations center included as a problem to address in their programming.

Dorm dances similarly provided a strong heterosexual norm for students and multiple opportunities for students, especially closeted ones, to fall prey to shame-eliciting interactions; what could otherwise potentially be a high sacred interaction ritual that reinforces dorm solidarity the way football games reinforce Domer solidarity instead often leaves homosexual students left out or struggling to fit in with heterosexual peers. One form of dorm dance especially, the “SRY” dances, is particularly problematic for GLBTQ students, especially closeted ones. SYR, or “screw your roommate,” dances, are based on roommates picking the date for each other for the dance. True, everyone in the dorm faces the possibility of being expected to go to the dance with someone they do not personally desire, but gay and lesbian students face either (if they are “out” of the closet) being left out of the fun\textsuperscript{29} and reminded of how they are different than those around them or (if they are closeted) having to fake it with a person of the undesired gender or backing

\textsuperscript{28} To be fair, these sorts of dances are not uncommon at other American universities.

\textsuperscript{29} While I never heard students say flat-out that same-sex couples would be out of place at such a dance, I also never heard examples of gay or lesbian students who were matched up with a male or female respectively by their roommates.
out and appearing to be a killjoy. “You either look lame because you won’t go or you have to come out to your roommate and make a big deal of it.” Furthermore, dorm dances, especially SYRs, are treated by many students as a large part of campus life and a marker of how they are different from, say, grad students or off-campus students; in the campus newspaper, during a debate over the rights of graduate students in football ticket lotteries, one editorial even used graduate students’ ignorance of the term “Syr” as one reason why they were not as authentic Notre Dame students as the undergraduates.

Outside of these specific events, many male dorms so emphasize a heterosexual masculinity that merely living in them provides near-constant reminders of one’s GLBTQ status. Men’s dorms suffer the same dangers of any homosocial environment, most notably suppression and privileging of heterosexual masculinity (Bird 1996). For example, as Bird would have predicted, a large part of socializing in many male dorms involves the establishment of women as sexual objects through establishing men as not only different from women but better than women (ibid 121). This can be as subtle as having multiple posters of nameless women, in various states of undress, adorning the walls of heterosexual males’ rooms to outright misogyny and or statements that “women aren’t people” as punch lines to jokes. Homosexuality is considered effeminate, thus feminine, and thus less respected than hegemonic or hypermasculinities, leaving gay males more likely to be denigrated as much as, if not more than, women.

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30 I was surprised how rarely explicit statements of this occurred in the sites I visited; the balance towards GLBTQ-focused locations over “heterosexual” spheres is almost certainly part of the reason for this, though it may also be the case that the association of homosexuality with femininity is falling out of vogue with younger people. I did, of course, constantly come across criticisms of homosexuality or behaviors as effeminate, but it was exclusively the province of homosexual students, and always denigrating—“stop flaming it up,” e.g. Heterosexual males’ negative reactions to homosexuality, on the other hand, were focused almost entirely on a revulsion about being an object of sexual desire for another
Women’s dorms, however, often come with their own gendered issues and heterosexist assumptions. Ideally, women’s dormitories offer a respite from the male gaze, a relief from the expectations of women as performers for a male-driven society and a site for undermining heterosexist assumptions. As one student put it, “it’s nice to just hang around in your pajamas without worrying about how you look.” However, my exposure to the women’s dorms and the majority of the discussions I had with female students suggested to me that female dorms who took advantage of having a “women-only” cultural space were in the minority, and instead the single-sex dorms structure seemed to consolidate masculine privilege. Even as male students, through comics in the Observer or conversation in the dining halls railed against the (relatively few, in my experience) women who would show up to classes in sensible and comfortable sweats rather than spending time making themselves “presentable,” most women walking around campus clearly put a lot of thought and work into their self-presentation—far more than the majority of men, at least. Women’s dorms often became the site of heterosexist assumptions about looking for “for guys” and finding a man, an attitude that only became clear to me after I began working with the GRC on eating disorder awareness; the final nail in the coffin, for me at least, was an editorial (after an series of exchanged by various students in the student newspaper’s opinions section) written by a woman criticizing her fellow students for not taking the extra “hour or so” in the morning putting on make-up male and a reticence about physical intimacy with another male—“stay the hell away from me” or “what if they try to, like, blow me in my sleep?”
and dressing up nicely—“because you can be smart and pretty!”  

While men might be critical of women who wore sweat pants to class or who “weren’t even trying” to be attractive, their criticisms came in large strokes, along the lines of “Notre Dame girls are just ugly”  

compared to St Mary’s women, female students possessed a more refined vocabulary for critique of women and judged behaviors as well as appearances. Thus, women might mention someone’s weight as too fat or too skinny, or a particular woman as promiscuous or an over-drinker.  

Instead of female dorms becoming sites for empowerment against male expectations of beauty, they often became sites where finer critiques on how to meet those standards were discussed.

The fact that all freshmen are required to live in dorms, with the vast majority of students staying in the dorms for their full terms at Notre Dame, leaves the campus with a pervasive heterosexist culture, an assumption of mainstream heterosexuality foisted upon all students. For “normal” male and female students, this day-to-day living with heterosexism can wear out even the hardiest of souls, as they must constantly measure themselves against their romantic achievements and how close they are to marriage (for women) or socially-proscribed promiscuity (for males). Gay and lesbian students,

31 I scoured the short editorial for quite some time, but could not for the life of me uncover a hint of the irony I so hoped would be- nay, needed to be- there.

32 One comic strip in the Observer repeatedly represented women at Notre Dame as gremlins, for example.

33 St. Mary’s women, in contrast, were considered sexually promiscuous or “slutty” by Notre Dame men, in general.

34 On a personal note, I found myself outraged at the public treatment of Notre Dame women by Notre Dame men, both in “public” (as with how women were represented in Observer editorials and comics) and in private (the way many heterosexual Notre Dame men talked about women). In my experience, casual misogyny was rampant at the university, though fortunately various campus organizations, including Feminist Voice, Men Against Violence, and the Gender Relations Center, worked tirelessly to counter such attitudes.
obviously, face the worse of it, as for them, the “ideal” they are presented with is one that doesn’t include them at all.

3.6.2 Homophobia

“I’m pretty used to getting odd stares when I walk around campus holding hands with my boyfriend. It wasn’t until guys in cars shouted “go home faggots” at us a couple of times that I really became self-conscious about doing it in public.”

-Graduate student, gay, talking with a professor

Sometimes, students are confronted not just by an assumption of heterosexuality, but by an outright hostility towards homosexuality. In the worst cases, this can be manifested as direct harassment, as with the student quoted above, or with a student who’s CommUnity “safe space” plaque that was hung outside of his dorm room door was torn down by his dormmates. In other cases, the homophobia emerges as avoidance and shunning, as with a student who noted that he was always “the gay kid” in his dorm: “It was like they were afraid to be seen around me.”

Even worse, for certain dorms, the public symbols and IRs expressing the dorm identity are overtly homophobic. For example, one dorm’s chant is nothing more than “Ole, ole ole ole, Zahm is gay, Zahm is gay” (apparently mocking a rival dorm), and on any given day on campus it’s not uncommon to see a student wearing an orange “Zahm? Fine by me,” shirt, mocking Alliance ND’s “Gay? Fine by me” T-shirt campaign. My contacts in the dorms involved were unable to give me a full explanation of the meanings behind the chant and shirts, and grew increasingly agitated when I probed further on the matter (a phenomenon explored more fully later in this chapter), leaving me unsure of the origins of the chant. However, regardless of the origin story of the chants and shirt, the
explicitly homophobic message is undeniable and hurtful, as evinced both by my personal reactions every time I was confronted by the shirts or chant and the outrage expressed by activist friends of mine who had gone to a pep rally where they chant was used (an outrage that lasted far beyond the initial event, which I was not privy to, but which apparently involved some sort of direct confrontation). GLBTQ-rights activities have also spurred counterprotests, ranging from the relatively benign and polite (including a handful of students countering an Orange Shirt day and closet event by wearing suits and ties at the closet site in support of homosexual students who were struggling to suppress their same-sex desires) to hateful and offensive (including a “Wrath of God? Fine by Me” facebook organization\textsuperscript{35} and some students wearing “Gay? Go to Hell” T-shirts).\textsuperscript{36}

Of course, homophobia is pervasive in society at large; two men holding hands in South Bend are just as likely to be harassed than the same men on the Notre Dame campus and, in fact, the younger demographic and culture of “politeness” might in fact shield some GLBTQ individuals from more egregious homophobia, at least in public. However, what distinguished Notre Dame from some other universities, particularly larger or urban universities, is that it is impossible to avoid these interactions: there are no gay dorms, no gay neighborhood, no gay resource center, and so on. Gay and lesbian space exists only in individual dorm rooms or on the five or six hours a month when the organizations meet or the CORE Council holds a GLBTQ office hour. The situation is

\textsuperscript{35} In response to the site, many GLBTQ supporters joined this group and posted on the group forum and the site was ultimately mostly abandoned in terms of updates.

\textsuperscript{36} Debate over these shirts popped up in the Observer editorials, and one Progressive Student Alliance member alleged that school employees at one on-campus chain refused to serve students who wore the “Go to Hell” shirts.
even worse for students who are unaware of the existence of the groups and who are underage and unable to visit South Bend gay bars. In short, homophobia is, most of the time, inescapable at Notre Dame, and the threat of homophobia can be a constant drain on students as they just wait for the next incident to occur.

3.6.3 Stereotyping and Insensitivity, Both Gay and Straight

“I introduced him to her, and she said, „Oh, you’re her gay friend! That’s so wonderful, I’ve been wanting to meet you for forever. I really need a gay friend to go shopping with!” After that, my friend told me he never wanted to see that person again.”

-Junior, gay, GLBTQ activist, presenting at a CommUnity session

While perhaps less stinging than blatant homophobia, stereotyping and symbolically marking gay students as “the other” is still painful for gay and lesbian students to endure. In fact, the fact that it comes from people who seem to think of themselves as progressive and open-minded can make the situation harder to deal with for students; whereas it’s acceptable to respond to direct homophobia with equal hostility, social norms leave gay students having to swallow their anger because the insult comes with a smile or as an act of “friendship.” While I was participating in the CommUnity sensitivity sessions for Freshmen students, I was surprised out how often students would make statements that seemed to be to be blatantly discriminatory, but seemed to be expressed as markers of tolerance. For example, one student said that he would be very open and accepting if his roommate came out to him—he’d just put up a sheet partition in the room “so he can’t see me when I’m changing clothes.” This insensitivity was often compounded with conservative Catholic stances on homosexuality in “hate the sin, love
the sinner” mentalities, a stance which allowed many Catholic students that I met to believe they were actually quite liberal and supportive of GLBTQ students.

Gay and lesbian students who live in dorms and are “out” to some degree have few options when faced with this behavior. Even in the most gay-friendly dorms, there are times when someone says something offensive or intolerant, and often even out gay students have to just swallow any response rather than be “that person” or “the PC one.” To criticize someone, even when they are in the wrong, is to shame, which by its very definition is a threat to the social bond; to shame another is to threaten your own bond with them as well. Furthermore, there’s always a risk in calling someone out, because the majority person can always turn around and claim that the marginalized person is being “too sensitive.”

Ironically, the dangers of the bond can go the other way, too, as with gay and lesbian students who feel ostracized from their gay peers because they are republican or not “gay-looking” enough. “It’s like because I don’t look like a bulldyke, I’m not welcome there, you know? Which is fine, I don’t really think of myself as lesbian anyway, I’m just… open.” “Sometimes I feel like, because I’m not super-liberal, I don’t fit in with the other gay guys.” One segment of Loyal Daughters, a play written by a Notre Dame student using interview data from other Notre Dame students and staff, includes a monologue with a woman talking about being “outside the box,” with a sexual orientation that is best described as “complicated.” The monologue reflected many themes I discovered when talking with other GLBTQ persons, especially women; “I can’t run for office, I’m not really gay so much as a… bent spoon.” It’s a problem many
bisexual and questioning students run into, not really being gay or straight, and thus feeling a little left out of either group.

3.6.4 “Being the Issue”

“The whole Vagina Monologues thing had me really stressed out... it seemed like everywhere, people were talking about homosexuality, about me.”

-Junior, lesbian, talking in the student center

Homosexuality, along with sexuality in general, was a hot-button issue throughout my years at Notre Dame, but it seemed to come to a head during the years I took field notes. For example, during one particularly intense week, every issue of the mainstream student newspaper had some article or editorial about the morality of homosexuality and dealing with homosexual people; in my last year in the field, I heard about a group of students working on a group project discussing how they were being forced to present an argument that homosexual sex was an immoral act for a class (presumably with another group of students arguing that homosexual sex was not immoral). President Jenkin’s statement on the intersection of academic freedom and Catholic character placed the issue of homosexuality front and center for several months (again, alongside other sexuality-centered concerns, such as premarital sex, contraception, rape, and abortion).

Some gay and lesbian students found these times particularly trying, as suddenly their very existence became the news in the classrooms (and the gossip in the dorms). Social spaces were filled with students who often casually discussed issues that were, for gay and lesbian students, deeply personal issues; gay students actually became the news, even those not campaigning for GLBTQ rights themselves.
3.7. Consequences

I’ve now covered both the series of interaction rituals a typical Notre Dame student is exposed to during their time as an undergraduate and the experiences of those interactions for gay and lesbian students. The former explains how those IRs can generate pride, while the latter presents the shame-eliciting aspects of those same rituals. My time in the field suggests that individuals that are, due to their structural position in an institution, forced into interaction rituals that generate both pride and shame for them adopt various strategies to cope with the conflicting emotions they feel. The following sections detail some of the consequences of this situation, including coping strategies like “keeping your head down,” acting “straight,” or leaving the university entirely. I also discuss the emotional consequences of this structural position: pain and, ultimately, ambivalence.

3.7.1 Coping Strategies: Keeping Your Head Down/Playing it Straight

“I just kept to myself the first few years at college. I knew I was gay, but just thought it would be easier to not deal with it, just keep my head down and get through my four years here. But, I kept getting more and more frustrated with all the things guys said in my dorm, about being gay, and about women... and so angry with myself for not speaking up about it.”

-Junior, gay, explaining why he became an activist

GLBTQ students living in the dorms are in a tough position. For the closeted students, there is little they can do other than “act straight,” swallow their shame, and try to make it through their four years at Notre Dame. Fear of being “outed”—and the shame they associate with it—leaves these students acting shamed even in contexts where gay and lesbian status isn’t being stigmatized, such as at Outreach meetings or parties. Many students are so scared of being exposed as homosexuals that they won’t even
attend Outreach events and “socialize” (read: hook up) with other men only through internet chat and clandestine meetings in private places. Individuals living in the closet are particularly vulnerable to feelings of isolation, since homosexuality (as a stigma lacking the physical markers of, say, race) can lend itself to hiding behaviors which “isolates those with the stigma and creates a condition of pluralistic ignorance in which all believe they are uniquely afflicted with the stigma, not even being cognizant of the others” (Britt and Heise 2000: 261). It’s even worse for students who are struggling to reconcile their sexual desires with their religious or heteronormative beliefs, as they can’t even turn to the “out” groups (as these students sometimes feel that groups like Outreach are “celebrating” the same aberrant desires they themselves wish to thwart in themselves). These “struggling” students receive little of the solace out gay students are now afforded from maturing in a “Will and Grace” era—one where sexual minorities are shown on primetime television, where gay chat rooms are easy to find.

Other students are not closeted, but try to minimize the importance of their sexual identity and sexual politics: “I just keep to myself.” “I don’t want to make waves.” “I just have four years here.” “It’s a Catholic campus, so why fight it?” Students had all sorts of ways of expressing their desire to just not be noticed—not by pretending to be heterosexual, but just by becoming invisible, just another student. Of course, as detailed in “being the issue” and in the many ways gay and lesbian students are marginalized in their day-to-day lives, “keeping your head down” doesn’t work well as a long-term

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37 Lesbians were either less likely to discuss internet hook-ups than gay men, less likely to engage in them to begin with, or discussing such activities in social spheres I did not have access to during my fieldwork.
strategy for gay and lesbian students; the issue of homosexuality keeps rearing its head no matter how hard the student tries to deny its importance to their lives and sense of self.

3.7.2 Leaving the University, or at Least the Campus

“It was then I noticed, my friends who were gay, they kept dropping out... two guys I know dropped out because they couldn’t handle this, and my other friend, well he just disappeared, I have no idea what really happened.”

-Junior, gay, GLBTQ activist

Unfortunately, the strain of being a sexual minority on campus, combined with the typical stressors of being a college student, are too much for some students, leading them to drop out of the university completely (further discussion of dropping out as it related to the activist scene can be found in Ch. 4, Sideways Entry).

Of course, students always have the option of moving off-campus, away from the homosocial dorm environments (an option that relatively few students, gay or straight, take). Interestingly, students who lived off-campus generally presented themselves as less interested in what others on campus thought of them and their sexual orientation, often to the point of delighting in their “difference” from the regular ND students. Furthermore, the more they intentionally distanced themselves from Notre Dame identities and the commensurate IRs of being a student, the less powerful the homophobic attitudes of random Domers would get to them, either in terms of eliciting shame or anger. Activist students who had nearly completely distanced themselves from the undergraduate culture actually seemed to be proud to be thought of as gay or lesbian by passersby, regardless of their actual sexual orientation, especially when an audience was
present. Every sideways glance, double take, or whispered giggle became a badge they displayed proudly.

3.7.3 Pain

“I couldn’t be normal, I couldn’t be gay… for a while, I felt like I was just waiting to die. Not suicidal, but just that… if I died, I had done everything I was meant for already, you know?”

-Junior, gay and Catholic, presenting at a CommUnity session

Notre Dame holds no monopoly on persons who live in pain, fear, and isolation because of their status as a sexual minority. However, the confluence of Catholic doctrine, pressure to be “normal” (which, at Notre Dame, often means “perfect”), and bog-standard American heterosexism and homophobia sometimes seemed to create an environment where homosexual students were particularly exposed to emotional strain (though not, fortunately, physical violence). However, Notre Dame’s dorm structure and orientation events, with the emphasis on dorm and school identity, the requirement that students live on campus their freshman year (with the vast majority of students staying on campus throughout their years as a Notre Dame students), and the expectation that students excel in the social as well as academic lives leaves gay and lesbian students emotionally torn between loyalty to their dorms (created by multiple, pervasive Interaction Rituals throughout their academic careers at Notre Dames) and pain from being discriminated against by the same students who are supposed to be their primary peer and support network (their dormmates).

These strategies illustrate the paradox of interaction rituals mentioned in the introduction to this chapter: how can these students, exposed to so many solidarity-building rituals, still feel so lonely and isolated from those around them? Could it be that
the same interaction rituals which build solidarity among strangers ends up placing said strangers in prime position to elicit shame reactions as well? What are the consequences of these conflicting emotions in students, and what are the implications of these emotions for GLBTQ mobilization?

The rest of this chapter seeks to explain ambivalence as an outcome of social organization, explaining why the majority of GLBTQ-sympathetic students, at the culmination of this pride and shame rollercoaster, end up in a position where even if they display cognitive liberation (McAdam 1982) on other fronts still seem to be willing to suffer homophobia in their immediate social groups, and why other students, though in a minority, do bring their passion for social justice with them even in their dorm lives.

3.8. A Theory of Ambivalence

Most undergraduate students at Notre Dame are introduced to life as a college student through a series of intense, powerful interaction rituals that create solidarity between them and their dorm- and school-mates and bolsters the social bond among students, creating a sense of pride. For many students, this pride is a point of strength, one so powerful that even after graduation they recall fondly and fervently their alma mater and their home dorms; continued IRs in the form of football games can prolong this indefinitely. For marginalized students, however, Frosh-O and other IRs serve to empower the persons around them; the same bonds that create such solidarity among these students also provide points at which they can feel shame, the threat to those bonds. In the case of GLBTQ students and friends and family of GLBTQ-identified persons, homophobia, heterosexism, and markers of “difference” leave students living on-campus navigating a perilous maze of social life, where every encounter is overcast with a threat
of shame, especially for students who are not “out” and thus are not provided even the token courtesies towards inclusion and tolerance students sometimes offer friends of theirs whom they know to be GLBTQ-identified.

These students, due to the ubiquitous-feeling homophobia and heterosexism on campus, are often places in social situations where the expectations others place on them as Notre Dame student or resident of a particular dorm clash with their identity as a GLBTQ person. As explained previously, these encounters have a high potential to leave the individual feeling shamed or embarrassed, draining them of emotional energy. These situations also can leave a student feeling ambivalent or having “mixed feelings”; as Smith-Lovin states, “situations where we are acting simultaneously in two or more identities will be characterized by mixes of quite different emotions, rather than a consistently positive or negative emotion” (Smith-Lovin 2007: 118-119, original emphasis). These mixed emotional reactions to the situation seems to translate, for many students, into ambivalent cognitive reactions to the events as well. This very state, however—a situation where audiences cannot be segregated, where a “complex situation” forces individuals to simultaneously occupy conflicting identities—is also the state where Smith-Lovin see the most potential for social change. My research provides empirical evidence that, in some cases, this is true, but in other cases these complex situations lead to continued ambivalence and political stagnation.

For any given individual, the final outcome of this situation depends on two things: the total balance of shame vs. pride-evoking interactions an individual experiences with those around them and the availability of other possible sources of pride for that individual. Depending on a combination of these factors, a group member will
either experience ambivalence about the group and will defend the group in the face of
actions they would find reprehensible in others, or the group member will not experience
ambivalence, often leading that member to confront the group members when they act in
ways that the marginalized individual feels are inappropriate.

The first determinate in the path to ambivalence involves the amount of pride and
shame an individual experiences overall during their time as a group member. For gay
and lesbian students at Notre Dame (and their supporters), there is no uniform amount of
shame and pride from belonging to a dorm. In terms of pride and solidarity, some dorms’
identities are much stronger than others. For example, one dorm is geographically
separated from the main campus by quite a long walk, leaving its members more likely to
socialize with each other and think of themselves as a “special” dorm. Another pair of
male dorms calls upon a long history and shared rivalry that many students that belong to
those dorms find meaningful. Members of these dorms seem even more likely than other
students to wear their dorm shirts often, and the history of one of the dorms in particular
leaves the students engaging in an even higher number of IRs that other students, albeit in
the form of prankish behavior such as streaking.

Similarly, the amount of shame a marginalized student might feel varies
significantly dorm to dorm, though in this case facts about the specific student come into
play as well. First, if the student themselves is not gay or lesbian, but rather a
“heterosexual ally,” homophobia and heterosexism sometimes seems to hit them less
personally. Second, dorms themselves vary in attitudes towards GLBTQ persons and
sensitivity towards heterosexism; female dorms, for example, are far less likely to express
an aggressively homophobic culture even if they do reinforce heterosexism (largely
because femininity isn’t linked to sexuality, unlike hegemonic heterosexual masculinity) (Connell 1993). Also, the situation can change immensely depending on whether an individual is “out” as either GLBTQ themselves or GLBTQ-friendly. Many students in both male and female dorms are more likely to both restrict casual, aggressive heterosexism and homophobia when they know their friend is sensitive to the issue and to apologize and attempt to repair any breach when they slip up, for example by saying “that’s so gay.” I was surprised to find that it was this “out” group of GLBTQ or GLBTQ-allied students that expressed quite a bit of ambivalence about heterosexism in their dorms. In retrospect, however, it makes sense; these students are living in a precarious balance of pride and shame, and rocking the boat too much provides great risk to that balance. Walking the line in this case, though, seems to require a great deal of mental gymnastics for the students; these students, for example, seemed the most likely to bring up incidents of discrimination or heterosexism in their dorms, even as they immediately followed it up by “but I don’t want to get them in trouble,” “but they’re good guys,” or, when they knew they were in a sensitive context such as the Town Hall meeting on heterosexism or being pumped for information by me in a more blatant researcher role, “but you can’t tell anyone it was my dorm, ok?”

For marginalized individuals living in these circumstances, the occasional pangs of shame when their fellow students make an off-comment or accidentally support heterosexist values is outweighed by their pride, solidarity, and sense of belonging that the various IRs and daily interactions with their dormmates generates. These students are

38 In these cases, the individual who made the comment often seems to display more shame—stuttering, avoiding eye contact as they apologize—than the queer student.
unwilling to take the risks that confronting their dormmates would entail; as their main source of pride comes from the students they live with, challenging those students and becoming “the PC (politically correct) roommate” could diminish their opportunities to feel pride and increase shame-eliciting interactions with their dormmates. Another way of framing this is that the students end up with conflicting definitions of the situation when a heterosexist joke or comment is made; for the privileged students, it’s just making a joke and having a good time, but for the marginalized student it can seem like a situation where they are the object of a joke or where something about their identity is being denigrated. However, when either side becomes aware of this discrepancy (for straight students, this sometimes occurs immediately, as they realize what they just said and how it might make their friend feel), there is considerable inertia against confrontation because of Goffman’s “working consensus”—agreement among interactants that blatant conflict over the definition of the situation is undesirable (Goffman 1958: 20). Furthermore, to avoid them shame they feel when in the presence of the marginalized student, privileged students might start to avoid the marginalized student. For gay students and their allies, ultimately, the act of speaking up against those around them a) requires a certain level of pride and emotional energy that the students (due to their marginalized status) often do not possess and b) is, by its very nature, highly shame-prone; while it is possible that “talking it out” with someone could lead to a shared catharsis that generates significant pride (as the shared definition of the situation transforms from joking around into a serious discussion of GLBTQ sensitivities), is it certain that calling someone out to begin with will involve at least some shame, often for all participants involved.
However, students who are either closeted or in a dorm where the culture is especially hostile to GLBTQ identities are not afforded the concessions paid “out” individuals in other dorms, either because their peers don’t realize that what they think is just having a good time is actually creating shame for the marginalized student or because some other value held by the group member—either as a whole (as with a general atmosphere that emphasizes heterosexual masculinity) or as an accidental aggregation of individual values (as in the case where a group of students all happen to be conservative Catholics)—prohibits them from sympathizing with the marginalized student. In these circumstances, especially with closeted gay students, the student is likely to experience quite a bit more shame through their gay identities than pride in their dorm identities. For these students, the feelings of shame build up over time until something has to give; the students need either less shame, more pride, or a combination of both.

One common strategy is the simplest—students change their living circumstances, either by moving off-campus completely or transferring to another room, further away from perceived hostile forces and closer to (or actually rooming with) friends or acquaintances more sympathetic to the marginalized student (women especially seemed to lean towards the latter option). However, especially when the student retreats from the dorm completely, the student still experiences lingering feelings of solidarity with their old dorm and, for lack of a better phrase, seems to lack closure to their experience in the dorms. For out gay students, this is the circumstance that most often seemed to lead to ambivalence; students couldn’t stand living in the dorm, yet they hold close feelings for those they used to live with.
Some students will attempt to eliminate the shame of being marginalized by destroying or altering the characteristics that mark them as marginalized. In the most extreme cases, this can involve attempting to actually “turn straight,” an outcome that is complicated enough to deserve a more thorough treatment than time and space allows me here. Another strategy used by male students is to “play it straight”—that is, act aggressively masculine (and for some closeted individuals, acting heterosexual as well), often making gay joke, using the word “fag,” and denigrating other gay men who act “too faggy.” While these strategies might serve a student in the short run, my time in the field suggests that these students ultimately still succumb to shame eventually, leading to a retreat from the dorm. Again, these “liberal” students express ambivalence towards their old dorm, though perhaps ironically they themselves are at this point using language that is just as heterosexist and homophobic as anything they heard during their times in the dorms. When confronted about their own actions, their defense even mirrors the language used by various students in defense of their dormmates’ heterosexism—“it’s just joking, it doesn’t mean anything.”

3.9. Clarity

What path, then, leads students towards non-ambivalence, an outright rejection of heterosexism from those they live with? As mentioned above, it is access to an alternate social group that can provide pride, solidarity, and EE for the marginalized individual. Almost uniformly, the students who were or became actively involved in some sort of “extracurricular” activity, one which provided an alternate social group to their dorm life, were the same students who spoke up against any form of heterosexism, even among their dormmates. As intimated earlier, part of this could be attributed to just having
greater emotional energy from the activities with the non-dorm group (be it from band, choir, debate, sports, political club, or identity organization), as this energy allows for anger, a mobilization of energy, in the face of an obstacle, rather than depression. However, membership in band, choir, sport, social movement groups, debate team, race- or ethnicity-based clubs, and volunteer organizations also provides an alternate social group for a student, a group that is often more aligned with the student’s own beliefs and values over the people they were randomly assigned with as dormmates. While extracurricular activities do not always provide greater opportunities for EE—indeed, as the next chapter will illustrate, sometimes belonging to a social movement organization can drain emotional energy—students expressed a stronger identification with, say, their teammates or bandmates over the students they lived with in the dorms.

Students who gained pride from groups outside their dorm social group were both less reliant on what limited pride could be gained from membership in that group and more resistant to shame from members of their dorm. For example, the “homosexual fries” student, by the end of my time in the field, would gleefully start saying that things that were bad were “so hetero,” mocking students around her who would denigrate something by calling it “so gay.” Immediately after doing so, rather than even focusing on the students who reacted poorly to her, she would turn and laugh with her friends from an activist group she was involved with, friends who she was almost always around in my presence.

These students might still endure shame-generating interactions with students they live with, but are better able to weather this shame because they base many of their pride-generating interactions with other students who are more “like them” and less likely
to create an interaction where the sense of “difference” is magnified. These students may even continue to engage in mainstream campus IRs, just with a different group of students—so, instead of going to a pep rally and football game with their dormmates, they go with other students involved in their social movement group or volunteer organization. These students are likely to speak up against homophobia within their dorms, especially in female dorms. Because these students do not depend so strongly on the students living around for creating feelings of pride, they are both resilient to the shame that they feel when confronting dormmates and random classmates and have more emotional reserves to initiate the confrontation to begin with. In fact, I have seen such students actually change the minds of those around them, creating environments that, over time, became less hostile for gay and lesbian students, even if only among small groups of women who tended towards civil rights activities to begin with and whose slippage into heterosexist language or actions was from ignorance more than hostility.

Many students end up in extracurricular activities through their attempts to manage shame and pride in their daily lives. True, for many activity groups, membership comes from prior involvement in a group, often in high school (band and sports especially), and membership is determined more from forces beyond the scope of my fieldwork than from a particular reaction to the living situation in the dorms. However, for more activist-focused organizations, like most of the gay-rights groups, it often seemed as though students gravitated towards the groups in an attempt to balance out the shame they felt in the dorms because of their gay identities. Joining an activist organization was often a strategy to deal with a dorm situation where shame outweighed
pride. Even more interesting, even as I saw students in the gay organizations start to burn out (as the pride generated from membership was still insufficient, again for reasons discussed in the next chapter), many students ended up in other activist groups and stuck with them. The students were seeking pride however they could find it, moving from activity to activity (and social group to social group) until they either found a group that could satisfy their need for pride or succumbed to the shame in their dorm lives and ended up with one of the previously mentioned strategies (dropping out of a dorm or moving off-campus).

All of these circumstances provide potential sources of emotional energy that increase the likelihood than a marginalized individual will participate in a social movement. As explained by Summers-Effler, among other factors, a failure of the status-quo to sufficiently reward individuals and access to emotional energy through “privileged” sources can encourage resistance to the status quo (Summers-Effler 2002:55). When individuals have sufficient emotional energy and are not entirely beholden to a certain social group for their long-term emotional energy needs, the individual can overcome ambivalence to engage in activist activity, even against those they have been emotionally bonded to through previous interaction rituals.

Returning to the “easy answer” at the beginning of the chapter: yes, it’s true that many students’ religious beliefs proscribe supporting GLBTQ rights, and that the Catholic nature of the campus as a whole suppresses mobilization to some extent.

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39 Participation in the activist organizations also facilitate the development of a GLBTQ or GLBTQ-friendly identity, something that isn’t fostered in other places on campus. In this way, it is similar to “non-activist” activities, like joining gay-oriented internet sites or visiting gay bars: all the activities help the individual more strongly enact a gay or “ally” identity.
However, it is telling that involvement in other clubs and activities is at least as relevant in predicting whether a given students will possess the capacity to articulate a clear, unambiguous (and unambivalent) position about GLBTQ life university policy in relation to GLBTQ students (a position which might allow or motivated a student into taking political action). As the next chapter will explain, extracurricular involvement in non-GLBTQ groups is also a predictor of a student’s ability to sustain involvement in the gay rights movement on the Notre Dame campus.
CHAPTER 4
SIDEWAYS ENTRY

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discusses one avenue through which people might be drawn in to activist activity: as a balance to a high shame: pride ratio in their primary social group. In other words, when an individual, due to a discrepancy between his sense of self and the expectations of those around him, finds that his interactions with his friends leaves him feeling lonely and isolated more than prideful and energized, they may look for outlets, like activist organizations, that allow them to express their marginalized identity and give them the sense of pride and solidarity they are lacking. The literature on emotions in social movements generally claims that after this initial entry into a movement, individuals tend to become more entrenched in the movement as they experience solidarity through the intense interaction rituals being a member of a movement entails (protest rallies, marches, etc.); for example, Britt and Heise detail the transformation of low-activation negative emotions, such as depression, into high-activation emotions such as fear and eventually anger, leading individuals into solidarity-generating protest participation (2000). Similarly, Stein finds that movement participation allowed Christian conservative activists to construct a positive, empowered sense of self (Stein 2001); Bell details how many black civil rights protesters find dignity
in their movement participation (Bell 2001); and Wood provides an example of how for Salvador peasants, rebellion allowed the revolters to reclaim their dignity (Wood 2001). The general theme is that activism\(^{40}\) draws participants deeper into a movement, often through emotional incentives; in fact, in the latter two examples, this was true despite the perceived low chance of success by the activists, a situation similar to that of Notre Dame GLBTQ activists, albeit with greater stakes.\(^{41}\)

In all cases, whatever the initial motivation is for joining a movement, in a successful movement, initial emotions are transformed through interaction rituals into feelings of solidarity and collective emotions, “which makes the individual feel stronger as a member of the group” and encourage continued movement participation (Collins 2001); in fact, for Collins, this emotional high is central to successful movements over rational choice and selective incentives. However, for this solidarity to be generated, successful interaction rituals are necessary, and in fact failed interaction rituals can ultimately drain more emotional energy (Collins 2004:50-53) than group membership otherwise generates. In other words, while in many conditions emotions can attract involvement; in others they can repel involvement. Contrary to the literature, I have found that activism, under certain conditions, actually leads to apoliticism and retreat from a movement culture.

\(^{40}\) Across many of these examples, a “moral shock” spurs the initial activist activity—that is, some new piece of information that is so outrageous to a participant that they become involved in a movement even if they are not direct beneficiaries of the movement’s goals themselves (Jasper 1997).

\(^{41}\) For a more general treatise on how some emotions emerge through protest activity, see Jasper 1998; Similarly, McAdam’s 1986 article provides a model for how low-risk activism can pull individuals deeper into protest activity.
This chapter describes the emotional effects on activists operating in a local social movement field (LSMF) marked by consistent, repeated failures, examining how activists end up in particular types of involvement or retreat from the “political”/instrumental side of the LSMF entirely. I find that students who belong to a LSMF organized around identities that are peripheral or of low-salience to themselves (such as heterosexual feminists in the LGBTQ-rights LSMF) are able to withstand the failures of the movement and gain emotional energy from the very act of protesting, regardless of their success in achieving a social movement group’s (SMG) stated goals. However, students who participate in a “failing” LSMF that is organized around identities that are high-salience to the activist (such as gay students in a GLBTQ-rights LSMF) lose emotional energy with each failure; when these students are unable to recoup emotional energy through peripheral movement activity or other pride-enforcing identity work, they eventually burn out and leave the local social movement field entirely. This departure may be permanent or temporary, but if the student does return to the LSMF, they tend to engage in only the social activities of the movement rather than the policy-focused activist activities. Ultimately, this chapter provides an explanation for how social movement groups can sustain involvement despite a hostile local context and suggests that the question of “conscience constituencies” is a nuanced, complex issue that struggling movement organizers must nonetheless confront.

42 By “local social movement field,” I am referring to a collection of social movement groups and the students that work among them that is clearly bounded on a local level. While a local social movement field is likely to consist of groups that draw their repertoires and cues from a movement as a whole—in this case, the national LGBTQ rights movement—the groups involved tend to focus on local issues rather than national ones and is more sensitive to shifts within the smaller institutions they operate under rather than national-level changes.
4.2. Excited Apathy

The school semester hadn’t even really started, but I was more excited for my research than I had been the past two years in the field. Alliance ND had organized a protest in front of the Joyce Center (a.k.a. the JACC) for Student Activities day, an event where the various student groups of the Notre Dame campus set up booths in a large auditorium in order to woo freshmen to their organization. Alliance ND, as an unrecognized group, weren’t allowed to set up a booth, so instead the leaders of the organization had organized a protest/information center outside of the JACC. The plan was to hand out fliers announcing their first social event of the year, a bowling night, while also letting students know that they were advertising outside of the JACC because the administration wouldn’t let them set up a booth (or recognize the organization at all).

For me, I was excited both because it was an opportunity to witness what I still tended to think of as “real” activism—public, loud, and openly oppositional—and because I thought that this willingness to put on a full protest in front of nearly the entire freshman class was a potential turning point for Alliance, one that would mark a more public, aggressive stance for the organization. I myself had a commitment to help run the Feminist Voice table in the JACC (since they wanted a male presence at the table), so I hadn’t come in the “Gay? Fine by me” orange shirts and planned to stand on the sidelines for most of the protest. When I reached the JACC, I was a little dismayed to see only a few student in orange shirts standing outside, with two posters next to them on the ground, but I was still hopeful; after all, a handful of people at a critical junction (the only open entrance to the JACC) could still make a huge impact. I greeted the Alliance members, most of whom I already knew, and stood aside as they lifted the signs.
The posters were in the air for all of a half-minute before I heard “Amy,” an officer of Alliance mutter, “Oh, here they come…” A large male security guard came up to the group and stood right next to her, whispering something I couldn’t make out.

“Well, where can we set up?” I heard Amy reply. He replied with something along the lines of “nowhere on campus grounds,” and the conversation continued for just a few more seconds. The co-chair turned to us and told us we were going to have to pack up, leaving the handful of protesters looking at each other blankly. The man was polite, almost reluctant to approach us I felt, but the message was clear: we were not welcome in front of the JACC.43

At this point, I’m thinking to myself, “Is this it? This is the big protest?” While I was not weaned on large-scale marches or massive sit-ins, I had admittedly hoped for something a little more passionate than 30 seconds of sign-holding, a whispered conversation, and then a retreat. This did not bode well for the chances of this being the year Alliance ND marches on the Great Hall, making hard demands for GLBTQ students. Frankly, this did not bode well for this being the year that Alliance did much of anything.

Enter: Samantha. Before this semester, I had known Samantha only in passing. I had seen her at a couple of Alliance meetings and knew she was an officer for the group this year, but knew little else about her. The week before this protest, we were at a training retreat for a peer volunteer group (FIREStarters, run through the Gender Studies Center) together and I had a little more exposure to her; during the retreat, she came up to

43 While the organizers of the protest knew that their small group would be asked to leave eventually, the students didn’t anticipate how quickly they were shut down and had not made plans for how to deal with that eventuality. This was typical of Alliance protests, as the members lacked protest expertise and often failed to plan ahead.
me and asked how the research was going (turns out, my little project was more a subject of discussion at Alliance than I had suspected). However, throughout the year to come, I would come to know Samantha quite a bit; she was in several of the groups I was observing, and she had one of those personalities that often seemed to just fill the room. She seemed to be at nearly every event on campus that had a progressive angle and still made it to classes and kept up a thriving social life. In some ways, she seemed the ideal Domer, able to balance the social, scholarly, and service aspects of college life effortlessly. Demographically, she fell within the mainstream, if not ideal, Notre Dame student- heterosexual, young, and white (though not a practicing Catholic). While her life was not without some of the drama endemic to being a college student, overall she was someone who most observers would say, in the vernacular, really had her shit together.

“I feel like breaking shit!” I hear her voice before I realize who it is. While the other protesters were deciding how (and if) to proceed, Samantha had arrived, just a few minutes late. Samantha came onto the scene rarin’ to go; she seemed to almost be looking for conflict, as opposed to the gay students already in front of the JACC who were at this point visibly cowed by the prospect of having to fight against the Notre Dame security and getting “ResLife‘d.” While the other protesters had worried looks on their faces even before security demanded they pack up the protest, Samantha had a big smile during her entire time at the event.

The current co-chair of Alliance relayed the prior events to Samantha- they had gotten there, had barely lifted their signs before security told them they weren’t allowed here or indeed, anywhere on the campus. Samantha’s reply: “That’s some bullshit! Let’s
go down the street, so they can’t see us… which was are most of the students coming from?” Where previously the students had hemmed and hawed about moving the protest down for several minutes without coming to a decision, Samantha took charge and made it seem as if it were obvious that they would be moving the protest- which, in fact, did happen almost immediately. Samantha continued to express both anger at the fact they were asked to move, complaining about the language used (“They defined “here” as all of campus?!?”), but also seemed excited by the conflict.

While the other students didn’t quite catch her mood, I found myself invigorated by it, thinking to myself, “Why didn’t we make a fuss when security asked us to leave instead of having a quiet talk and being swept under the rug?” In fact, my fervor was so ignited that, as I was walking away from the group to speak to some friends in the feminist organization I loudly confronted a male freshman behind me who made the comment, “‘Gay: Fine By Me?’ I need a shirt that says, ‘Gay: Stay Away from Me,'” as he was walking away from the protesters. I immediately turned around and shouted, “Hey man, fuck you too!” in the direction of the comment, giving the bird as well (for the record, actions that aren’t exactly the norm for myself- though, I feel a certain pride to this day in standing up to that student, even if he was just performing what he thought was expected for a group of strangers he was suddenly thrust in among).44

44My failure to speak up when security first arrived on the scene left me feeling helpless and frustrated; Samantha’s enthusiasm despite the prospect of punishment exacerbated the situation, throwing me into a shame-rage spiral (I felt shamed when security appeared, but then became angry that I was ashamed or “let” them shame me into inaction, a “feeling trap” as I reacted to my first emotion with another emotion) (Scheff 1988, 1990). Interestingly, while Scheff discusses these shame-rage spirals as a negative thing, the fact that the spiral resulted in my speaking up suggests that shame-rage spirals could be useful for activism.
Still, I wondered what would have happened had Samantha not come on the scene, and what Alliance would do in general if even this small-scale protest was shut down so rapidly by campus security. How long could even Samantha keep up her level of enthusiasm in the face of constantly being shut down almost before even getting started? And what about the other students? What was so special about Samantha that, faced with the prospect of failure, rather than giving up or getting down, she got angry and energized?

4.3. Alliance in August

Every school year, AllianceND starts out strong, with meetings of 20 or so students and grand plans for the coming school year. AllianceND, along with the other gay-rights groups on the Notre Dame campus, relies quite a bit on early enthusiasm and novice members to create a “base” membership each year. While the majority of these members will eventually leave the organizations for reasons described in this chapter, for a good quarter of each school year, the majority of Alliance‘s members are students new to the organization who are hopeful for achieving university recognition for Alliance and increasing awareness of the problems GLBTQ students face on the Notre Dame campus. Some of these students, particularly freshmen, find Alliance through web searches; others become aware of Alliance through the Orange Shirt campaigns or through word-of-mouth.

45 Students also become part of the LSMF in order to meet other gay students, since there aren’t many other public places in the area where young gay students can socialize.
Initially in the sites, students were generally excited at the prospects of the movement and often hopeful for change. The students’ hope sustained them for a time through minor failures, but after a certain point, for most students, keeping the organization running became less a matter of being hopeful for change or part of a long history of struggling against the university and, instead, became a matter of tradition and momentum: the organizations exist because (in the students’ 4-year memory) they have always existed. From a macro perspective, this lack of hope might be puzzling; after all, there was some cause for optimism, as Notre Dame had arguably become far more sensitive to the needs of GLBTQ students over the past decade or so. There was a Standing Committee on Gay and Lesbian Student Needs, a “Spirit of Inclusion” statement that explicitly welcomed gay and lesbians students as part of the student body, and in more recent years an “orange shirt” campaign that gave visibility to supporters of gay and lesbian students. However, almost none of these improvements occurred during the current activists’ academic lifetime at Notre Dame, and for most of the students involved in the gay and lesbian rights LSMF, these changes were insufficient, especially in the face of the many setbacks that were, for the current generation of students, far more salient.

The students despaired at the university administration’s refusal to recognize the various student-run GLBTQ-centric organizations, including an Emmaus-style spirituality group. The Alliance ND listserv was deleted by the university and more than one Alliance protest was either cancelled or actively disbanded by university staff. The Standing Committee’s students were told that they could not co-sponsor a letter a

46 This is especially notable at the start of the yearly cycle, a few weeks into the Fall semester.
student wrote on National Coming Out Day because that day “celebrated a lifestyle” that was contrary to Catholic teaching. Students experienced various forms of discrimination in classes and in their day-to-day lives, from small slights and heterosexist assumptions by professors to harassment and verbal abuse from other students. More than all this, though, the undergraduate students just expressed a sense that they were not welcome at their own school, a sense that even I as a graduate student felt at times.

And, unfortunately, the students’ efforts to change these more immediate aspects of oppression at the university rarely resulted in outcomes that could be framed as “successful” by the students. In the face of failure, hostility, and oppression, both at an individual level and at the level of the gay student organizations, hope alone was unlikely to sustain membership in the gay rights movement on the Notre Dame campus. All but the most optimistic students soon came to believe that their efforts were not going to create the kind of change they sought on their campus, especially not in the near future. In the end, this means that most of the students who stay on in the organization are doing so because they derive pleasure from the means of protest more than the ends of achieving social change. Like Samantha from the introductory story, these students are energized by their oppositional stance to the university even if they don’t believe they are making major changes at the university.

However, gay and lesbian students who are involved in the GLBTQ LSMF at Notre Dame are, in some sense, tied to the “ends” side of protesting: while they could derive pleasure from protest in any opposition group, the same identity that brings them to the GLBTQ rights cause leaves them personally invested in the outcome of those protests: achieving gains for GLBTQ students on the Notre Dame campus. The very real
consequences of this mobilization’s successes and failures in their day-to-day lives makes it nearly impossible for GLBTQ students not to be strongly ends-focused. Unfortunately, the sense of hopelessness about achieving those ends leaves these students with little to gain from continued mobilization.\textsuperscript{47}

4.4. Burnout

As early as the beginning of October, attendance at Alliance ND and Outreach meetings tended to wane remarkably, from around 20 people to perhaps 5-10. The majority of the students who stayed on with the organizations past this initial period exhibited signs of exhaustion in the meetings—when they even showed up at all. Rather than leaving immediately when the organizations they became involved with appeared ineffectual, these students stuck it out for a longer period (possibly due to a lack of pride-eliciting interactions in their other spheres of life, as discusses in the ambivalence chapter). Unfortunately, when these students \textit{did} finally succumb to the drains of the constant failed attempts to mobilize (as was the case for the majority of the gay and lesbian students), they tended to be hit hard, often leaving not only the organizations, but sometimes the university itself (for a time).

Likewise, these students tended to “return” to the organizations in time, but when they did, their focus shifted considerably. These students seemed to derive energy from both the general oppositional position they held to the school\textsuperscript{49} and from the desire to

\textsuperscript{47} Later in this chapter, I also discuss the effects of failures on the “means” side (failed protest actions) for these students as well.

\textsuperscript{48} low affect, a detachment from the proceedings, and just plain looking tired

\textsuperscript{49} For example, as mentioned in the Ambivalence chapter, many students expressed joy glee while making negative comments about Notre Dame as an institution.
socialize with and date the other members of the organizations. The organizations, for these people, were less sites for striving for social change as they were places where they could socialize with others “like them” – in the words of one student, “it’s just nice to be around other gay people.” Here, the students’ personal ties to other activists combine with the high salience of their gay identities seems to pull them back into the organizations, just as personal ties and appeals to salient identities pulled individuals into Freedom Summer activist activities (McAdam 1986, McAdam and Paulsen 1993). Being able to express their gay identities around gay friends acts as a “soft” selective incentive to join the movement (Olsen 1965).

These students pretty much stopped participating in any activities of organizations outside of their central identity movements, as well, ultimately ceasing “playing the game” at all with the institution and instead focusing on the social aspects of the movement.

The few gay and lesbian students that remained in the groups for the majority of the school year without “burning out” were always deeply involved in some other group or activity outside of the gay scene, like choir or an ethnicity-based social club 50 or were officers for the organizations. For students who were gay or lesbian and held an office with the organization, leaving the group wasn’t quite so simple. As an officer for the organization, students were exposed to greater pressure than regular members to stick with things when they were tough; if the officers did start to miss meetings, other officers would sometimes “call them out” on it when they communicated through email or saw

50 These memberships illustrates the fact that these students have multiple meaningful identities organizing their experiences at Notre Dame, beyond just their GLBTQ identities.
each other elsewhere on campus. While I was only personally witness to such a confrontation a couple of times in the field, discussions with officers on both sides of the conflict made mention of this fact (with straight officers sometimes complaining to me of the extra burdens placed on them by the absence of other officers, or with gay and lesbian officers commenting on how they would prefer not to go to a particular meeting but if they didn‘t, X or Y person would nag them about it). Furthermore, the people making these requests were often friends, adding extra pressure for gay and lesbian students who sometimes just wanted some time off from the groups. These officers ultimately tended to make meetings—ininfrequently, perhaps, but still often enough that I considered them “regulars”—but always looked exhausted at the meetings and carried themselves as if they didn‘t really want to be there. Ultimately, for these students, it seemed that the chains of obligation and peer pressure to stay on as active members were enough to keep them involved; perhaps the more immediate drains from rebuffing their friends‘ requests that they come to the meetings outweighed the less frequent drains from actually belonging to the organization, or maybe having friends in the organization made going to the meetings pleasant enough to outweigh the costs of activism in the hostile context of Notre Dame.

There exists a tenuous balance between the need to keep members committed to the organization and the risks of alienating members by holding too high of standards of commitment. In her research on movements in abeyance—that is, movements operating during periods where they are unlikely to experience movement success—Taylor claims that encouraging purposive commitment is essential for movements in abeyance structures (Taylor 1989: 766). Memberships may shrink, but those who remain will do
whatever is necessary to keep a movement (or organization) in existence during politically hostile periods. For members who otherwise might attend meetings sporadically, the high pressure from leaders on them to attend every meeting could cause those individuals to break off from the group completely as they perceive that expectations for membership are high and feel shamed by the leaders when they are “called out” for not attending every meeting. This inadvertently can limit membership in Alliance, which generally sought to increase its membership throughout the semester; however, exclusivity in membership is also part of the abeyance structure. By the end of each semester, it generally was a core of highly committed students that kept Alliance in operation, buoyed by the pleasures of protest itself (Jasper 1997, Jasper 1998).

4.5. Happy Hopelessness

As I stated previously, the majority of the students who stayed on with the organizations past this initial period exhibited signs of exhaustion in the meetings. What, then, of those few students who defied this trend? While analyzing my field notes, I found an unusual inconsistency in the sites: while there was a general sense of being tired and overworked expressed by all students involved (indeed, a sense I felt myself quite often!), several of the students who “ought” to have been most tired—those participating in the most organizations—were often the students who would intermittently display extreme energy. Furthermore, the energy these students felt generally revolved around their activities in organizations that were less “central” to their self-concept—gay men working in a feminist movement, or heterosexual allies in a GLBTQ movement. This energy persisted beyond initial involvement in an organization, after the “newness” wore out, and seemed unrelated to the specific successes or failures of the organizations. The
students didn’t have hope for “success,” yet they continued in their efforts and exhibited high-EE behaviors—an eagerness in engaging in new interactions, a sense of efficacy in their personal activities if not in their ability to achieve political gains, and a vibrancy and effervescence that other students in the groups were lacking. While these students seemed to enjoy socializing with others in the movement, the activities of the movements, particularly protests and campaigns, seemed to provide just as much motivation and emotional energy. They continued to participate in the movements that were based around identities they expressed strongly (queer, feminist, etc.) but on those occasions where I was able to witness these students in their “native” organizations, their activities in those movements were often subdued and, frankly, defeated. For example, Samantha, the heterosexual women who was so vibrant at the Joyce Center protest described earlier in this chapter, sounded far more subdued and defeated when discussing her work at the Notre Dame feminist organization. Conversely, “Guile” and “Ken,” two gay students, looked half-asleep during Alliance meetings but were all smiles and jokes when they were working on an article for a feminist mini-journal.

After seeing this pattern repeatedly in my field notes (and in the sites themselves), I realized that the determining factor between a student who became drained by working in a less-than-successful local social movement field and those who were energized by their activities depended on the whether the identity protected by the organization was highly salient and central to the student or low salient and peripheral. Thus, in the examples above, heterosexual students in a gay rights organization continued to be energized by protest activities even in the face of defeat, while gay males in a feminist
club were similarly excited by their actions despite lack of visible gains. On the other hand, individuals who are centrally identified with an organization or movement that is having difficulties achieving its goals tend to become drained by their actions, often to the point of burn out and departure from the group.

4.6. Sideways Entry

I refer to this tendency toward burnout by those deeply connected to the identity invoked by an organization and retention by those with identities peripheral to the one supported by an organization “sideway entry.” When an activist organization repeatedly meets with failure, particularly one based on a marginalized identity, the emotional energy drain is too much for those who “belong” to the class of persons the organization is working to support, leading to a tendency for those individuals to leave the organization. However, for organization members who are “outsiders” or “allies”—those with peripheral or “sideways” identities—failures in mobilizing are offset by the pleasures of protest, and membership will continue indefinitely.

To visualize this process, it helps think of a spaceship attempting to re-enter the Earth’s orbit. If the spaceship tries to fly directly into the earth, the atmosphere will cause too much friction and burn the craft to pieces. However, if the spaceship approaches at an angle, it can slide into the orbit of the earth with less friction and not fall apart. A GLBTQ-identified person attempting to enter into a failing local social

51 While it is true that the feminist cause as a whole does benefit queer males, they are not, as a category, the group mostly closely identified with and defended by the movement; their gains would be “peripheral,” not “central.”
movement field directly related to their identity will similarly be ripped apart by the emotional forces they encounter.

4.7. Description of Theory

Students who participate in an instrumentally-focused social movement group, who have identities central to the movement’s ideology, and who are direct beneficiaries of the movement’s goals, enter into the organization out of a genuine desire to achieve social change, out of a need to be around like-minded persons or express a social identity for which there are few other outlets in their social world, or out of curiosity about the organization. Regardless of their initial motivations for joining the group, they are generally hopeful about achieving the group’s stated goals when they first join. However, repeated mobilization failures and the monotony of the organizational meetings drain emotional energy from the students.\(^{52}\)

Eventually, the students burn out, especially when they have few other avenues for generating EE.\(^{53}\) The students that burn out may retreat from the groups for a time, drop out of the university, or even become so disenchanted with the university that they behave recklessly and get kicked out, but eventually, something has to give. These students may return to the organizations, but only if they have emotional energy and identity expression needs that are not being met elsewhere. If the students do return, they are no longer hopeful about creating social change and instead gain EE from socializing

\(^{52}\) As the previous chapter detailed, unsuccessful interaction rituals drain, rather than generate, emotional energy.

\(^{53}\) This effect is exacerbated by other school-related time pressures, like tests and homeworks; however, it can actually be alleviated by participation in other social movement activities, ones that are less failure-prone and/or are organized around identities that are less central to the student.
with other movement members. Their talk turns from protest, politics, and advocacy movement activities towards what X or Y member of the community is doing and who is dating whom. At Notre Dame, for example, the students who do return to the local social movement field generally work with the “apolitical” Outreach,\textsuperscript{54} not Alliance, and focus on partying over politicking.

In short, the students find themselves in the middle of a complex interaction market, attempting to maximize their emotional energy gains and minimize their EE losses (Collins 2004). Individuals in these emotional energy “markets” are drawn towards contexts where IRs will provide EE gains; this attraction is generally an unconscious reaction to the rewards and costs of engaging with certain groups (\textit{ibid} 145). So, when the emotional costs of belonging to a GLBTQ organization outweighs the emotional gains, a student will retreat from the organization—until they find themselves in such dire need of those EE gains that they \textit{must} return to the organization, and even then they mainly engage in aspects of the organizations that minimize the risk of EE loss.

Students who are not GLBTQ are able to sustain their participation in the movement much longer—indeinitely, in fact—and express energy in the movement activities that are less identity-focused. Failures are experiences less personally to them and are thus less shame-generating and less draining on their emotional energy reserves. These failure are more likely to be met with anger (energy mobilized to overcome an obstacle) than depression, doubly so when these students have access to EE-generating outlets through other, more successful or identity-peripheral protest activity. This final group of students truly has the best of both worlds: they gain the social and identity-EE

\textsuperscript{54} The next chapter will discuss the ways in which Outreach is actually quite “political.”
from solidarity with “doomed” groups that they are central to while getting activist/agency-EE from working in groups where overall lack of success doesn’t drain the EE they got out of “making an effort” or fighting the good fight.

4.8. Summary

The hostile and failure-prone cultural context Notre Dame creates for GLBTQ activists creates four clear categories of activist students at Notre Dame: first-entry students, those who have just become involved in the organization; burnouts who have returned to the organizations in a less political capacity after having spent time apart from the organizations or the university; and sideways entry students, those who sustain membership indefinitely either as straight students or as gay/lesbian students who are also involved in some other activist activity peripheral to their demographic characteristics. Students are pushed and pulled through these categories by their need for emotional energy, the need to feel pride and avoid shame. The first group often consists of students who, as the last chapter indicated, need more pride-eliciting interactions due to their shame-prone dorm lives. The second category is created when those same students run into the “brick wall” of the administration, burn out from repeated emotionally draining failures at mobilization, then return in a more cautious, less shame-vulnerable capacity to the organizations. The third category is created by students who are more resilient to the shame created by the repeated mobilization failures because their personal identities aren’t as tied to the characteristics the organization is formed around- in other words, straight students in a queer activist scene.

Finally, some gay and lesbian students manage to sustain participation in a failing movement past the initial “honeymoon” period, before the organizational hiccups start to
pile up. These students all had some other fairly obvious source of emotional energy in their lives; extracurricular activities like band or debate, or activism outside of the gay and lesbian cause. On the other hand, students who fell in with other causes that were, relatively speaking, abundantly gay-friendly, as with art or theatre majors, were likely to withdraw from the organizations (and their concomitant emotional drains) entirely. This delicate balance was rarely achieved, and only a handful of “out” gay students remained with either Alliance or Outreach for very long, even those holding officer positions within the organization. For Alliance, this manifested in most of the gay and lesbian students vanishing from the meetings after the first couple of months of the school year, while for Outreach, it resulted in just a few “core” members and a rotating roster as new students came to check out a few meetings throughout the school year (either as part of their “coming out” process, attempting to connect to the gay scene at Notre Dame, or as friends of existing members) before drifting away from the group.

The only group that held a strong, consistent membership through the semester was the CORE Council—and that was only after the change from the Standing Committee. CORE Council student members were more likely to claim that they were making positive changes in the university than activists in the other organizations,

55 By and large, students who mostly operated in gay-friendly majors like theater or art became involved in Outreach or Alliance through personal ties to activist students—in other words, because they were dating someone involved in one of the groups. These students didn’t stay with the organization long when they were no longer dating activist students.

56 Often, the students who left the GLBTQ-rights local social movement field ended up in other activist groups that had peripheral GLBTQ leanings—Feminist Voice, Gender Relations Center events, and so on. Very infrequently, individuals would end up working on LGBTQ issues in the South Bend community; this was more common with older students, graduate students, and staff rather than undergraduates.

57 Though, their opinion on this wavered day-to-day; some days, CORE Council members would wonder aloud if they really were accomplishing anything through the Council. Not surprisingly, these
suggesting that they were facing less emotional drain through failed events. Of course, since the concept of “failure” in mobilization is socially constructed, it could just be a different organizational mindset filtering down through to its members, or even an attempt to balance cognitive dissonance, since the more explicit obligations set upon CORE Council members (compared to Outreach and Alliance) left the students “stuck” staying with CORE Council when they might have otherwise abandoned the group.

4.9. Conclusion

Primarily, this research suggests that struggling movements can only succeed if they either have a steady supply of new “hopeful” blood or a strong core of “conscience constituents”: participants who are not necessarily direct beneficiaries of a movement, but who provide resources for it because they “agree emotionally” with a movement (Collins 2001). On the one hand, a conscience constituency provides extra resources for a movement, especially one with limited resources; on the other hand, if an identity-based movement consists primarily of persons who don’t hold the relevant identity, then the movement runs a risk of being coopted completely from those who are direct beneficiaries of the movement’s goals (McAdam 1982:55-56). Conscience constituencies lack the foundational marginalized identity that the movement is organized around and, thus, are less able to engage in the emotion-transformation activities discussed in the introduction to this article in the works of Britt and Heise, Bell, etc. Furthermore, as they are not direct beneficiaries of the movement, there is a greater risk views were more likely to be expressed after the students hit some sort of obstacle in mobilization with the Council.
among conscience constituencies who gain power in an organization to begin to gain more EE from their central positions in the organization (Collins 2004) and for them to act conservatively in order to maintain their position, rather than in the best interests of the individuals the movement represents (Lipset 1997). Furthermore, the marginalized members of the group are generally most in need of the sense of pride through agency that activism can bring (Wood 2001). When the most active members of a group are those who hold privileged identities, the marginalize members are deprived of a potential source of emotional energy and pride.

On the other hand, my theory suggests that a struggling identity-based movement that relies mostly on members who hold the marginalized identity is unlikely to sustain membership once the initial thrill of being an activist takes hold; without some sign that the activists’ efforts are influencing their target, a movement organization is unlikely to be able to build and sustain momentum. As gay and lesbian students burn out of the instrumental side of the local social movement field, it is the committed core of mostly heterosexual students that maintain the movement from year to year. Also, high standards of commitment among officers might lead to fewer overall members in a group, but it encourages a small group of individuals who might otherwise bow out due to the high emotional energy costs of continued participation to stay on in the organization. The final decision is in the hands of activists and organizations themselves; they must weigh the relative costs and benefits of sustaining a movement largely on conscience constituencies. Indeed, Collins claims that successful movements are ones that take advantage of conscience constituencies (Collins 2001: 32).
My findings also suggest that if a gay or lesbian activist wishes to mobilize effectively for a GLBTQ cause that is unlikely to meet its immediate goals, they may benefit from involvement in other social movements and should actively searching for positive EE-generating possibilities. Since emotional energy can be transferred from context to context independent of the symbols associated with the acquisition of EE (Collins 2004), persons who hold one marginalized identity can participate in other movement groups to gain the aforementioned pride and sense of agency that protest can bring. One could even imagine a situation where two different marginalized movement groups “share members” so that neither side is too drained by energy losses while all parties are energized by the basic pleasures of protest; coalitions among activist organizations may be critical in pooling emotional as well as material resources. Once an individual or movement begins to understand the effects of emotional forces acting on them, they can begin to consciously work at maximizing their emotional gains, rather than unconsciously responding to the emotional contexts they find themselves in.
CHAPTER 5
PARADOX

5.1. Introduction

The first substantive chapter answered the question of how a gay rights social movement field emerged in the particularly unfavorable condition of the Notre Dame campus; the second substantive chapter described the ways in which membership is alternately sustained and lost by the organizations operating within that field. Both of these chapters focused on individuals students and the mechanics operating on them, both in terms of the social structure of Notre Dame as an institution—dorms and schoolwide practices—and in terms of the activist organizations and other extracurricular activities. This chapter looks at how the institutional shape of Notre Dame as a campus interacts with the activist organizations themselves—their structures, their goals, and ultimately the students’ perceptions of what the organizations stand for—as well as the disparity between organizations as they appear on the surface or top-down and how they operate in practice. The chapter asserts the importance of being explicitly conscientious about level of analysis when engaged in social movement research.

The three major organizations at Notre Dame each occupy a distinct position on campus, both in terms of their services to the GLBTQ community and in their relation to the university administration. Outreach is individual student-focused, grass-roots, and, as
an organization, completely oppositional to the university administration; CORE Council is administrative, focused on the campus as a whole, and operates largely under the blessings of Notre Dame as an institution, though its agenda sometimes runs against conservative Catholic dogma; AllianceND occupies a position somewhere between these two extremes. These organizations—the way they are structured, the goals they espouse, the means they use to achieve those goals—present a challenge to existing concepts in the social movement literature. For example, Outreach challenged Taylor's concept of abeyance periods for a social movement by utilizing micro-abeyance structures; Alliance ND incorporates aspects of both liberal, intra-institutional and radical, extra-institutional logics for change in its activities; CORE Council is the most resource-abundant GLBTQ organization yet also the one least able to mobilize said resources; and all three organizations provide distinct, complex instrumental and expressive functions as part of an single local social movement field.

I begin this chapter with a short review of the relevant social movement literature. I then describe a meeting of Alliance ND as an example of how students navigate the tension between a desire to be “radical” and the pragmatism of being “liberal.” From there, I cover Outreach, Alliance, and the CORE Council in turn, comparing and contrasting the groups while exploring the paradoxes of each organization. I conclude with a discussion of the importance of “level of analysis” when studying social movement groups and speculate that the symbiotic relationship among the various groups is perhaps a result of the hostile context that all operate under.
5.1.1 Tactics and Goals

Social movement groups by their very nature are change-oriented entities. Thus, they and their members seek certain changes (their goals) and utilize certain strategies to achieve those ends (their tactics). The field as a whole may work towards a unified long-term goal, for example improving the quality of life for gay students at Notre Dame, but have quite different short-term goals, for example becoming the first gay student group recognized by the university versus providing safe spaces for gay and lesbian students to socialize. Tactics are not the same thing as short-term goals, however; even with similar short-term goals, however, organizations may have very different tactics to achieve the goal (lobbying the university administration for a room to use once a week to hold a “gay” hour versus throwing a party off-campus once a month).

The literature on social movement goals discusses two categories of short-term movement goals: “political” or policy-based goals, and “cultural” goals. Bernstein divides movements by “whether they employ an identity or instrumental logic of action, and whether they are internally or externally oriented” (Bernstein 1997:533). I contend that these divisions are more accurately applied to strategies of resistance rather than movements as wholes, and I would replace “identity” logics of action with “expressive” logics, but I believe that Bernstein’s categories provide the most theoretical leverage to understand both movement activity that is based on building solidarity among movement members as well as movement activity oriented towards achieving political or cultural gains external to the movement.

The concept of policy-based goals has its foundation in Gamson’s classic study, where he discussed movement success in terms of whether a movement was able to gain
access to the polity ("acceptance") or new advantages for its constituency (Gamson 1975). Significantly, the study uses a framework of "success" rather than "goals" (since, as Guigni et al point out, if we measured "success" in terms of a movement's stated goals, very few movement would be considered at all successful) (Guigni et al 1997). However, focusing entirely on policy-based goals would bias the research against Outreach, which on the surface seems to be entirely a social-based organization with little to no activist activity. Ironically, the researcher might then miss out on the role Outreach does play in policy-based activism, a role discussed in more detail below.

Unlike political goals, "cultural" goals seek more inchoate gains for a movement's constituencies, such as the spread of an ideology or identity the movement endorses. The focus on "cultural goals" emerged partly from the overall "cultural turn" in sociology as well as the "New Social Movement" (NSM) paradigm. While this paradigm overstated the unique qualities of the organizations it studied compared to the working-class movements of the industrial era, it also brought with it a focus on "identity, culture, and the role of the civic sphere- aspects of social movements that had been largely overlooked" (Pichardo 1997:425). Pichardo also indicates that instrumental motivations for movement participation were overrepresented in the literature prior to the NSM paradigm, and thus policy goals, which were more immediately obvious as "rational" choices to sociologists of that era were treated preferentially in research.

James Jasper is one of the more prominent proponents for a move away from social movement research that focuses solely, or even primarily, on the instrumental aspects of movement participation. Jasper, like the NSM theorist before him, claims that the major motivations in movement participation are expressive more than instrumental.
He further argues that this “expressive” aspect of movement activity is so powerful that the cultural dimension of movement activity- the aspect through which participants create meaning for objective conditions such as resources and political opportunity- is “a fundamental component in the construction of the other dimensions as well as being its own set of variables” (Jasper 1997:42). For example, later in this chapter I will discuss how Alliance members‘ expressive needs to “feel” radical affects their politically-focused agenda.

5.1.2 Radical/Liberal Continuum

Throughout the sociological literature on social movements, there exists a concept of social movement tactics as existing on a continuum between “liberal” or “radical.” (Freeman 1975, Taylor and Whittier 1992) Liberal tactics are intra-institutional, generally “legal” or allowed by the institutions they are used against, and work to change existing systems; radical tactics are extra-institutional, proscribed by the institutions they target, and frequently involved the destruction of existing systems. In the classic example of the women’s right movement of the 1960s and 1970s, heirarchichized, formal organizations like the National Organization for Women, which engaged in formal lobbying are often contrasted against “radical lesbian” feminist side of the movement, which lacked formal organization and aimed to transform patriarchal structures through “flamboyant” and disruptive tactics (Taylor and Whitter 1992: 107). As another example, the Black Panthers could be contrasted with Martin Luther King Junior’s contingent, with the former being radical through its Black nationalist and armed self-defense philosophies and the latter being liberal through an assimilation and pacifist policy.
Some scholars have taken this concept further, arguing that the concepts apply to more than just organizational tactics and that an “either/or” distinction between the two concepts is inappropriate. For example, Gilmore notes that the liberal/radical continuum can refer both to organizational structures (as in the “radical” structure of some organizations in women’s movement), and to tactics/immediate goals (Gilmore 2003). When referring to organizational structure, “liberal” organizations are bureaucratic and hierarchical, with local, state, and national chapters, while “radical” organizations are grass-roots based and nonhierarchical (ibid:95). Gilmore claims that the literature on feminist mobilization that proposes a liberal/radical divide most often refers to organizational structure and group styles rather than ideology. These styles of organization, in turn, are associated with “liberal” strategies or immediate goals (working “within the existing political system,” attempts to persuade or coerce political leaders) verses “radical” strategies (“public, ‘in-your-face’ tactics to bring attention to their issues and undermine the system itself”) (ibid: 95).

Gilmore’s main point is that feminist organization can be simultaneously liberal AND radical and that the liberal/radical divide in social movement literature may be an inappropriate for understanding feminist mobilization (and, by implication, other movements). However, she also provides a framework for parsing out tactics or strategies from organizational structure and reinforces the point that identical long-term goals among activists does not equate to identical short-term goals and strategies. To put in another way, tactical choice is not solely a product of organizational structure or organizational long-term goals.
In summary, the literature claims that tactics and organizational structure can be liberal or radical, and that organizations within a single movement, as with the women’s movement, may differ among each other in terms of tactics, structure, inward/outward focus, and short- and long-term goals. Ultimately organizations are guided by certain logics of action, which may be instrumental/policy-based or identity/expressive. The three major gay rights groups at Notre Dame differ greatly across these multiple axes; however, the no organization is purely of one category over another. By way of example, I provide this short narrative describing an Alliance meeting; during the meeting and in the discussion between Agnes and Steve, the tension between liberal and radical in particular is brought to the forefront.

5.2. Alliance ND: Between Liberal and Radical

Another Tuesday night, another Alliance meeting, I think to myself. Whatever excitement I once had about going into the field to take notes on AllianceND had long given way to boredom at the meetings. I enter the Great Hall, the large foyer area of a classroom and office building, where somewhere between 10 and 15 students are gathered, sitting and chatting while waiting for enough people to get there before moving to a more private space for the meeting proper.58 I spend the time chatting with the faculty advisor, “Wendy,” about longevity in organizations—“you students are always leaving us!” she exclaims as she tells me why it’s hard to get coalitions that last across

58 By the end of my last semester taking field notes at Alliance meetings, this number will have dwindled down to about five students, and the meetings will occur in a small public space in the Student Center.
years and beyond the undergraduate students. “Well, not you graduate students, you hang around forever.”

After just a few minutes of chatter, the group moves to an open classroom and the meeting commences. It’s pretty standard fare, mostly a listing of upcoming GLBTQ-related events on and around campus. There’s considerable excitement about the chance of Margaret Cho being invited to speak at Notre Dame, and a potential counter-protest to an anti-gay group that was planning on protesting a local production of *The Laramie Project*; however, the general consensus turns into “it would be better to just attend the play and not protest,” so that the anti-gay group wouldn’t receive any extra attention.

There’s also a quick mention of an upcoming Gender Studies panel on gender issues—“Who’s going to be on the panel?” “Apparently, us.” “I don’t know what I’ll say… maybe, ‘Nobody knows I’m not gay! Not even my parents!’”—and a discussion of the conflict over what ultimately became GLQ week—“We had to take ‘bisexual’ and ‘transgender’ out because it might conflict with Catholic teaching about homosexuality as not a choice, and the ‘Q’ is ‘questioning,’ not queer, since queer implies a political stance…” “Well, you know they had to oppose something about the event.”

Things get a little more interesting for me once Harold, an officer of Alliance, comes up and talks about what happened when he attended a “Coalition” meeting:59 “Yeah, so I went to the Coalition meeting, and it’s like me, Carl, and two Right to Life-ers,” Harold complains. Later, he admits that there were representatives from the student union and feminist voice, but his basic conclusion is “they have all this money that they

59 The Coalition meetings are held by the CORE Council and include all organizations with an interest in GLBTQ rights, including Alliance, Outreach, Feminist Voice, and Right to Life.
can’t do anything with.” “I mean, I ask them about putting a non-discrimination clause for gay students in the Notre Dame constitution and they’re like, ‘We can’t talk about that,’ and I was like, ‘Well, I just did, so there.’” Here Harold rolls his eyes in exasperation.

I break in here, saying, “Ok, instead of focusing on what they can’t do for Alliance, can you talk about what they can do?”

“Hmph. Nothing,” Harold huffs. Regardless of potential, “rational” gains—Alliance clearly had enough potential projects in the works that they could use the cash—Harold clearly could only relate to CORE council emotionally, with anger. What’s more, no one else in the group was willing to confront him on it, even after I spoke up personally. Harold’s attitude represented the tension of this group; the desire to feel oppositional to the administration against the necessity of working with the university system to achieve its ends.60

After the agenda is covered, Steve, a representative of student government, takes the floor to discuss the potential relationship between student government and Alliance. He ends up speaking for quite some time, but eventually the meeting wraps up. As people are filing out, Steve asks Agnes, the female co-chair of the group, if he can talk to her about Sister Theresa, the effective leader of the then-Standing Committee.

“So, about Sister Theresa… she’s a very good person, and she’s done a lot for the gay community…” Agnes praises Sister Theresa for a bit more, then says, “the thing is… when I talked to her about ideas for Alliance, she basically suggested that we become an

60 The fact that the group sent a representative to the Coalition meeting at all suggests that they have some investment in liberal tactics for change.
offshoot of the Standing Committee. But, that's not really acceptable… it's important that there be a student-run organization on campus. Really, that’s what we're working for here, what I’m working for; if Alliance were ever recognized by the university in that way, as an extension of the Standing Committee, I wouldn't remain co-chair. I would just say ‘thanks’ and walk away, instead of dealing with the bureaucratic bullshit that being recognized would entail.” She continued for a bit more, basically saying that while Sister Theresa did a lot of good, having her or any rector in charge of the group would work against the needs of the group- “though, that might just be my left leanings. Really, Wendy has been the best person we could have hoped for as a faculty sponsor, because she really lets us students run the group. Sister Theresa on the other hand… well, it’s just that she tends to take over meetings she's involved in.”

Steve has been listening intently as Agnes spoke, taking notes on a legal pad. “I understand that, and I sympathize, but really, the only way to get a gay group recognized by the university, in the near future at least, would be with a rector directing the group,” Steve responds. “The people who would take that position would be friendly to the group though, and it’s not like you’re all that bound up with rules. I mean, I’m in X club, and we do tons of shit that defies our constitution. And I think you guys have the best chance to get recognized this way, that’s why I came here. The fact you include straight people helps, that you’re reaching out across the divide… Outreach could never get recognized because part of the rules of forming a group is that you can't discriminate in allowing members.”

“I get that, and I can see the benefit of having that kind of organizations, but I am also afraid of what that kind of organization would look like,” replied Agnes. “In fact, it
might actually have a negative effect on gay students on campus... it a group like that was created, and it was such a baby step forward, then activism on campus would decline, like when the Standing Committee was created in ‘94. I just think a group like that wouldn’t be able to meet students’ real needs and would actually suppress activism. I mean, a lot of the appeal of Alliance comes from it being ‘underground.’ I’d rather go all-out and try to reach a larger goal than take small increments as consolation.”

5.2.1 Alliance’s Paradox

Alliance ND exists in a strange paradox; on the one hand, it campaigns for university recognition, but on the other hand, were the group ever to be recognized, it would almost certainly lose members. Each of the three major GLBTQ groups in the local social movement field at Notre Dame exists in a similar paradox; this next section discusses each group in turn, beginning with Outreach, the most internal-focused, expressive, and radical of the groups, then moving to Alliance and concluding with CORE Council, the most externally-focused, instrumental, and liberal group.

5.3. Outreach: Socializing and Support

Outreach is, on the surface, the least “political” or instrumental of the three main GLBTQ-rights organizations on the Notre Dame campus. Its members weren’t generally involved in direct-action politics, like protesting or campaigning for university recognition. Most of the students were mainly interested in the social aspects of belonging to a gay community—friendship, clubbing/drinking, dating, and partying—along with, on rare occasions, dealing with “the Catholic issue”: how to reconcile being

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61 Really, no different than any stereotypical college students
both gay and Catholic. The emphasis of Outreach was strongly on the “identity” or expressive logic of action—cultural rather than “political”, internal rather than external. However, Outreach also played an important role in the instrumental side of social movement activism by acting as a space for instrumental activists who were drained by other failures to regain emotional energy through parties, identity-building, and socializing.

Typically, Outreach meetings were unstructured; while there was usually a topic of conversation for the day (coming out stories, dating, sex, religion, politics, and so on), the conversation usually quickly veered in an entirely different direction, ultimately devolving into a series of small discussion among groups of friends; “movie nights” as stand-ins for meetings were not uncommon. Outreach became known as “the party organization,” such that Alliance leaders themselves were hesitant to throw parties “because that’s Outreach’s thing,” even when Outreach had “dropped the ball on the party thing” one year. Outreach had several semi-official parties, such as an annual Halloween party and “Dragtostal,” and even went so far as to rent out a mansion once a year for a nice dress-up ball. The various leaders of Outreach consistently stated that Outreach was an organization aimed at “being there for people when they come out,” and even when Outreach membership was floundering and students’ interest in the organization was being questioned, students argued against cutting down from bi-weekly meetings out of fear of not being available when a student needed them. Despite

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62 At the end of most semesters and especially at the end of the Spring semester, membership in the group waned immensely and meetings either consisted of only a few students or were cancelled entirely. Part of this was just fatigue as finals and tests added up, but part of the reason for this is also described in Ch. 3: Sideways Entry.
not having a constitution stating its goals, Outreach had a clear, explicit focus on providing a support and social network for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, but little to no emphasis on overt political advocacy—Bernsteins “instrumental” logic of action. For example, during the end of my time in the field, an outside gay rights group was visiting the Notre Dame campus to hold a protest. The leaders of Outreach told the group that Outreach as an organization would not be participating in the protest or aiding the group, arguing that “that sort of thing” doesn’t accomplish anything at Notre Dame and wasn’t what Outreach was about.63

As a consciously non-“political” organization, Outreach offered something of a retreat from instrumental social movement activism for students who were drained and frustrated from their lobbying efforts in other organizations.64 However, by offering a place for students to recuperate and regain some measure of emotional energy from pleasurable interactions with other GLBTQ students, Outreach also made future political activity possible for those students. Basically, Outreach and the social functions it through became a site where EE-drained activists could recharge their emotional batteries; this Outreach played a role in instrumental politics even as it rejected overt participation.

One of Outreach’s greatest strengths for the undergraduate gay community was to provide various social spaces for students to feel safe(r) with their marginalized sexual identities, both in the group’s official meetings (with mixed success) and in the social

63 Ultimately, two Notre Dames students who were unaffiliated with any of the major GBLTQ-rights groups did participate in the protest. The two students were reprimanded by the university, but were not suspended or expelled.

64 This is described in more detail in Chapter 3: Sideways Entry.
activities outside of the meetings—parties, bar trips, and so on. Unlike Alliance or CORE Council, Outreach meetings were marked by consumption and expression of gay identity through viewing GLBTQ cinema and talking with other gay students about gay issues. Similarly, meetings of Outreach weren't necessarily occupied with the trials of being a queer person or activist at Notre Dame. While Outreach never seemed to have the capacity to be the sole auxiliary source of EE through interaction for gay students—the bi-weekly meetings were often more draining than energizing and the other social activities happened too infrequently on an organizational level to sustain individual members—it still provided a space for GLBTQ activist to come in, vent, and recover from the stresses of activist activities in other venues (or even just in day-to-day life as a gay student on the Notre Dame campus). In fact, it seemed as if having a space to express a gay identity and vent tension was as rewarding to members of the group as IRs that created emotional energy. As for EE-generating rituals, however, every gay, lesbian, or bisexual member of Alliance and the CORE Council made at least one appearance at one of Outreach’s events each semester, and most of those students attended nearly every party. Outreach parties were so important in providing emotional energy to GLBTQ activists that even students still attended the parties during times when they were, for various reasons, not current Notre Dame students.

65 Alliance meetings tended to consist of a small group of leaders telling students about upcoming activities, with socializing relegated to pre and post-meeting; CORE Council was bureaucratic and largely in the hands of the heterosexual administrators.

66 Including graduates, drop-outs, and suspendees.
5.3.1 Outreach: The Social is the Political

Ultimately, I would argue that Outreach, though largely considered a nonpolitical agent at Notre Dame, is actually tightly interwoven with more overtly political struggles. The actions of Outreach have very real political implications: while partying, going to bars, and goofing off in general may not seem to be strategies for achieve social change, it is actions like these that often make other, more “obviously” political actions possible in a hostile context. In a way, it’s very similar to much of the backstage activity that occurs around elections and rallies; for every politician standing on a stage, campaigning loudly for their cause, and for every bit of fundraising organized to generate enough resources for a campaign, there are also countless people who just show up with coffee and donuts, who have a joke and a smile for campaign-weary politicians; people who are likely to never show up on the public’s radar but who make bearable the draining experience of campaigning, striking, protesting, and other activity that we often consider “political.”

Furthermore, there are times when instrumental political activity is just not feasible, often because the political climate is so hostile to a group’s goals that no progress can be made. Often, social movements whose members are not on the front lines campaigning for change pass under the radar of social movement scholars. Taylor uses the example of the women’s movement to provide the concept of a “movement in abeyance” to describe one possible strategy movements might use when in this situation. In periods where an institution is unreceptive to a movement’s external change-orientated strategies, a movement will turn inward to sustain itself through solidarity building,
culture-focused strategies of resistance. An abeyance structure can sustain a core activist
group through hostile times
by inward-focused goals like reinforcing commitment, building the movement culture,
and becoming more exclusive (Taylor 1989). These structures can exist within
movements, and are not just descriptors for overall political periods.

Taylor‘s focus on political climate helps illustrate another point: when social
movement scholars discuss political behavior, there is a tendency to discuss it as just
that—behavior, or action, while ignoring or remaining ignorant of the ways in which our
understandings of those behaviors are shaped by the particularly political conditions that
they occur under. When scholars claim to only be studying political action, in reality
they are often actually using concepts that describe political conditions as well as the
dynamics of political action. Taylor’s article provides a good example of how being
attentive to the ways a specific political climate informs our view of an organization or
movement; Outreach’s ability to function in the political fabric of Notre Dame as both an
expressive group, allowing for the formation and expressing of gay identities, and as an
instrumental group, providing a place for war-weary activists to vent and recoup
emotional energy.

Previous research on expressive efforts in GLBTQ mobilization has similarly
examined the political outcomes of identity and emotion work. For example, both Britt
and Heise and Gould suggestion that the expression of emotions is key in GLBTQ
mobilization (Britt and Heise 2000, Gould 2001). For Britt and Heise, expressing pride is
necessary to “deemotionalize” queer identities and allow for activist activity. Gould, on
the other hand, examines how ACT UP‘s focus on expressing the collective anger of gay
and lesbian persons over a 1986 U. S. Supreme Court ruling that upheld the
criminalization of homosexuality, comparing it to incest and adultery, translated into
political activism. In both cases, anger is used to overcome fear about one’s sexual
orientation. Though the activities studies by both organizations are “expressive,” they
both had major instrumental or political implications.

What, then, does an organization look like when it self-consciously presents an
instrumental image in the local social movement field? What strains and paradoxes can
be found in an organization that attempts to engage in externally-focused, liberal,
instrumental change, but which possesses a membership drawn in by the promise of
being “underground” and radical?

5.4. Alliance ND: Direct Advocacy

Students often contrasted Outreach with Alliance ND, the younger, “more
political” (again, in sociological terms, more “instrumental”) student GLBTQ group.
Alliance wasn’t even in existence when I started at Notre Dame, and its first year
consisted mostly of a single motivated student sponsoring what became “the orange shirt
campaign”: the distribution of orange T-shirts with the slogan “Gay? Fine by me”
printed on the front in large white letters. The campaign itself was inspired by the T-
Shirt Project at Duke University,\(^\text{67}\) which, like Notre Dame, had been highly-ranked on
homophobia in the Princeton Review of American campuses (“Alternative Lifestyles Are
Not an Alternative,” an often-quoted phrase among the T-shirt distributors at Notre
Dame). Alliance’s stated goal during my time at Notre Dame was to achieve recognition

\(^{67}\) http://www.finebyme.org/
as a GLBTQ student group while raising students’ consciousness on GLBTQ issues. Alliance held a number of protests, including hanging out orange armbands and fliers outside of the football stadium before a home game (in protest of the university’s refusal to recognize the group) and setting up a giant closet on the south quad around National Coming Out Day, for students to come out of the closet “as anything, really,” which included things such as being a St. Mary’s student or announcing one’s major.

While the T-shirt campaign met with fair success, quoted as distributing some 3000 shirts as of 2007, Alliance’s inability to gain recognition left the group in a sort of limbo by the end of my time in the field. The campus culture had changed greatly in just the past few years since Alliance’s inception: more and more freshmen students were coming in already having gay friends from high school and “watching Will and Grace,” so homosexuality wasn’t a huge, unknown mystery; one prominent figure in the administration had gone from saying that there would never be any gay groups on campus during his tenure to “throwing money everywhere” for gay rights causes; and the now-CORE Council and the Gender Relations Center were engaging in more and more GLBTQ-related functions that Alliance and Outreach once performed. As one student, “Cynthia,” put it, “Alliance ND is hitting middle age, and it’s having an identity crisis… we don’t know what to be.” With awareness of GLBTQ students on the rise and, as the previous chapter discussed, Alliance’s protest events meeting with little success or outright failure, Alliance was left with little to do but continue the T-shirt campaign and file its annual application for official club status.

Alliance’s members, however, tended to view themselves a radical activists and thorns in the university administration's side. Members consistently referred to
themselves as the “underground” gay group on campus and some leaders talked as if they were constantly under scrutiny from the university: “I mean, I know they [the administration] are reading all my emails, figuring out what all we are doing.” Since the group wasn’t an official club, they could not officially reserve meeting rooms, hang posters, have a university web page, or own a university listserve, and while the group managed to get by fairly well (by meeting in public spaces, creating their own email address list, using Facebook and AIM to disseminated information, and putting up posters regardless of the administration’s edicts), group members would consistently refer to the things the administration refused them. Furthermore, as illustrated by the story above, some members of the Alliance were downright hostile to those organizations that were recognized by the university (or at least the red tape those organizations seemed strangled with).

On the other hand, many of Alliance’s own protests and events were actually university-sponsored, often through other departments. For example, the *Queer as Folk* showings were sponsored through the history department and included a discussion of issues brought up by particular episodes, like “what is ‘gay’ art?” The group members were generally reluctant to flaunt university policy beyond their occasional posting of dorms; for example, one proposed protest event was eventually cancelled when the group failed to get approval for it and all but one member said that they would be uncomfortable going forth with the protest. Similarly, one year the “closet” event, originally scheduled for National Coming Out Day, was postponed when the group’s leaders were unable to secure approval in time. When Soul Force did announce their decision to come to campus, Alliance as a group decided against joint participation, and
the student who had contacted them in the first place claimed to me that he didn't know what the group was really “about,” saying, “What have I gotten us into?” Even the orange shirt campaign was careful to skirt the administration’s rules; since unrecognized groups could not engage in fund-raising on campus, to recoup the costs of the shirts the group had to rely on “suggested donations.” T-shirt distributors were specifically told never to say that the shirts were “for sale.”

Alliance’s grassroots organizational style and occasionally confrontational tactics, as with the Closet Event and the protest on Student Activities Day, certainly have a “radical” feel to them, and in a certain way, their major goal—gaining university recognition for a student-run GLBTQ organization—is radical by its very opposition to the universities official stance to deny recognition for that organization. In fact, it often seemed as though students wanted to feel radical, to seem as if they were sticking it to “the man,” and while the actual occasions when an event failed were draining, being able to use “the administration” as “the enemy” occasionally perked students up a bit. On the whole, however, Alliance tended to operate much more like a “liberal” organization

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68 The one notable exception to this general trend of abiding by university laws was a protest outside of the JACC during the student activities fair (described in Ch. 2: Ambivalence). However, even here, were it not for Samantha’s appearance at the event, I believe that the group would have packed up and left when confronted by security the first time, and even when they continued their protest down the street they were ultimately non-confrontational with the university authority, fleeing from security rather than facing them.

69 The university administration, in various forms, has generally stated that there is no “need” for a group like Alliance at the university, and that the Standing Committee/CORE Council meets the universities GLBTQ student needs.

70 I was actually somewhat surprised by how rarely students would actually speak ill of the administration (in terms of their activist woes, at least) at Alliance, especially compared to the consistent venting at Outreach; I suspect that the group would have attracted more members and retained greater numbers had it been more explicit in naming the administration or some other figure as the threat to the organization, as attribution of threat is a major component in achieving cognitive liberation (McAdam 1982).
than a radical one, petitioning for university funding, generally obeying the regulations of the university, and working within the system when possible.

Alliance’s growing pains are not unexpected; Barbara Epstein details how the women’s movement went through its own changes, eventually abandoning the larger goal of gender equality (Epstein 2001). Just as the Epstein charges that second wave feminists spoke as if they represented all women, despite the fact that they were overwhelmingly young, white, and heterosexual, so to do the members of Alliance represent only a fraction of the gay population of Notre Dame, one geared more towards a particular brand of activism, yet are perceived to represent the entire Notre Dame gay community. For example, as was mentioned elsewhere in this essay, Catholic homosexuals sometimes felt left out of the political scene at Notre Dame. And, just as gains for the “majority” feminists left behind women of marginalized race, economic status, and sexual orientation, so too has Alliance’s concentration on gains for its more “liberal” members, who seek simple recognition from the university, leave behind the radicals who seek a complete overhaul of the Notre Dame campus to achieve social equity.

5.5. University Sponsorship: Standing Committee and CORE Council

When I came to Notre Dame as a graduate student in the Fall of 2002, the only “recognized” gay-related organization on the Notre Dame Campus was the Standing Committee for Gay and Lesbian Student Needs. The Standing Committee for Gay and Lesbian Student Needs (which eventually was reorganized into the CORE Council) was the third major gay “student” group I approached when I began my fieldwork and stands distinct from the other groups in many ways. Primarily, the CORE Council is not technically a student activities group; rather, it is an advisory council to the Student
Affairs office (primarily through the vice president of student affairs, Father Poorman). Thus, the group enjoys official university recognition and access to university funds. The Council consists of eight undergraduate students, all but one of whom are gay or lesbian, and four administrators from the Office of Campus Ministry, University Counseling Center, Gender Relations Center, and Office of Student Affairs. There are two co-chairs to the group: one of the student members, and the administrator from Student Affairs.

Students and administrators working “in the system” at Notre Dame come up against restrictive and oppressive power structures in several ways that outsiders might find surprising. While Outreach and Alliance mostly confront a lack of resources due to restrictions placed on them by the university, action within the system seemed to me to be sometimes even more repressed by administrators. For example, the majority’s control over the discourse of the gay rights issue, always framed in terms of Catholic teaching, puts gay rights advocates at a major disadvantage right out of the gate. To even enter the public discussion of GLBTQ rights, one must be familiar with and willing to use Catholic discourse, which takes a large number of students out of political play (graduate students especially seemed more frustrated with the rules of discourse pushed on them in public forums).

This exercise of power is perhaps more subtle than more obvious domination of one group over another through sheer use of resources. In his book *Power and Powerlessness*, Gaventa distinguishes between three dimensions of power (Gaventa 1982). The first dimension is when one actor has more resources and overtly overcomes another, less privileged actor; the second dimension of power is the exclusion of an actor from the bargaining table to begin with; and the third dimension of power is exercised
when the marginal group is successfully encouraged to believe that inequalities are nonexistent or justified. In Gaventa’s terms, the use of Catholic discourse on GLBTQ issues functions as the second dimension of power—those individuals who are unable or unwilling to use such discourse find themselves left out of the discussion completely. “Liberal” GLBTQ-rights activists at Notre Dame must confront “…a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures (‘rules of the game’) that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others” (ibid 14).

Graduate students were explicitly prohibited from applying to the CORE Council, something that aggravated both myself and other queer-identified graduate students who were aware of this limitation. One student was so upset with the omission that he refused to hang posters advertising CORE Council activities because he felt that the posters insinuated that the council served the whole student body, not just undergraduate students. While graduate students might have felt “out-of-place” or self-conscious in Outreach or Alliance, they were generally welcomed in those organizations. This clear and formal delineation of boundaries always distinguished CORE Council from Outreach or Alliance; while Outreach leaders did attempt to restrict membership to only gay or lesbian persons, a wide variety of people attended those groups’ meetings, including sometimes St. Mary’s students and “townies.” CORE Council often seemed to be acting like a group under threat, tightening and strengthening its boundaries (Simmel 1955) even as Outreach and Alliance, the groups ostensibly more oppressed by the university, seemed to be working to expand their boundaries. CORE Council wasn’t necessarily
against expansion, however—it was just focused on a very controlled expansion, with specific criterion for potential members.\textsuperscript{71}

What surprised me the most, however, was how absolute and, at times, intense administrative opposition to even those playing by the rules could be. For example, I participated briefly in a gay student Emmaus bible study group organized by a student who had been inspired in part from his interactions with others at the Campus Ministry’s annual gay student retreat. The student originally had high hopes that the organization could gain university approval—after all, “how can they say no to a bible study group?” However, the student’s application was rejected and certain staff associated with the group felt enough administrative pressure that they attempted to keep their participation, if not secret exactly, at least not general public knowledge.

In another example, a student approached the CORE Council about funding for an ad in the student newspaper that consisted of a “We’re glad you’re here” message to gay students along with signature from students, faculty, and staff, to be run on National Coming Out Day. Despite the fact that the ad seemed entirely in line with the university’s stated Spirit of Inclusion, the fact that it was going to be printed on National Coming Out day was a major factor in the committee’s ultimate decision to deny the student funding.\textsuperscript{72} Part of the problem was the fact that one of administrators on the committee felt that National Coming Out Day was “celebrating a lifestyle” that was in conflict with Catholic teaching, and thus shouldn’t be supported by the committee. As a

\textsuperscript{71}The very application process seemed to be geared at weeding out more radical potential members, at least as I looked at who (from my fieldwork) applied versus who was accepted to the Council.

\textsuperscript{72}The student hadn’t given the group much lead-in time on the issue, which was also an issue, and ultimately ended up paying for the ad without the help of CORE Council.
faculty member who kept track of the activities of CORE Council and Standing Committee once put it, “They always have to put up a fight about something”—for example, the Council’s debate over the use of the terms “bisexual” and “queer” in describing another event.

This and further events surrounding National Coming Out Day left the student members of Alliance feeling irrelevant, mere figureheads so that the university could claim to be welcoming of homosexual students by pointing to the council, but powerless to engage in the kind of instrumental political action needed to secure actual gains for GLBTQ students. Whatever doors were opened for the CORE Council as a university-supported organization were met by just as many roadblocks to mobilization. Beyond the standard difficulties of bureaucratic organization—getting paperwork in time for funding, the mundanity of meetings, and so on, the burden of adhering to a Catholic perspective on gay and lesbian issues bound the hands of the members. In a way, this, the most “liberal,” privileged, and powerful of the three organizations, was paradoxically the most scrutinized, hamstrung, and limited.

5.6. Conclusion

From a vantage point outside of the groups “looking in,” a sociologist would likely come away with this picture of the gay right scene at Notre Dame: Outreach is an apolitical, support-oriented social group; AllianceND is the radical/extra-institutional underground troublemaker that is constantly oppressed by the administration; and CORE Council is the liberal/intra-institutional cooptation of the gay rights movement. While

73 The fact that there are multiple interpretations of “the Catholic position on GLBTQ issues” also created a stumbling block for the committee.
clearly there are reasons to represent the organizations this way, especially from a more macro perspective of the campus (taking a resource mobilization perspective, perhaps), the paradox of the organizations is that Outreach’s partying and support is political, Alliance is actually more “liberal” that radical, and the CORE Council and its members are often treated as the true radicals. Two scholars, both studying the same site, could come away with not just different conclusions on how the organizations fit together but outright conflicting conclusions.

Part of this issue comes from differing levels of analysis. While no specific level of analysis is necessarily bound to a particular approach in sociology, there are certain patterns, based on the strengths of the levels of analysis. For example, macro-level focuses excel at describing change on a national level, but are relatively blind to micro-level interactions like the mechanics of emotion I described in the previous two chapters. Conversely, micro-level analyses may focus so much on individuals’ attitudes about change, success, and so on while glossing over the political context these attitudes are shaped under. Similarly, a national-level focus lends itself towards a more political perspective on movement activity, as that is easy to “see” and measure from a macro perspective; micro perspectives are better equipped to examine the mechanics of expressive movement activity, with their focus on emotion, culture, and identity. Depending on the level of analysis, certain aspects of a phenomenon are going to appear more or less important in a burgeoning theory.

The root question becomes this: How are we, as social movement scholars, going to determine the relevant level for analysis for a given sociological research question? Do we primarily rely on our existing body of knowledge and theory to choose the
relevant level, or do we let direct observations inform our choice. As with most sociological inquiry, the answer isn't an either/or; rather, depending on our research question and the type of explanation we seek to provide, we will choose between (or synthesize) the two.

For example, my time in the field suggests that for the question of tactics is as issue of “level” more than an essentialist category. Specifically, the liberal/radical distinction can depend as much on the level of analysis as than the tactic used itself. A macro-focused inquiry of the activities of the CORE Council and its members or of the Emmaus bible study group would likely proceed with the assumption that these groups are “liberal”- institutionally recognized, working within established guidelines for change, and ascribing to the national-level institution's value system (the Catholic church) to achieve their ends in their immediate context (a Catholic university). However, many of the social movement activities, within the more micro context of the university itself, are actually as radical (if not more so) than anything presented by Alliance, and are treated as such at times by the administration.

Similarly, sociologist looking at organizations like Outreach will come away with different interpretations of the function of the organization depending on their level of analysis. A macro-oriented, structure-focused perspective, like a national political perspective, would likely see Outreach primarily as a non-political entity, an organization aimed around a shared identity but with more in common with, say, a bowling club or a sports team than with GLAAD or Soul Force. As one moves to a slightly more micro or
cultural perspective, one would be more likely to focus on the identity-work that a group like Outreach can provide for a university, especially given its history as a direct descendant of the major GLBTQ activist group at Notre Dame in the 90s. Even more micro, perhaps even switching from a group-level perspective to an interactional and social psychological perspective, and one begins to see how Outreach plays a role in keeping members emotionally functional in a hostile cultural context. Of course, these are not the only interpretations—a micro analysis of Outreach could go below so far below the level of the organization that Outreach’s place in the ND social movement scene as a whole could become invisible—but here again the question of level provides a fascinating challenge to social movement scholars.

I’d like to conclude by returning to the questions driving this dissertation as a whole, the question of how a local social movement field emerged in an institution actively hostile to its basic tenants, and how that hostility shapes activists and organizations. The shape of the local social movement field at Notre Dame allows space for the organizations to, if not thrive, at least survive; what’s more, the groups seemed to relate to each other symbiotically, with each organization fulfilling various roles across the liberal/radical and instrumental/expressive structures, tactics, and logics. In fact, it seems as if the hostility Catholic teaching has towards the basic premise that the GLBTQ organizations fight for—that homosexual desire is neither a sin nor something that needs to be suppressed and controlled, and that GLBTQ persons should not be treated any differently than their heterosexual peers—has created an environment where multiple

74 This is not to set culture and structure as oppositional or to conflate culture with “micro” and structure with “macro,” but just to throw out an idea about the issue of perspective.
strategies are required for the local movement to gain traction at all. CORE Council has the ear (and pocketbook) of the administration and supports a version of Catholicism that is supportive of GLBTQ students as persons; Alliance is a thorn in the university’s side, prodding them to more socially liberal policies and greater support for GLBTQ students; while Outreach provides a place for students to vent and regain emotional energy as the multiple conflicts between the other groups and the university administration tends to end in the administration’s favor. While further comparative research across institutions is needed to make larger claims, at Notre Dame, the organizations need each other even though they might, at times, resent one another.

75 Countless other individuals, groups, and organizations play into this tapestry as well, including Feminist Voice, the Queer Film Festival’s organizers, various scholarly departments at the university, the Campus Ministries office, the supporters (and detractors) of the Vagina Monologues and Loyal Daughters, individual unaffiliated students, dorms and rectors, the Gender Relations Center, and more.
6.1. Introduction

Methods sections in qualitative sociological works are something of a mixed bag, generally not taking a uniform shape as is the case with many forms of quantitative research. Of course, there are certain commonalities found in most ethnographic manuscripts: a discussion of the site of study (as much as can be revealed through the layers of deception the authors use to protect their subjects' anonymity), perhaps some comments on what it was like in the field and how the researcher gained access to their field site, and generally some comment on how the research follows the Chicago school or is a product of grounded theory. Unfortunately, relatively few methods chapters include what I, during my graduate study, most yearned for: a frank discussion of the process of “doing” ethnography that would provide assistance to others attempting an ethnographic research project (both in terms of practical steps to take and morale-boosting). Thus, in this methods chapter, I cover both the standard subjects for ethnographic research, but also include quite a bit of discussion revealing the research-as-process, in the hopes that others reading this manuscript someday might gain some measure of confidence from knowing that, for really all sociological ethnographers, the final product is the result of quite a meandering path.
6.2. The Field

This dissertation is the product of three years of ethnographic participant observation of the gay and lesbian “scene” of the Notre Dame campus. I spent the most time with Alliance ND and Outreach, participating in their meetings and events throughout the three-year span (though my attendance in the middle year was negligible). I also attended as many Standing Committee/CORE Council events as possible, though because of access limitations many of my notes on those organizations were drawn from the events they held, like the annual National Coming Out Day table in the student center and the bi-weekly “Coffee Hour” for gay, lesbian, and questioning students, often referred to jokingly as “Homos as the CoMo” by gay and lesbian students. and from students’ stories of their experiences working for the Committee or Council. I also became involved in as many gay-related events as I could on campus, such as discussions about the Vagina Monologues being performed on campus or the “town hall meeting” on heterosexism held by the student government office; this included volunteering at the Gender Relations Center for a year, working in the FIRE Starters peer mentorship program, attending the Notre Dame feminist group’s meetings, and working as an assistant stage manager for the play Loyal Daughters. Describing LD. By living on the campus, reading the university newspapers, occasionally visiting undergraduate parties, and making an effort to spend time in undergraduate “hot spots” like the student center, Reckers, the dining halls, and even dorm common areas, I also was able to achieve some level of immersion in Notre Dame undergraduate culture.

76 Often referred to jokingly as “Homos as the CoMo” by gay and lesbian students.

77 Describe LD.
My entry to the field consisted of little more than simply “showing up” to the meetings of the organizations and subsequently asking or signing up for the organizations’ listserves. At the first meeting I attended for each organization, when the students took turns introducing themselves, I identified myself as a graduate student in sociology who would be performing an ethnographic study of “gay life at Notre Dame.” I then said that what that entailed is “basically just writing down everything” I observed; I compared this to keeping a journal. At the events, I observed the students’ interactions; as soon as I had a chance after the events I would write extensive notes on what occurred at the meetings- the things people said, the actions people took, even physical descriptors of the locations of the events. I generally participated in the same activities of the students I was observing: if they were pinning rainbow flags to prayer cards, I helped; if they were socializing at a bar, I would engage in smalltalk while cautiously nursing an alcoholic beverage. All of these actions were guided by the premise that, in order to understand the world that the activist lived in, I had to immerse myself in that world (Emerson et al 1995:2). I also would speak with students outside of the meetings to ask them what they thought of a specific incident or even just what was on their mind.

When I began the study, I tended to err on the conservative side when it came to engaging those around me, preferring to observe silently most of the time and speaking up rarely; in short, the very “fly on the wall” strategy discouraged by Emerson et al (1995). Ultimately, I abandoned that strategy, as it put up a considerable barrier between myself and those I was observing, with most students seeing me as “that grad student
researcher” and reacting to me accordingly.\footnote{I did not realize how fully the “fly on the wall” strategy alienated me from my subjects until more than a year after I abandoned it; for example, while I thought I was “out” as a gay male to everyone in the groups, I eventually discovered that there was actually a period during the first year where the question of my sexual orientation was a subject of gossip among certain group members.} Interactions between myself and the students felt awkward and stilted, and while I was welcomed into the sites in general, there was a certain sense that when I came to the center of someone’s attention, they were more conscious of how they might be portrayed in research rather than acting “naturally” (for example, during this period student I talked to would frequently ask about my research or make reference to the research project). The natural “ethnographic marginality” that came from my focus on goals outside of the group (Emerson et al 1995: 35-38)—producing my dissertation—was exacerbated by my reticence about behaving “naturally” in the group, myself.

After my first year in the field, I began to loosen up a little bit and act more like “myself” in the field—joking around, engaging in conversation more often, and generally just speaking up more. Ultimately, I decided that it was better to be active in the field and consciously thinking about how my presence and actions might alter the field than trying unsuccessfully to be “invisible” in the field. As students felt more comfortable around me and began to trust me more as a person, positive interactions with them outside of the meetings were more likely; most of my “interview” field notes came from just talking with other students at lunch or in the student center instead of in formal (and artificial) interview settings.\footnote{Whenever possible, I preferred to interact with subjects in as natural a setting as possible; while I did schedule a few interviews, I usually just tried to catch people at lunch or talk to them while just hanging out. I did this to keep the conversations as natural as possible, rather than conscious “performances” for me as an ethnographer. In the end, I did feel that these informal “interviews” provided more natural, open, and, dare I say, earnest interactions than the few formal interviews I did conduct.} I also became bolder about asking hard questions in
meetings to see how others would react; by my third year, I felt pretty confident I knew how things would go without anyone rocking the boat, and often became curious how much pushing would be required to elicit a different response, not unlike Dunier’s attempts to make clear the importance of race and acquaintanceship in *Sidewalks* when, after a black vendor was asked by a police officer to pack up his stall, Dunier (a white male) set up a stall in the same place (insert citation and page number).

Conversely, at no point in my research did I attempt to hide my research agenda; indeed, given the sensitivity many students at the sites had about being “outed,” there was even greater pressure than usual to be upfront with my status as a researcher. I found out that during my first year of research, my disclosure of this combined with my mostly silent observation did make me “stick out” a bit in the field; for example, many members of Alliance were not even aware that I was gay, and sharing a gay identity with those I was researching was one of the most useful biographical aspects of myself as a research tool that could make gay and lesbian students around me comfortable. Again, though, when I lightened up a bit, I found that students regarded me fairly positively (lesbian and heterosexual female students especially seemed to like me). On the other hand, while I would admit to doing research if asked, I did not announce my researcher status anew at every field site, particularly in very public settings (shouting it out to an entire dining hall would hardly have been appropriate anyway!). In the end, those around me tended to be comfortable enough around me to talk to me like any other student, but aware enough of my status as a researcher that they would sometimes say something along the lines of, “but don’t write that in your book!”
Taking up these two different positions in the field—first mild and quiet, then later bolder and more assertive—provided two different points of view on the activities in the field, both in terms of how others interacted with me and in how I perceived the activities around me. When I took a more passive role, I was better able to observe body language and record conversations occurring around me; my focus tended to be on the minutiae of the sites, down to rooms, timing, and chair arrangements. I could define various participants based on what roles they tended to take in the groups, and was able to pay attention to students who tended to fade into the background in meetings. This passive approach also gave me insight into how the organizations and members operated “normally”—without agitation, in other words. However, it also left me with just a surface view of many issues, particularly with Outreach, where political topics tended to be glossed over quickly.

Once I took a more active role, however, I was able to push people’s boundaries a little more, both to get at their “deeper” convictions on matters and to test the boundaries. By consciously toeing the line, I sometimes continued to press an issue past the point of being polite; if it ended up pushing away certain group members who saw me as confrontational, it also endeared me to other group members who might have been dissatisfied with certain aspects of leadership. However, as I began to speak up more and enter into conversations, my notes turned more towards how people defended positions or how they constructed their work in the groups; I gained more information about their

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80 I also was able to view how informal sanctions kept things runningly “smoothly” in the groups; while no members were chased away, shifts in tone or body language tended to shut down certain types of conversation, and participants in the groups either learned the interaction rules for each group or left the organizations.
personal histories at the cost of being attentive to their physical behaviors in any particular microinteraction. I was often able to take knowledge gained from my passive roles to ask pointed questions during active roles, and by the end of my time in the field, I would switch back and forth between roles from meeting to meeting. In the end, both sides were necessary for the full theories developed in this research—without the intense focus on body language, for example, the emotional energy losses would have been less visible, but without the more aggressive approach, I wouldn't have been able to test the boundaries of the groups.

To be clear, the population I am studying is not the gay and lesbian population of the Notre Dame campus; rather, it is the GLBTQ-rights activist population at Notre Dame. While I do try to integrate the experience of some of the non-activist GLBTQ students, including closeted students who communicate mainly through IM and gay chat rooms or students who only shows up at Outreach’s apartment parties but never gets involved with anything on campus, such students rarely entered my field sites and failed to show up at appointed times for interviews. Besides what the ND activist community refers to as “closet-cases,” there is also some unknown number of gay and lesbian students who seem to navigate their time at Notre Dame as out, happy homosexuals, living much as gay and lesbian people do in any town (including perhaps some time on gay dating sites or hitting up gay clubs). These “out” students mostly came to my attention second-hand, during discussions of homosexual dating at Notre Dame, when someone would mention “oh, but there’s always X and Y, from so-and-so class, they’ve been dating for a while. You wouldn’t know them though, they never go to meetings.” At least on the surface, it
seemed that out gay students involved in relationships were unlikely to participate in the organizations.  

6.3. Biography

Both in my personal field notes and in the stories I present as evidence for my theories, I myself am a prominent figure, giving an explicit authoethnographic component to the research. As such, my personal biography, something relevant to nearly any sociological research project, is especially relevant. At the time I began my fieldwork, I had been a graduate student at Notre Dame for two years already and had just finished my Master's Thesis the year before. My first year at Notre Dame, I became involved with Outreach, hoping to meet other gay students and continue the activist work I was involved with in my undergraduate institution. However, I stopped attending the organization that same year when it became clear to me that the meetings weren’t a great site for activism or dating and had more of a support-focus, something I felt little need for since I had been “out” as a gay male since high school. Ultimately, I was left with the impression that the gay community at Notre Dame, particularly for undergraduates, was a whole world away from my personal biography and experience due to its affluent, Catholic, high-pressure-to-achieve, and publicly scrutinized nature.

Because of my own status as both a Notre Dame student and a queer-identified male, the autoethnographic components of my research come from a combination of what Carolyn Ellis categorizes as “reflexive” ethnography—where the researcher themselves are the phenomenon being explored—and “indigenous” or “native” ethnography (Ellis

81 Lesbian students in relationships, however, seemed no less likely than their single peers to show up to meetings.
Rather than obscure my presence in the stories I write about the field, I reflexively examine my own reactions—my emotional states, my foci of attention, and so on—in the field to help form my theories. Thus, while the bulk of the evidence I present represents the phenomenon I describe as it occurs to the undergraduates in the field, it also described mechanisms that I myself was subject to as a gay male in the GLBTQ organizations at Notre Dame. I often invoke narratives to elicit similar emotions from the reader—to take them “there” as it were. Similarly, this research falls mostly in the “confessional” category of Van Maanen’s (1988), with the co-committal personal authority rather than absolute or cultural authority; as Van Maanen points out, it’s the difference between saying “the police do X” and “I saw the police do X” (ibid:74).

6.4. Evolution of the Project

When I began my research, when someone asked me what my dissertation was about, I would say “the gay and lesbian movement at Notre Dame.” Even at that early stage, this was actually something of an evasion, a simplification; to me, my dissertation was much more about how social movements operate and flourish in hostile environments and (ultimately) how participants in such organizations navigate their activist lives emotionally. However, like most ethnographies, the evolution from idea to fieldwork to final product took many turns throughout the research process.

The actual project grew out of my work for a year-long qualitative methods course that included a heavy fieldwork obligation. By this time, Alliance was entering its first year as a “real” organization—several students and faculty remarked at various times that before that it was primarily the project of one student who used his private resources to start the orange shirt campaign at Notre Dame. Meanwhile, the Standing Committee
had been firmly established for some time and had its regular events as mentioned previously. The research question driving my entry into the field was mostly just to get a grasp on what was really going on with the gay community at Notre Dame and understand why (and how) there came to be three gay-related organizations at Notre Dame, none of which seemed to be involved in much “actual” gay-rights protesting (at least, in my eyes at the time). By the end of my first year in the field, I was focused on the multitude of strategies used by the members of the various organizations—direct advocacy, education and awareness-raising activities, identity building and social support, and even just partying, having a good time, and enjoying one’s sexuality as a mark of uniqueness rather than a scarlet letter. The dissertation took its final shape as I parsed out these multiple strategies, particularly why and how individuals ended up using various strategies over others and how the institutional structure played a part in the mere existence of these strategies. This legacy is most apparent in the Paradox chapter, where I emphasize the varying strategies favored by the three major organizations (and their members).

This development of a middle-range theory “through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development” is a hallmark of grounded theory (Charmaz 2005:507). Through an iterative analysis process, a broad research question—“what is going on with the gay rights movement at Notre Dame”—is narrowed down to a more and more refined question—“how do multiple movement strategies emerge and sustain themselves in this hostile context,” until the researcher arrives at their final research question. The researcher is “grounded” in their data, but their perspective moves from micro to macro and back throughout the process, resulting in theories that generally
occupy the “middle range”—that is, theories that link microprocesses with macro phenomena (Glazer and Strauss 1967, Charmaz 2005). As the research question becomes more clear, the researcher is able to both develop more abstract ideas about what they see in the data and seek out specific data to “fill out, refine, and check the emerging conceptual categories” (Charmaz 2005: 508).

In my case, it wasn’t until I had collected more than a year’s worth of data, entered it into ATLASI, and finished a couple of rounds of coding that it became clear to me that the most interesting and accurate answers to my “macro” research question—how the gay rights movement persisted and multiplied despite the difficulties of mobilizing on a Catholic campus—would be grounded in the more micro levels of analysis. The combination of listening to what the students were saying and seeing the visual clues they were giving off led me to the realization that one of the most pervasive themes across the sites was exhaustion, a tiredness unusual even for the already stress-prone life of being a Notre Dame undergraduate student. Across the field sites, I found that the students were constantly mentioning fatigue, attempting to balance their limited energy reserves across the various activities they wanted or needed to engage in, and physically displaying low-energy states (leaning on hands to stay awake, exhibiting delayed response to questions, and so on).

82 After I was able to reliably predict the course of events that would occur in a given situation involving the groups I was studying, I compiled all of my field notes in ATLASI, a software program used in the analysis of qualitative data. I coded the data for specific concepts— for example, I flagged all occasions where students utilized Catholic discourse— which then facilitated a comparison of these phenomena as they occurred across the St. Sebastian organizations, “public” debates, and interactions among students. At the end of this analysis, I had thorough descriptions of the organizations, their goals, and their strategies, and was satisfied that I had reached categorical saturation on those levels.
However, as I examined my field notes, I also discovered there were times when this exhaustion would disappear completely, where students who, at other times in otherwise similar-seeming situations, had displayed a malaise or sense of depression instead showed vibrancy and what I came to discover were markers of high emotional energy—expressions of solidarity and self-efficacy and a willingness to engage in new interactions (Collins 1990, 2001). It was still (usually) the middle of the school week, it wasn’t tied to any particular time of the year (once the beginning-of-the-school-year enthusiasm had subsided), and it occurred at seemingly random times across my notes from the various sites. Ultimately, I realized the relevant factor wasn’t exactly the context these periods occurred in; rather, it was the subject matter on which the individuals who were experiencing the energy boost were focused (primarily gay male students working on projects for Feminist Voice).

My turn towards the emotional aspects of the field was, itself, in part a result of my own social structural position. After my first year of research, I took a microsociology course that sensitized me to the sociological research on emotions, particularly that of Hochschild, Goffman, Collins, and Stets; this, combined with my work as a teaching assistant for a social movement course that emphasized (among other things) emotional processes in social movement through readings of Durkheim, Scheff, Collins, Jasper, and Britt and Heise. Thus, I began to interpret some of the physical signs of “tiredness” in my sites in terms of “low emotional energy” (Collins 1990, 2001). I also began to interpret some of the microinteractional cues from my field notes, such as

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83 In fact, the incident which most gave me what my mentor calls “the ‘ah-hah!’ moment” occurred right around a particularly test-intensive period in the school year.
stammering or rapid speech patterns, as signs of shame (Scheff 1990). Discovering quite a bit of empirical evidence for large portions of the theories of Durkheim, Collins, and Scheff drew me further into their work and into a belief in the fundamental claims of their research—that human interaction is significantly governed by shame and pride processes, and that interaction rituals are one of the primary conduits for these emotions (particularly pride). With these theories in mind, I developed an early draft of the Sideway Entry chapter, from which the rest of the dissertation followed.

6.5. Disclosure of the Site

Throughout my time in the field, when I disclosed my researcher identity students would almost universally react positively and say something along the lines of how they were glad that someone would tell their story, the story of being gay, lesbian, or bisexual at Notre Dame. Like many theorists, I went into the site not to write an expose’ of Notre Dame, but to use the site as one (initially among several) to create sociological theory that was separate from the site itself, and thought for a long time that I would use a pseudonym for the university in the final manuscript. However, after my first year in the field—when I began to take the more “aggressive” approach to fieldwork—I realized more and more that when these students were letting me into their lives and telling me their stories, they were doing so in part because they wanted their story to be told; they wanted the research to be about Notre Dame. I realized that inadvertently, I had entered into a sort of contract with these students, one that put some moral pressure on me to

84 The one notable exception to this was my first attempt at entrance to Feminist Voice; while the organization’s president was quite receptive, the other members I initially interacted with said that it was “kind of creepy” and “uncomfortable” having someone observe them.

85 For a long time, I referred to Notre Dame as “St. Sebastian,” the patron saint of sports.
disclose Notre Dame as a site. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, Notre Dame as a site possesses certain peculiarities and unique qualities (as the premiere Catholic university in the United States of America). Presenting the site in pseudonym while ignoring or obscuring these qualities could lead to statements that would mislead the audience. In the end, after much discussion with the students being studied, my dissertation advisor, and my peers, I decided to “out” Notre Dame as my fieldsite.

6.6. Conclusion

The convoluted path by which this dissertation developed illustrates on major point more than any other: had another researcher entered the same site, or even had I myself followed a slightly different course in the field and in my coursework as a graduate student, the conclusions could have been radically different. However, the rigorous nature of the method give me confidence that the theories that emerged would not likely conflict with each other. Just as I argue in the conclusion to this book for more sensitivity to context when observing the field, I argue here that context is what largely determined the product of this research. While I am confident in the resilience of my findings, I know that within the data I have collected lie countless other potential theories—many of which I hope to develop myself as I continue in my career as a sociologist, perhaps through comparison with other universities or by applying alternate sociological perspectives.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

I started this research with the question: how do multiple GLBTW social movement organizations not only survive under the hostile conditions for them at Notre Dame, but thrive? In Chapter 3, “Ambivalence,” I discussed how students with access to GLBTQ-friendly peer groups are able to overcome the emotional obstacles preventing entry into the GLBTQ local social movement field, balancing the emotions of shame and pride. Chapter 4, “Sideways Entry,” examined what happened to students after they join the groups, more specifically how GLBTQ-identified activists will burn out after successive failures in mobilization while “allies” can weather the setbacks the group experiences, balancing positive and negative emotional energy. Chapter 5, “Paradox,” looked at the organizations themselves and asked how the structure of Notre Dame as an institution, as well as the mechanisms discussed in the previous two chapters, shaped the groups across various categories in the social movement literature.

In one way, this project is focused on dichotomies: shame/pride, liberal/radical, instrumental/expressive, micro/macro. However, this focus on dichotomy is aimed at deconstruction of these categories rather than as reifying them. In a large part, this project is a call to understand the importance of different types of involvement, and that when we recognize that involvement is not a yes/no distinction, we can start to understand the dynamics that move actors between different types of involvement.
Interaction rituals can simultaneously generate both shame and pride; organizations and tactics can simultaneously possess liberal and radical qualities; expressive logics of action serve instrumental purposes. It’s not that the concepts are flawed; rather, there is a tendency in sociology to draw firmer boundaries than we find in the “real” world, almost as if having blurred boundaries among concepts is a theoretical weakness rather than an acknowledgement that the social world is more complex than our Weberian ideal types might suggest.

Notre Dame’s GLBTQ local social movement field has been a great example of just how those boundaries can be blurred. This is true in a literal sense, as the organizations share huge overlap in membership, and in a metaphorical sense, as gay and lesbian students, an “invisible minority” on campus, spend much of their student lives between gay and straight realms. As activists “living in tension”—between gay rights advocacy and (willing or unwilling) adherence to Catholic doctrine—participants in the GLBTQ LSMF have to negotiate a middle ground, otherwise they would snap under the intense pressures the opposing sides place upon them.

While it is easy to claim that the hostile political context of Notre Dame, as an institution, towards gay and lesbian civil rights has lead to this blurring of boundaries, in truth, almost every social movement operates under hostile conditions, real or perceived; it’s the very motivation for why many people become activists, after all. Instead, I argue that the small, relatively closed institution makes the blurred boundaries between categories more easily visible. Taking too micro of an approach can lead to a denial that
categories exist at all, \( ^{86} \) while taking too macro of an approach leaves sociology unable to account for multiple strategies utilized by single actors and how actors can move among types of involvement over time. At its most extreme, a macro perspective risks reducing the complexity of the social world to either/or dichotomies and loses the nuance of live as it is lived by real people.

Thanks in part to the New Social Movement paradigm and the so-called “cultural turn” in sociology, social movement scholars are moving towards an understanding of social movement activity that moves beyond resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald) and political process (McAdam) models. While scholars do not deny the importance of these factors to mobilization, they seek to bring in emotions, identity, culture, and other factors that were out of vogue with post-1970s social movement scholarship as “murky, dangerous” factors that go on “inside people’s heads” (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001), such as emotions (Hochschild 1983, Jasper 1997, Collins 2001, Kemper 2001, Stein 2001a), identity (Stryker et al 2000, Berezin 2001, Stein 2001b), and culture (Lichterman 1996, Jasper 1997, Stein 2001a, Eyerman and Jameson 2003). However, the risk here is that these aspects of identity or expressive logics of action conceived of as oppositional to instrumental or “political”/policy-based logics of action. Instead, as I show in chapter 4 with my description of Outreach, these various logics are deeply intertwined.

In many ways, grounded theory is especially primed for just this sort of boundary-crossing; after all, with its emphasis on shifting between micro and macro, grounded and

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\( ^{86} \) And may, at the most extreme, deny that the macro “exists” in any real sense: for an example, see Collins 1981)
abstract perspectives throughout the simultaneously-occurring data collection and analysis processes, the approach already crosses methodological boundaries (Glazer and Strauss 1967 [1999], Abbot 1997, Charmaz 2005). Furthermore, grounded theory specializes in middle-range theories: theories that link the micro and macro, and thus by their very nature cross levels of analysis.

For our understanding of social movements to advance, we must move towards dynamic understandings of the concepts that lend themselves to understanding how categories such as liberal or radical, social or political, instrumental or expressive are intertwined, and allow for an understanding of change across time within and across movements, organizations, and individuals, and expand what we consider to be movement activity to include strategies than even activists themselves might not traditionally think of as “political.”

7.1. Future Research Agendas

The greatest limitation of an in-depth ethnography of a single “site”—the Notre Dame campus—is that it limits macro-level comparisons. While many of the theories developed in this dissertation are supported by cross-organization or student comparisons, for example comparing Alliance against Outreach, or both organizations against the Notre Dame feminist organization or the Gender Relations Center, the more macro context of Notre Dame as a culture and institution is held constant throughout the majority of my research.⁸⁷ The largest question remaining thus becomes: How do these

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⁸⁷ Arguably, my time spent in South Bend’s city hall during the unsuccessful attempts by a South Bend gay rights group to include sexual orientation in its antidiscrimination clause, at off-campus GLBTQ-oriented parties, or visiting local gay bars with Outreach members provides a non-Notre Dame context to my fieldwork. However, my time at these sites was generally limited and often still centered on Notre
mechanisms differ in nonuniversity settings? In setting where the political context isn’t as hostile to the GLBTQ cause? In larger settings with a huge pool of potential GLBTQ organizers, or in small settings where everyone literally knows everyone else in the institution? With people who are generally younger, or with crowds who are generally older? In a public school rather than a private school? The list continues indefinitely.

One specific research agenda that requires comparison across campuses was touched on in the Paradox chapter: Does the very hostile context of the Notre Dame campus create the multiple organizations in some way? What is it about the institutional structure of Notre Dame, in particular, that might contribute to the requirement of multiple organizations that fill various roles on the campus—the “social/support” organization, the “radical activist” organization, the “co-opted by the administration” organization. Similarly, while the main findings of this dissertation are presented at the level of generalized abstractions, e.g. “ambivalence develops when a person holds an identity which is marginalized by their primary social group, and this ambivalence can be overcome if the individual has access to more supportive alternative social groups.” But, is this true in large part due to the dorm structures at Notre Dame? How would the models work in institutions where social groups are even more highly regimented and access to alternative groups are more limited, say on a military base or for contractors working in foreign countries? If GLBTQ students could feel ambivalence on a Catholic

Dame students. Just as the student body as a whole is bounded by the Ivory Tower of Notre Dame, I myself, as a graduate student, also found that most of my experiences while attending Notre Dame were Domer-centric.
campus, what happens to military or contract personnel who object to the occupation of Iraq or who have had their tours of duty extended due to stop-loss measures?

Or, for another twist, how do these mechanisms operate for high-school age GLBTQ persons living with families (a primary social group) that are not GLBTQ friendly? How are some children able to stand up to their parents at a young age, while others refuse to confront their parents on issues of contention even through adulthood? And what about individuals who display ambivalence about a social group in one setting, but who rail against that group entirely in another setting?88

7.2. Relation to Existing Scholarly Work

As stated previously, the point of this research isn’t to overturn or contradict rational choice (Olsen), resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald), and political process (McAdams) theories of social movements. In fact, in many ways, this research folds into these existing theories: for example, emotional rewards, like feelings of pride and solidarity, could be seen as rational incentives for joining a movement, even if the activists themselves lack the vocabulary to name these specific emotions as motivations for joining a movement. Similarly, emotional energy is a necessary resource to start and sustain a movement, as critical as free time and money. And, of course, the political structure of Notre Dame as a shaping factor in the GLBTQ groups has been a prevalent theme throughout the research.

88 As far as Notre Dame goes, this category for comparison was a mental exercise rather than an actual group; in my field notes, not one student displayed ambivalence in one context and clarity in another. However, I could conceive of students who seem “ambivalent” or tactful when actually around dormmates, but who display clarity of emotion when hanging with other activists or gay friends.
Instead, this research attempts to slightly shift the focus from the hard instrumentality that these three major theories tend to emphasize (Goodwin et al 2001: 49), towards soft incentives and resources based in human emotion.


Giugni, Marco; McAdam, Doug; and Tilly, Charles. 1999. *How Social Movements Matter*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN.


