STAGING OPPOSITION

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PERFORMANCE AND POWER IN THE LGBTQ2+ MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Whereas the LGBTQ2+ movement has made notable gains since its inception, these gains do not reflect the experiences or political priorities of the entire collective. In fact, within the movement there are varied understandings of who 'we' are, where 'we' should go, and where the sources of our struggles lie. It is this tension between collectivity and fragmentation that guides this dissertation, specifically, I ask, how do intersecting power relations shape the processes whereby we mobilize and strengthen collectivity, engage in consciousness-raising, and advocate for certain political priorities in our protest. Using popular drag and queer cabaret as a case study, my findings contribute to core movement concepts including collective identity, storytelling, 'free spaces' and infighting to better explain the tension between collectivity and fragmentation in the LGBTQ2+ movement in Ontario, Canada. Using a combination of field observation, semi-structured interviews, and cultural artifacts I find that intersecting power relations shape drag and queer cabaret in both shared and movement free spaces. Drag and queer cabaret are valuable means of mobilizing and sustaining collectivity as well as consciousness raising; however, failure to address how intersecting power relations shape these processes simultaneously undermines collectivity by introducing hierarches and subsequently fragmenting the movement. Groups that seek to challenge these hierarchies do so in two primary ways. In the case of 'free spaces,' queer cabaret groups build *intersectional prefigurative politics* into their performative protest to expand the

narrative of who ‘we’ are. In ‘shared’ movement spaces like Pride—wherein LGBTQ2+ experiences and ideologies vary greatly—marginalized groups use drag and queer cabaret as a form of *strategic resistance*. Overall this dissertation attests to the need for greater attention to how ‘our’ LGBTQ2+ resistance is situated within larger relations of inequality.

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Introduction

I cut my protest teeth in the mid-1990s amongst a group of LGBTQ2+ peoples in my home community. We marched through the streets of London, Ontario and onto the steps of city hall. It was 1995 and our protest was in response to then Mayor, Dianne Haskett's refusal to proclaim 'Gay Pride', a refusal she attributed to her Christian faith[1]. As we chanted and walked with fists raised, the subversive potential of queer political action became clear to me. During this time, I also began attending drag shows. Drag was a staple in the 'gay bars' (the terminology we used at the time). Watching performers like Mz. Afra-Tighty and the Gutter Boyz tell their stories on stage while holding the room in the palm of their hands, I witnessed the incredible potential of drag to facilitate community engagement and connection within queer spaces. It was not until I entered graduate school that I began to delve deeper into the kinds of creative political protest that happen in cultural spaces. Specifically, I became increasingly interested in the relationship between performance and the development and sustainment of LGBTQ2+ political activism.

The Puzzle

LGBTQ2+ political activism has achieved notable successes drawing on 'rights-based' master frames (Smith 1999). For example, the *right* to have 'same-

[1] In response, the Homophile Association of London, Ontario (HALO), filed a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. The courts determined that Haskett and the city discriminated against HALO (for more information, see Warner 2002).

sex marriage' legally recognized, the *right* to workplace protections, and more recently, the *right* to have legal recognition of one's chosen gender have featured prominently in the Canadian imagination. Since the late 1970s, a large faction of the LGBTQ2+ movement has engaged with the state as a means of fighting for rights. For example, Smith (1999) argues the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, played a central role not only in the adoption of a 'rights-based' master frame, but also in the advocacy and action aimed at achieving equality-based change. Using *rights* as a framework, movement activists have advocated for 'our' inclusion in Canadian social institutions. And while these battles are important, they are not the political priorities of all. For example, marriage in particular is a hotly contested issue within the LGBTQ2+ movement (see Bernstein and Taylor 2013; Conrad 2014).

While these struggles have been fought in the name of the LGBTQ2+ movement, *the* movement evokes somewhat misleading imagery of 'us' as a unified collective. We are not. I see great potential in further exploring these ideological and biographical factions as a means of better understanding LGBTQ2+ lives and the articulation of the movement's political priorities. Let me pause here to clarify that I do not seek to abandon the idea that *a* movement exists, one that has made (and continues to make) valuable inroads culturally and institutionally; in fact, I see strategic value in framing a movement in the singular. That said, I am increasingly drawn to the sites of schism, hierarchies, and political

infighting within the movement as opportunities for insight into social movement processes and the articulation of political priorities.

Overall, my research is guided by an interest in the relationship between *collectivity* and *fragmentation*. More specifically, I am interested in how intersecting power relations inform this tension. As such, the overarching question that drives this research is as follows: *how do intersecting power relations shape LGBTQ2+ collectivity, consciousness raising, and political protest?*

Factors external to a movement can shape the internal dynamics (Van Dyke and Cress 2006) as well as the overall trajectory (Smith 1999; Fetner 2008), yet, I am compelled to look inward to see how the use of tactics can shape the development of collectives, ideologies, and political priorities. Performance tactics have played an enduring and meaningful role in the LGBTQ2+ movement (see Shepard 2010; Taylor, Rupp, and Gamson 2004), as such, I use popular drag and queer cabaret as a case study through which to examine how intersecting power relations shape social movement processes.

The Case of LGBTQ2+ Performance

For social movement scholars like James Jasper (1997) who argue, "legal rights are never enough" (p. 369), alternative and creative forms of protest are valuable sites of inquiry. It is not enough to relegate the study of movements to their engagement with the state, rather, we must also understand creative forms of protest that shape movement cultures. Performance has been central to LGBTQ2+ movement work (see Rupp and Taylor 2003; Taylor et al. 2004; Shepard 2010).

Groups like the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) have regularly used performance as a means of engaging 'outsider' audiences in creatively advocating for political change. However, performance has also played a central role *internally* within the LGBTQ2+ movement. For example, drag has been shown to build community (Rupp and Taylor 2003; Piontek 2002; Schacht 2002), to provide community members with resources (Rogers 2018), and to challenge and transform individual and collective understandings of gender and sexuality (Butler 1990; Shapiro 2007; Volcano and Halberstam 1999). That is not to say that all drag is subversive or without its problems. On the contrary, one need only turn on their television to an episode of *RuPaul's Drag Race* to see how complicated and contradictory drag can be. Despite the show's widespread appeal, problematic politics related to fat bodies, trans folks, racism, misogyny, and cultural appropriation abound. In short, the prominence and political significance of drag within the movement signify its potential to provide insight into the inner workings of LGBTQ2+ movement culture. Scholars ahead of me have explored the cultural and political significance of queer performance *content* and they have done so quite well (for example, Muños 1999; Halberstam 1998; Volcano and Halberstam 1999). I seek to neither replicate this work, nor critique it. Instead, I situate the content of LGBTQ2+ performance within the larger process of storytelling in social movements.

The Research Questions

My overarching desire to understand the tension between LGBTQ2+ collectivity and fragmentation, and more specifically, how intersecting power relations shape LGBTQ2+ collectivity, consciousness raising, and political protest informs the specific sub-questions that drive the chapters of this dissertation. My approach to research is inductive and as such, the questions that guide my individual chapters evolve as the research progresses. In other words, each question I ask has been informed by the answer to the previous question. I began this project by asking:

1. How do intersecting power relations shape LGBTQ2+ collectivity and consciousness raising in popular drag spaces?

The answer to this question provides insights into the tension between collectivity and fragmentation. Simply stated, while drag can facilitate the development of collectivity, it does so in ways that marginalize LGBTQ2+ peoples along race, class, gender, ability, and age lines. In response, marginalized queer folks carve out new opportunities to engage in performative storytelling through queer cabaret. This drove me to ask:

2. How do intersecting power relations shape LGBTQ2+ collectivity and consciousness raising in queer cabaret spaces?

I find that queer cabaret storytelling has a significantly different relationship to intersecting power relations, collectivity, and political priorities. In short, queer cabaret weaves intersectional prefigurative politics into the fabric of queer cabaret

storytelling in an effort to lessen fragmentation in the process of building collectivity. In both drag and queer cabaret, activists carve out movement 'free spaces' in which to tell their stories of protest, mobilize and sustain collectivity, and develop a critical LGBTQ2+ consciousness; however, the way groups address intersecting power relations leads to the development of distinct political priorities. Yet, movements cannot exist on 'free spaces' alone. Therefore, I ask:

3. How do LGBTQ2+ collectives with different political priorities engage in intramovement contests to advocate for their political priorities? And, what does this process tell us about intersecting power relations and social movement action?

Overall, the answers to each of these sub-questions contribute to my overall position that social movement processes are far from neutral. Intersecting power relations shape the social movement processes we use in ways that inform the development of an LGBTQ2+ collective and the various fragments within that collective. As such, I argue that failure to address the complex and often implicit ways intersecting power relations inform social movement processes undermines collectivity and increase fragmentation along biographical and ideological lines. Conversely, addressing and contesting intersecting power relations in our movement work has the potential to expand the collective narrative of who 'we' are and better identify the source of our struggles. In other words, *how groups engage with intersecting power relations* matters.

The Guiding Literature

To better understand the how intersecting power relations shape social movement processes of collectivity, consciousness raising, and political protest, I first situate this project in the body of scholarship on intersectionality. Following that, I outline the key concepts from the social movement literature that help guide my work, namely collective identity, storytelling, free spaces, and infighting. I also identify how my research informs this scholarship.

Power

Conceptions of power vary greatly. I ground this project in an understanding that all social processes are embedded in intersecting power relations. Thus, I draw on the insights of intersectionality scholars who understand power as intersecting and relational (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; 2016; Yuval-Davis 2006b). In other words, power is organized along race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and age lines (among others) and these social categories effectively hierarchically organize people (Collins 2000; McKinnon 2013; Yuval-Davis 2006b). Furthermore, institutions operate in ways that meet the needs of some while eradicating the experiences of others (for example see Crenshaw 1989). As such, looking to those who are marginalized by racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and ageism can be fruitful for gaining insight into how social movement processes unfold to maintain specific intramovement relations and political priorities. This, in part, is what drew me to LGBTQ2+ performance as a site of analysis. As drag and queer cabaret performers reside along the

margins of the movement, they have a specific vantage point for providing insights into unequal power relations within movement spaces. However, in looking to the margins for insights, I am cautious not to leave domination unchecked. As such, I heed Carbado (2013) and Yuval-Davis' (2006b) advice by attending to the role of domination in creating and maintaining marginalized positions.

Boundary work is also fundamental to understanding how power relations operate in LGBTQ2+ movement spaces (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Gamson 1997). Simply stated, the ability to draw boundaries requires access to some form of situational power. Creating a space to centre the stories and experiences of those who are disproportionately marginalized is an empowering process. Building a critical consciousness that critiques the status quo is also empowering and deeply significant insofar as agency and structure are co-constitutive (see Giddens 1984). Ultimately, this project is guided by the understanding that intersecting power relations exist and are deeply embedded within our social institutions, culture, and everyday interactions; however, the ability to re-organize those relations and move 'from the margins to the centre', however ephemeral, is an act of empowerment that has significant potential to shape overarching power relations. I bring these insights from intersectionality studies to inform the scholarship on social movements, specifically the work on collective identity, storytelling, 'free spaces,' and infighting. I map this scholarship next.

Collective Identity

At its most basic level, collective identity is "a process in which movement participants socially construct a 'we'" (Gamson 1991:45). The concept of collective identity is perhaps one of the most widely used tools that helps to explain how and why people organize and participate in contemporary social movements (see Polletta and Jasper 2001; Staggenborg and Ramos 2016). I unpack the nuances of how I draw on the collective identity literature in the following chapter; however, to put it simply here, I am particularly interested in the development of collectivity that happens at the cultural level outside of formal organizational affiliation. I am also drawn to the analytic sites of boundary work and consciousness raising that Taylor and Whittier's (1992) model offers. Additionally, I attend to the role of context in shaping how groups come to develop the political priorities associated with a given collective (Reger 2008). Rupp and Taylor's (1999) conception of collective identity is also valuable insofar as it creates space for divergent political ideologies to exist under the same collective identity. Yet while each of these models is a means of understanding social movement collectivity, none of them pay sufficient attention to the role of intersecting power relations in shaping movement collectives. As such, while I draw upon some of the analytic tools offered by these collective identity models, I

turn to other concepts to help fill this gap. Specifically, my research is guided by the scholarship on social movement storytelling, free spaces, and infighting.

Storytelling

Scholars including Jasper (1997), Rupp and Taylor (2003), and Taylor et al. (2004) have done the important work of demonstrating how cultural and creative forms of protest can unsettle the status quo. I seek to build on this work further by examining how intersecting power relations inform LGBTQ2+ creative protest. As such, I draw on the body of scholarship that examines the role of storytelling in social movement action. Storytelling is a means of building movement collectivity (Davis 2002; Polletta 1998; Swerts 2015). Furthermore, storytelling frameworks necessitate a focus on the processual aspects of storytelling. In this way, storytelling is not solely about *what* stories social movement actors tell, but also *where* and *who* tells them. Thus, storytelling frameworks lend themselves to analyses of the social forces that inform storytelling processes; however, they fall short of explicitly incorporating attention to intersecting power relations. Drawing on the work of social movement scholars such as Thomas Swerts (2015) and Francesca Polletta (1998; 2010; Polletta et al. 2011), I demonstrate the need to attend to the ways that intersecting power relations shape the storytelling process. Whereas both Swerts (2015) and Polletta (1998; 2010) pay attention to the role of context in storytelling

processes, my research makes explicit the ways in which *intersecting power relations* inform the storytelling process.

Free Spaces

My findings also inform the guiding scholarship on social movement 'free spaces'. Drag and queer cabaret events act as movement 'free spaces'—safe spaces for socially marginalized peoples "where they are free—for awhile—to be themselves without pressure or self-consciousness about what members of the more powerful group may think or how they will react" (Gamson, W. 1996:37). While social movement free spaces have been shown to be important sites of consciousness raising and mobilization (Evans and Boyte 1986), there is a general inattention in the free space literature to the role of *intersecting* power relations in shaping the politics of free spaces. My work in chapters four and five demonstrates that free spaces are not free from hegemonic ruling relations. In fact, movement free spaces are embedded in intersecting power relations. In chapter four, I demonstrate how movement free spaces can perpetuate hierarchies in drag spaces in ways that mirror hierarchies found in 'non-free' spaces. Conversely, the insights garnered in chapter five demonstrate how groups who explicitly address intersecting power relations by infusing their free spaces with intersectional prefigurative politics can more fully capture the potential of movement free spaces.

Collectivity and Infighting

Collective identities require drawing boundaries around who is and is not part of the movement. As such Gamson's (1997) research on boundary work within the feminist movement provides insight into how boundaries work to demarcate who counts as part of the movement and who does not. At times this boundary making process will elicit contention as movements grapple with making claims about inclusion. Gamson (1997) and Kretschmer (2014) make the important link between collectives and particular movement issues. In cases where movements take a firm stance on a given political issue, groups can be excluded based on their inconsistent political priorities. In this way, collectives undergo acts of boundary work around *who* and *what issues* to include. Yet, where both Gamson's (1997) and Kretschmer's (2014) work explain how movements have taken particular stances resulting in exclusionary boundary work, I look to Ghaziani's (2008) research on the role of 'infighting' within LGBTQ2+ movement organizing as Ghaziani's (2008) work attends more to the back-and-forth process of intramovement battles over political priorities. Whereas I agree with Ghazini (2008) insofar as infighting is not inherently destructive to a movement, I believe it goes beyond a focus on *issues* to include attention to how intramovement struggles depict and shape collective narratives of who 'we' are. Further, I draw on Rupp and Taylor's (2003) work again to demonstrate the important role of audience. I situate these larger theoretical insights within an analysis of intersecting power relations and in doing so I offer up my own theory

of *strategic resistance* to explain how and why marginalized groups within the LGBTQ2+ movement engage in shared collective spaces like Pride. In short, strategic resistance brings together issues of collectivity, of consciousness raising, and advocating for political priorities in the LGBTQ2+ movement.

Two Notes on Language

First, while I draw greatly on scholars who have sought to understand the role of collective identity in shaping movement mobilization, affiliation, and trajectories, I use the term 'collectivity' throughout. I agree with Gamson (1995) that the wave of queer politics and theorizing has challenged 'identity politics'; however, we must avoid negating the value of collective organizing around identity. In this way, I agree with Bernstein (1997) that identities can be used strategically to simply get things done.

Yet at the same time, identities in the context of LGBTQ2+ organizing are political, deeply personal, and at times incredibly complicated. For example, many of the people I spoke with were firm in their desire to self-identify using specific terminology. Others eschewed identity labels entirely. Others still would transition through various labels to identify themselves. I found quite early on that asking people to describe their gender and sexual identity was particularly tricky. Some were less tied to specific labels (for example, throughout an interview one drag king used gay woman, dyke, and lesbian all to define their identity). For others, specific labels were more fixed and as such resisted the imposition of other labels (for example, one performer was firm in both the desire to be referred to as

'gay' and the resistance to the label of 'queer'). I see this as evidence of Bernstein's (1997; 2005; 2008) arguments about the significance of identity labels; however, my focus is less on these specific identities and more on the act of coming together in the name of something that is associated with queerness and/or the LGBTQ2+ movement. As a concept, 'collectivity' allows me to draw on the valuable insights that emerge from the work on collective identity while at the same time addressing the tension between identity (singular) and the ever-evolving identities (plural) that make up the LGBTQ2+ movement.

Second, language is changing quickly in the context of the movement. While early work emphasized the experiences of 'gays' and 'lesbians', recently it is more common to include reference to bi-sexual and trans folks by referring to the movement as LGBT (although for scholars like Susan Stryker (2007), the 'T' is a bit of an awkward fit). In a project such as this, one that seeks to better understand internal processes of collectivity and diversity within the movement, I find it necessary to amend the popular LGBT to include 'Q' (queer). Further, as a scholar writing in this particular geographical context and moment in time, I also believe it is crucial to counter the all-to-common erasure of Indigenous peoples by incorporating the number '2' to signify two-spirit. I also adopt the growing trend to include a '+' sign at the end of the label in an effort to include those who identify with the movement but do not find their home in the preceding markers. Considering the evolution of queer theory in the academic literature, there may be specific intentions behind distinguishing *queerness* from the other identity-based

labels; however, I spoke with many people who self-identify with the label "queer" to demarcate their gender, sexuality, or both. So, while queer can certainly be an important *verb* (and I use it at times in this manner) for the movement, it is also a *noun* and thus, I include it when referring to the collective.

Dissertation Overview

In chapter four, I draw on the work of storytelling scholars to understand how LGBTQ2+ peoples use performance, specifically drag, as a means of telling their stories in LGBTQ2+ spaces. Whereas early ethnographic work uncovered the radical potential of drag to empower drag performers, more recent work attests to the possibility of challenging hegemonic gender and sexuality and expanding the potential for collective identity through engagement with audience outsiders (Rupp and Taylor 2003). In this way, chapter four affirms the literature that champions the potential of drag stories to empower and build collective connections in affirming ways. However, this body of work has not yet adequately grappled with the role of intersecting power relations in shaping these processes. Thus, I draw upon the theoretical insights of social movement storytelling to understand not only the potential of drag but the limitations of popular drag for creating group collectivity and fostering radical change. In this way, I pick up where Rupp and Taylor (2003) left off.

Drag is a part of our narrative of who we are as LGBTQ2+ folks. Drawing on the work of social movement scholars like Thomas Swerts (2015) and Francesca Polletta (1998; 2010), I examine the content and the context of popular

drag to situate drag as more than a cultural artifact but also a means of creating movement narratives about who 'we' are and what 'our' political priorities are. I also attend to the ways that drag storytelling processes are situated in contexts and cultural boundary work that are shaped by intersecting power relations. Drag as a storytelling process forces an examination of not only the story itself but a broader analysis of who is telling the stories, where they are told, and how they are told. I find that popular drag has the potential to build and undermine intramovement solidarity and collectivity. These findings are significant for two reasons. First, I show how in Canada, much like in the United States, drag is a vehicle for solidarity and collectivity. This work affirms much of existing literature. For many performers, drag is a medium not only for personal empowerment but affirmation of one's situation within a larger collectivity. Second, this work also pushes beyond as attention to intersecting power relations shows how drag storytelling can also be the source of fragmentation and marginalization within the movement. The processes of boundary work in popular drag spaces delimits not only whose stories are shared on popular drag stages, but what our political priorities should be. In other words, popular drag is a is a medium to tell stories that critique hegemonic gender and sexuality; however, left unchecked, the storytelling process fails to address the complex axes of oppression that constrain LGBTQ2+ lives. Herein lies the paradox: popular drag can be both a source of collectivity and fragmentation. When popular drag storytelling—specifically where stories are told and how those stories are regulated—fails to address

intersecting forms of oppression rooted not just in homophobia but also in binary gender ideologies, racism, classism, and ableism, the process of storytelling constrains whose stories become part of the movement's collective narrative. Ultimately, chapter four demonstrates how performative storytelling and our movement tactics can simultaneously challenge and maintain inequality in the movement.

In chapter five, I look to the sociological literature on movement 'free spaces' to show how moving beyond the gayborhood is an opportunity to examine the potential of performative storytelling in queer cabaret. In doing so, I analyze the relationship between creating new spaces to tell our radical queer stories and intersecting power relations. Moving beyond the gayborhood is an opportunity for creating queer cabaret storytelling that operates on what I have termed, *intersectional prefigurative politics*. In the case of popular drag, storytelling most often happens in spaces that are already associated with LGBTQ2+ communities. However, queer cabaret happens 'elsewhere' in urban spaces, where 'other queer people live'. Thus, there is radical potential in moving beyond as queer folks build the politics of these spaces from the ground up. By going beyond the gayborhood, queer cabaret storytellers can tap into the potential of performative storytelling for building collectivity and empowering movement actors while also infusing these spaces with intersectional political priorities. Unlike in popular drag spaces where challenges to racism, ageism, colonialism, normative body and gender regulation, class hierarchies are positioned 'in addition to' the politics of LGBTQ2+

resistance, queer cabaret infuses the storytelling process with intersectional politics. Chapter five provides valuable contributions to the scholarship on social movement 'free spaces'. Ultimately, by moving beyond the gayborhood and infusing these spaces with intersectional prefigurative politics, queer cabaret is an opportunity to expand the kinds of stories 'we' tell and complicate popular LGBTQ2+ movement narratives by embedding resistance to racism, classism, ableism, and normative body standards into the LGBTQ2+ struggle for justice.

That said, moving beyond the gayborhood is not without its limitations. There is radical potential in creating queer spaces and infusing them with intersectional prefigurative politics; however, moving beyond the gayborhood requires a pre-existing connection to other LGBTQ2+ folks. Moving beyond also demonstrates the relative insularity of queer cabaret. Finding queer cabaret spaces requires access to pre-existing networks and thus, limits who can participate in the collective process. Ultimately, chapter five pushes social movement scholarship in an important way. By injecting attention to intersectionality into the free spaces frameworks, I develop the concept of a 'intersectional prefigurative politics.' In doing so, I demonstrate how space and place are deeply tied to political priorities and this has consequences not only for who gets to tell the stories, but what stories are told.

In chapter six, I examine the process whereby relatively distinct movement collectives (i.e. drag and queer cabaret collectives) come together in culturally significant moments of Pride. In chapter four and five, I focus the analysis on how

groups organize to build collectivity and shape collective consciousness in affirming spaces. Furthermore, these divergent groups tell stories in ways that develop nuanced differences in the LGBTQ2+ political consciousness. I attempt to theorize the significance of shared moments of political struggle wherein groups within the movement with distinct political priorities come in contest with various other groups within the movement. Putting Ghaziani's (2008) work on infighting in conversation with Rupp and Taylor's (2003) focus on audience allows me to theorize the relationship between activism, boundaries, infighting, and audience. Despite the unwelcoming and at times hostile environment Pride spaces create for marginalized movement members, I find that activists from both drag and queer cabaret collectives are motivated to participate in shared spaces of Pride by their desire to engage in what I call, "strategic resistance".

Strategic resistance is a process whereby marginalized movement actors assert their right to prominent movement spaces, advocate for specific political priorities and engage with diverse audiences. Pride is politically significant for its ability to draw large groups of people. Further, strategic resistance provides opportunities for activists to engage with 'outsiders', audiences that would otherwise not be a part of, or identify with, the LGBTQ2+ movement. In this way, outsiders are viewed as potential allies. In other ways, audiences can act as resources for intramovement change. In this way, outsider audiences serve as witnesses to intramovement contests over political priorities. Thus, strategic resistance is a means of challenging hegemonic power relations that shape the

status quo within and beyond the 'mainstream' LGBT community. In this way, I push Ghaziani's (2008) concept of infighting further by introducing strategic resistance as a means of understanding the intramovement relations that fuel internal political debates while also addressing the role of audiences. Thus, despite the risks associated with participating in Pride spaces, many LGBTQ2+ activists take those risks in order to advocate for the political priorities they believe should be propelling the movement and its allies.

Conclusion

I began this chapter attesting to the power of performative protest to mobilize and create a sense of LGBTQ2+ collectivity. I drew on work that positions performative protest within the LGBTQ2+ movement as an invaluable resource for affecting change. In doing so, I established the thematic focus on collectivity and fragmentation that inspired this project. I also articulated the overarching question that drove this dissertation, namely, how do intersecting power relations shape LGBTQ2+ collectivity, consciousness raising, and political protest? To address this, I parse out three sub-questions that serve as pieces of the overall puzzle. Having mapped the layout of the dissertation and briefly demonstrated how my work contributes to specific bodies of social movement scholarship, I use the following chapter to delve deeper into the relevant conversations within the guiding literature.

Understanding Social Movements

On the pages in this chapter, I provide a map of the theoretical and empirical studies that inform my research on LGBTQ2+ collectivity and fragmentation and intersecting power relations. To contextualize my focus on the contemporary movement, I trace the historical roots and the research that has shed light on the movement's evolution to present day. I then delve into the scholarship on drag and queer cabaret and situate them as forms of creative protest that have deep ties to LGBTQ2+ movement organizing. Following this, I identify the significance of intersecting power relations in shaping social movement processes. I also advocate for amending prominent social movement concepts including collective identity, storytelling, and free spaces to include attention to how intersecting power relations inform these processes.

A Brief History

While communities united by queerness[2] have existed for many decades, research that explores the development of the contemporary LGBTQ2+ movement tends to identify the early days of the homophile movement of the 1950s as a jumping off point[3]. According to Armstrong (2002), the homophile

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[2] Nomenclature has changed significantly over the years. Identity labels have expanded and various members of the movement have opted to dis-identify with labels all together. That said, I use the term queerness here not to blur the distinctions between specific labels but to distinguish the complexity of LGBTQ2+ experiences from hegemonic heterosexuality.

[3] While many other scholars and activists cite the 1969 Stonewall riots as the birthplace of the contemporary movement, others have challenged this logic. For example, transgender activist Susan Stryker argues that the Riot at the Compton

movement marks the first of three prominent evolutionary stages of the movement prior to the mid 1990s. During this time, lesbians and gay men gathered primarily to support each other and advocate for their right to love someone of the same gender. They did so in a climate of explicit criminal and social oppression (Armstrong 2002; Warner 2002). At a time when the state offered no protections, the church deemed homosexuality a sin, and the institution of medicine framed homosexuality as a "psychologically based psychiatric pathology" (Warner 2002:23), homophile activists fought for the opportunity for gays and lesbians to exist and love one another. The homophile movement played a prominent role in the lives of many gays and lesbians; yet, a combination of the Stonewall Riot in 1969 and the rise of the New Left incited a significant shift in the trajectory of the movement toward more radical politics.

Scholars who mapped the trajectory of the movement in the United States, saw a shift in the late 1960s and early 1970s away from the more assimilationist or "sameness" logics that shaped homophile politics, toward a celebration of "difference" that characterized liberationist politics. During this time, according to Ghaziani, Taylor, and Stone (2016), gays and lesbians moved away from focusing on how similar gays and lesbians were to heterosexuals and began to celebrate the

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Cafeteria three years earlier deserves more notice (see Stryker and Silverman 2005). Others still, argue that citing Stonewall as the contemporary movement's root is logical as the riot and the annual commemoration of the riot by way of Pride, served to institutionalize Stonewall in the movement's collective memory (Armstrong and Crage 2006).

potential in how different we were. With this, the political ideologies that once centered on the need for *inclusion*, morphed into a desire for more radical conceptions of LGBTQ2+ life (Armstrong 2002; Ghaziani, et al. 2016). Armstrong (2002) argues that the movement in the latter part of the twentieth century distinguished itself from earlier ideologies by embracing the politics of visibility, primarily through the push to 'come out of the closet,' and championing the potential of a more radical justice. Gay liberationists sought to make 'gayness' something to be proud of, to celebrate, thus, crystalizing the movement as one of freedom of sexual expression (Armstrong 2002:97). The 1960s and 1970s were a time characterized by an array of political movements that advocated for liberation as evidenced by the activism of the civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements. The push toward liberationist politics in the gay and lesbian movement created new opportunities for solidarity building with other justice-based movements such as the New Left (Valocchi 2001)[4].

The adoption of liberationists politics facilitated a shift in the movement wherein activists and organizers increasingly made connections between the liberationist struggle and struggles of other justice-based movements. Stone and Ward (2010) state that, "Campaign messages in the late 1970s reflected gay

[4] The degree to which these movements fully supported each other is up for debate; however, Valocchi's (2001) research demonstrates that the solidarity between the liberationist movement and the New Left, was in part facilitated by the 'organizational fluidity' of the New Left in ways that did not (and could not) because of the centralized organizations that characterized the movement of the 'Old Left'.

liberationist efforts to link gay and lesbian issues to a broad array of New Left Movements and social justice concerns (i.e., connecting gay rights in the US to the attacks on Third World People, women and working class people in this country and internationally)" (p. 619). Liberationism also fueled reflexive conversations about the hierarchical organization of the movement itself. Women and people of colour continued to challenge the movement's prioritization of middle-class, white, cis-male politics pushing the movement to build solidarity with other social movement groups such as those who struggled for racial justice (see Stone and Ward 2010; Vaid 2012). Unfortunately, this push toward inter-movement coalitional change began to wane in the 1980s.

The increased conservativism, the dissipation of the New Left's prominence, and the HIV/AIDS crisis that devastated the lives of many within the movement, all dramatically shifted the overall trajectory (Armstrong 2002; Ghaziani 2011; Vaid 2012). At this point, the movement in the United States veered away from the liberation politics of the earlier era and instead focused on rebuilding around the process of forging a *unifying* gay identity (Van Dyke and Cress 2006), one "concretely embodying the evolving interests of middle-class, white, gay men" (Armstrong 2002:135). The conservative wave in the United States during the 1980s also gave way to increased visibility of countermovements.

Arguably, the most significant countermovement campaign was led by the Religious Right. With the backing of prominent spokespeople like Anita Bryant

and the institutional resources of the church system in the United States, a strong countermovement grew in resistance to the gay and lesbian movement of the time (see Fetner 2008). Arguably, the emergence of the Religious Right impacted LGBTQ2+ peoples and the movement in three significant ways. First and foremost, the framing of the HIV/AIDS as a 'gay disease' justified the blatant inaction on the part of President Ronald Reagan government in the United States. Reagan's failure to respond to the crisis at the onset fueled the devastation that rocked the lives of gay and lesbian peoples in the United States (France 2013). Second, governmental inaction lessened the internal fracture within the movement. Prior to the onset of the crisis, the division within the movement along gender lines was notable; however, this particular fraction within the movement dissipated as gays and lesbians banded together to focus efforts on caring for ailing community members (see Van Dyke and Cress 2006). According to Van Dyke and Cress (2006), "changes in the political context as well as internal movement conflict can critically influence the composition and collective identity of a social movement" (p. 521). Last, the prominence of the Religious Right countermovement effectively propelled the gay and lesbian movement into the mainstream creating public discourse beyond what had ever existed previously (Fetner 2008:121). While the evolution of the Religious Right countermovement had a significantly different status and impact in the American context, largely due to the relatively distinct institutional supports and policy implementation (see

Fetner, Stokes, and Sanders 2015), a notable anti-LGBTQ2+ sentiment exists in Canada, one that cannot be disregarded.

This increased public discourse was also heightened by the radical, in-your-face political tactics of groups such as ACT UP, Queer Nation (see Shepard 2008), and the explicitly sexual and political work of the Canadian magazine publication the *Body Politic* (Warner 2002). As the movement progressed through the 1980s and into the 1990s, the rise of queer political organizing and the parallel emergence of queer theory (Butler 1990; 1993; 2004; Seidman 2004) informed the internal movement debates, specifically around the role of 'identity politics'. Those inspired by post-structuralist and anti-identitarian politics championed the need to abandon identity categories entirely. This perspective held that identities rely on rigid and binary logics, both of which fuel oppression against members of the queer community. Queerness was a means of not only subverting the confines of rigid identity categories, but also a chance to radically challenge our movement and our relationship to social institutions (see Gamson 1995). Ingraham (1994), for example, advocated for an approach that looks toward ideologies and structures such as institutional heterosexuality rather than gender and sex categories themselves in order to better understand queer oppression. Yet, while many queer theorists and queer activists were campaigning to end the movement's reliance on 'identity politics', others were cautioning against abandoning identities entirely (see Bernstein 1997; 2002; 2005; Gamson 1995; Stein and Plummer 1996), particularly since collective identities are understood to be

integral to social movement change. Others still attempted to demonstrate how trans* organizing had the potential to both construct and deconstruct a sense of collective identity (Broad 2002). As the more radical queer faction of the movement was growing, so too was the push for rights-based initiatives, perhaps none more significant that the campaign to legalize 'same-sex' marriage (Armstrong 2002).

Debates surrounding the political prioritization of 'same-sex' marriage rights are both simple and complex. For proponents of 'same-sex' marriage advocacy, the Canadian legalization in 2005 and the federally recognized legalization following the case in 2015 in the United States are movement success stories. Conversely, for LGBTQ2+ critics of 'same-sex' marriage campaigns, these markers signify a step even further away from the liberation politics of yore. Instead, the prioritization of marriage as a central movement issue signified a problematic movement shift toward *homonormativity* (Duggan 2002) and a reaffirmation of an institution that creates and sustains hegemonic heterosexuality among other axis of oppression (Bornstein 2014; Stanley 2014; D'Emilio 2014). In other words, rather than celebrating 'difference', the campaign is a return to the politics of 'sameness' (see Ghaziani et al. 2016).

Instead of celebrating queerness, resistance to conformity, and the radical politics of some LGBTQ2+ communities, organizing around an issue like 'same-sex' marriage reflects the context of our current "post-gay" (Ghaziani 2011) era that emphasizes how similar 'we' are to heterosexuals. Further, critics argue that

advocating for marriage rights does little to address the ways in which intersecting power relations shape the everyday realities of marginalized queer folks (Farrow 2014). Nuances of this intramovement debate notwithstanding, the overwhelming presence of 'same-sex' marriage as a key LGBTQ2+ movement issue demonstrates the prominence of the 'sameness' ideologies that currently have a firm grip on the movement. And while there are certainly parallels in how this particular issue has shaped movement work in both Canada and the United States, the movement trajectory in Canada has important distinctions.

Similar to the United States, Canadian activists also adopted the language of 'rights' in fighting for change (see Smith 1999); yet scholars like Warner (2002) explicitly reject the notion that lesbian and gay liberation 'died out' in Canada in the same way it did in the United States. Instead, he argues that "rights attainment has been only one, albeit dominant, thrust of a movement of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals that now spans some thirty years" (Warner 2002:4). That is not to say that middle-class, gay, white, cis-men's interests did not dominate the movement's focus in Canada, but rather, the internal debates, or 'infighting' (Ghaziani 2008) within the movement, specifically those between the assimilationists and radical liberationists were healthier in Canada than in the United States (see Warner 2002). In other words, while liberationist politics waned greatly in the United States during the 1980s, they continued to play a significant role in the Canadian context in meaningful ways. As such, the movement was less bifurcated in Canada than in the United States (Warner 2002).

That said, in both the Canadian and American context, the middle-class, white, gay, cis-male agenda that spawned from the increasingly conservative and assimilationist identity politics of the movement, worked to marginalize and exclude many within the movement along class, race, and gender lines (Vaid 2012). Armstrong (2002), for example, argues: "For women and people of color this focus meant setting aside issues that were as important, if not more important, to improving the quality of their lives" (p. 138). Similarly, queer activist Urvashi Vaid (2012) states that more intersectional queer issues of sexism and racism were relegated to the 'back burner.' A criticism of the prevailing whiteness of the movement is also alive and well in the Canadian context (see Giwa and Greensmith 2010; Logie and Rwigema 2014). Additionally, queer disability justice activists like Eli Clare, Mel Chen, and Mia Mingus have articulated how the exclusion of queers with disabilities has invisibilized experiences of queerness and trans-ness. Instead, critics have advocated for *centering* queer and trans folks with disabilities in queer justice activism (Mingus 2015). Other hierarchies within the movement have also fueled the marginalization of queer youth and seniors. As MacDonald's (2001) essays demonstrate, ageism has also flourished in feminist and LGBTQ2+ spaces. The overarching shift toward *sameness* in the supposed "post-gay" era notwithstanding, marginalized queers have always (and continue to) challenge the hierarches that shape the political organizing within the movement and this work is relentless.

These criticisms of prominent gay and lesbian organizing and activism indicate internal fractures. Therefore, despite the overwhelming dominance of issues like 'same-sex' marriage, issues that tend to benefit those who are relatively more privileged, the movement has long contained political and ideological diversity. Furthermore, different activist groups within the LGBTQ2+ collective have had, and continue to have, divergent ideologies and political priorities. To look at how these tensions emerge, I look to prominent movement tactical processes for insight. Specifically, I adopt a case study approach to the performative protest tactics of drag and queer cabaret.

Drag, Queer Cabaret, and Performative Protest

Perhaps one of the more enduring forms of protest associated with the LGBTQ2+ movement, drag has served as a significant tactical resource. The body of scholarship on drag is expansive. Early sociological and anthropological research on drag primarily focused on what drag tells us about gender and sexuality. Newton's (1972) germinal book, *Mother Camp*, is a significant contribution for two reasons: first, Newton demonstrates drag's ability to unsettle the "sex-role" system, and second, she attests to drag's potential to build a collective consciousness (p. 113). Despite these two invaluable contributions, much of the sociological work that grew from this seed, focused on the first insight, the relationship between drag, sexuality, and gender. For example, Shapiro (2007) demonstrates the role drag plays in facilitating identity transformations. Others unpack the potential for drag to illuminate and challenge

hegemonic gender and sexuality (Noble 2002; Rupp, Taylor, and Shapiro 2010; Schacht and Underwood 2004). Others still advocate for more nuanced understandings of the distinction between drag kings and drag queens not only in the way they use drag to convey messages (Horowitz 2013; Rupp, Taylor, and Shapiro 2010), but also in terms of how their performances reaffirm and challenge hegemonic power relations (Schacht 2002). For example, despite drag's subversive potential, Schacht's (2002) analysis of the oldest drag organization in North America, the Imperial Court System (ICS), illustrates the complicated ways kings and queens interact to both challenge and reaffirm gendered hierarchies. Despite being an organization that includes kings and queens, queens reign supreme in the ICS, a reality Schacht (2002) attributes to the "male embodiment" of drag queens (p. 81). Distinctions between drag spaces have also been a factor in research that examines the role of drag in creating community. Piontek (2002) in particular, is critical of the disproportionate focus on drag communities in large urban contexts. Thus, geographic isolation shapes not only how drag performance looks to audiences and how LGBTQ2+ folks use drag to challenge hegemonic power relations (Piontek 2002), but also how drag serves the community (Rogers 2018). In other words, while drag can facilitate critique it can also stand as a potential resource particularly for trans and nonbinary peoples to explore identities and build important networks (Rogers 2018). In short, aside from some notable exceptions which I explore in further detail below, the bulk of the

sociological and anthropological scholarship focuses primarily on the role of drag in subverting, and at times reaffirming gender hierarchies.

Researchers in cultural and performance studies have also explored the realm of queer performance coming to similar, yet distinct, findings. For example, drag has been used as evidence of the performative nature of gender (Butler 1990). Halberstam's (1997; 1998) work on female masculinity demonstrates the power of drag as a cultural practice to not only uncouple masculinity from male bodies, but to critique hegemonic masculinity and provide queer women with a space to have their own masculinity celebrated[5]. Other realms of queer performance have also been given some attention by cultural studies scholars. Here I nod to T.L. Cowan's (2010) work on queer cabaret and José Esteban Muños' (1999) ground breaking work in *Disidentifications.* For Cowan (2010), queer cabaret has transformative potential insofar as it creates a *cabaret consciousness*, one that seeks to harness the transformative potential of imagining new possibilities of queer life (p. 53). Additionally, Muños (1999) argues that queer performances are "survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continually elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (p. 4). For Muños, disidentification is not only a survival strategy and an opportunity to celebrate the lives of those along the margins, but it is also a

[5] See also, Halberstam's collaborative work with Del La Grace Volcano (Volcano and Halberstam 1999)

way to challenge hegemonic notions of citizenship. While I appreciate the insights offered by the aforementioned work, I find myself somewhat resisting the explicit anti-identity framing of these authors. For example, while I agree with Muños' insights about queer performance as a "survival strategy" and a means of resistance, I am cautious of his framing of identity as a "fiction…one that is accessed with relative ease by most majoritarian subjects" (Muños 1999:5).

Much like the unease Joshua Gamson (1995) expresses in cautioning against the queer theoretical push to eradicate identity altogether, I too see the power of identity as a strategic tool to affect social movement change. As Bernstein (1997) argues, while identity politics may have the potential to 'essentialize' groups in order to justify exclusion, identities can also be used to achieve movement goals. She states, "Identities may be deployed strategically as a form of collective action. Identity deployment is defined as expressing identity such that the terrain of conflict becomes the individual person so that the values, categories, and practices of individuals become subject for debate" (Bernstein 1997:537). In other words, while identities can certainly be constraining and problematic, they are not beyond revision and/or agentic manipulation in the case of movement work. As such, I find myself leaning on the work of sociologists who understand queer performance as part of a larger cultural movement to help address the questions that guide my own research. As such, I am indebted to the body of work by Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor for bringing drag research into the realm of social movement studies.

Rupp and Taylor's (2003) ethnographic study of the *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* is groundbreaking insofar as it moves the academic conversations about drag into the realm of social movements. Everything from the clothes performers wear to the songs they choose becomes part of the strategic political work of movement groups (Kaminski and Taylor 2008). Whereas the kinds of performances vary, Rupp and Taylor (2003) argue that, "What ties together this wide variety of performances is a persistent if sometimes subtle questioning of the meaning of gender and sexuality as we normally understand them. It is in that sense that drag queens 'perform protest'" (p. 116). Further, Rupp and Taylor (2003) unpack the ways drag is a "complex process" that involves "separating people into gender and sexual identity categories, then blurring and playing with those boundaries, and then bringing people all together again, the drag queens at the 801 do indeed free people's minds, open their minds, remove their blinders, change their lives. It is a stunning performance of protest" (p. 208). Much like Jasper's (1997) earlier work that drew explicit connections between art and protest, Rupp and Taylor (2003) not only affirm this connection, but they push the potential for drag to bolster the LGBT movement by engaging with 'outsider' audiences. Drawing on participant observation and focus group discussions with members of the 801 Cabaret's audience, Rupp and Taylor (2003) illuminate the potential for drag to not only provide a space for performers to reimagine the rigid boundaries of gender and sexuality, but to also incite critical reflection on gender and sexual norms on the part of audience members (many of whom self-identified

as 'straight'). It is this relationship between performer and audience that has the potential to expand the LGBT movement's collective identity (Rupp and Taylor 2003). Like Rupp and Taylor (2003), my work delves into the relationship between performance, collectivity, and consciousness raising; however, I go beyond this work in three significant ways. First, whereas Rupp and Taylor's (2003) ethnography focused on one particular drag bar, I expand my analysis to include drag occurring in multiple cities. Second, I expand my focus to include queer cabaret protest—creative protest that centers the stories and bodies of marginalized queer peoples—in addition to drag. And third, I pay greater attention to the role of intersecting power relations in shaping social movement processes. I elaborate on how I understand intersecting power relations next.

Intersecting Power Relations

Conceptions of power vary greatly. Early classical theorist Karl Marx argued that the history of society is one of class struggle (Marx and Engels 1848:3). Under capitalism, the bourgeoisie ruling class—those who own private property and the 'means of production'—control the state and thus benefit from the exploitation of the proletariat. Granted, Marx saw great potential in solidarity and the class consciousness that would fuel the inevitable proletariat revolution (Marx and Engels 1848); however, power is primarily about control and exploitation. Other classical theorists sought to provide nuance to this understanding of power. For example, Weber (1968) distinguished power—the probability that an actor will be able to carry out their own will—from

domination—the probability that a command will be obeyed (p. 53). In doing so, Weber not only created more space for understanding domination as not entirely related to economics (see Weber 1968:212), but he also positioned power as possible 'from below.' Foucault (1980) also grappled with issues of power, stating, "Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation and not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power" (p. 98). For Foucault (1980), power is fundamentally relational. Others have come to understand power as an expansion of freedom and choice (Cerulo 1997:393), the ability to define a situation (Cast 2003), and the exercise of transformation and social change (Butler 2004:204). Thus, power can depict an array of social relations and phenomena. My own understanding of power is informed by the body of scholarship some have dubbed 'intersectionality studies.'

Intersectionality theories grew from the deeply interconnected, yet all too often divergent, feminist and anti-racist social movements of the latter half of the twentieth century (Crenshaw 1989, Nash 2008, Collins 2000). The twenty-year period between the late 1960s to late 1980s is largely characterized by an explicit feminist commitment to unearthing the ways in which women are similarly oppressed under patriarchy both locally and throughout the world (Zinn and Dill 1996:321). Critical race projects also emphasize how deeply entrenched *systems* of racism work to oppress people of colour (Bonilla-Silva 1997). The aim of these movements was to shift focus from individual acts of sexism and racism to

uncovering how overarching power structures such as patriarchy and racism work to marginalize and oppress in complex and systemic ways. Scholars and activists alike aspired to mobilize critique of larger structural and institutional mechanisms of rule.

While black women have critiqued single focus perspectives for centuries[6] not until Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) oft cited, "Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics" article did the language of 'intersectionality' emerge in academic scholarship. Crenshaw's (1989; 2016) analyses map how unifocal frameworks for understanding discrimination effectively erase the experiences of black women within the legal system in the United States. According to Crenshaw (1989), by operating on a 'but for' logic wherein women would be equal 'but for' their gender, and black folks would be equal 'but for' their race, the criminal justice system fails to capture the specific way in which black women experience institutionalized discrimination. In functioning upon a logic that is both colour-blind and gender-neutral, the law fails to adequately address black women's experiences because "...both [approaches] are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender" (Crenshaw 1989:40). Crenshaw's work

[6] Sojourner Truth's (1851), "Ain't I a woman" speech is often cited as an early call to intersectional politics within the women's rights movement in the latter have of the 19th century.

shifts the lens toward the specificity of black women's experiences and in doing so locates black women's experiences at the crossroads of systemic sexism and racism. From here, the metaphor of the traffic intersection emerges wherein black women are located in the centre of an intersection of racism and sexism. Crenshaw's work on intersectionality has been invaluable insofar as it "provided a name to a pre-existing theoretical and political commitment" (Nash 2008:3).

Crenshaw's (1989; 2016) insights capture the bubbling critiques from both "within and against" feminist and anti-racist scholarship in a way that facilitates a widespread shift away from attempts to uncover universality in oppression and toward the ways in which oppression and privilege contribute to *difference* in experiences (Zinn and Dill 1996). Largely driven by women of colour, critical scholars champion the need to scrap the tendency to resort to focusing on the value of sameness and instead adopt a more complex appreciation of difference in social movement work as well as within scholarly inquiry (see Crenshaw 1989; hooks 2000; Zinn and Dill 1996; Collins 2000). As Collins ([1990] 2000) argues, "oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (p. 21). In other words, "intersectionality helps reveal how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories" (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013:797). Therefore, while there may be widespread patterns *between* groups, there are also nuanced patterns *within* groups that require further analysis. Thus, in a project such as this which seeks to analyse how intersecting power

relations shape the intramovement dynamics of the LGBTQ2+ movement, an intersectional framework is most appropriate.

Scholars have come to understand intersectionality in myriad ways; however, the thread that weaves this body of scholarship together is as follows: oppression is the result of multiple intersecting power relations that work to constrain and oppress. As such, one does not experience discrimination on the basis of racism, *or* sexism, *or* classism, as these social categories are inextricable; instead, these axes of oppression are woven together in a 'matrix of domination' (Collins 2000). Further, intersecting power relations shape all levels of social life—the micro, macro, and meso level—thus, intersectional studies must adopt multi-level analyses in order to account for the co-constitutive relationship between each level (Winker and Degele 2011). Intersectional analyses must also recognize that people are at the heart of social life. As Yuval-Davis (2006b) argues, "social divisions are about macro axes of social power but also involve actual, concrete people. Social divisions have organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms, and this affects the ways we theorize them as well as the ways in which we theorize the connections between them" (p. 198). Thus, people and their subjugated positions are valuable sources of knowledge (Collins 2000). In other words, those who are negatively impacted by oppression will have the best vantage point for informing social change and unsettling unequal and intersecting power relations.

The value of subjugated knowledge positions notwithstanding, focus on subjugated knowledge positions should not occlude attention to the co-constructive relationship between subjugation and privilege. Some branches of intersectionality studies advocate for understanding how intersecting power relations also work to benefit certain groups. As Yuval-Davis (2006b) argues, intersectional frameworks are "applicable to any grouping of people, advantaged as well as disadvantaged. This expands the arena of intersectionality to a major analytical tool that challenges hegemonic approaches to the study of stratification as well as reified forms of identity politics" (p. 201). My perspective is greatly informed by Yuval-Davis (2006b) as well as others like Carbado (2013) that advocate for attention to the complex interplay between privilege and disadvantage under hegemonic power relations. As such, I bring these insights to my study of the LGBTQ2+ movement and the theoretical models that guide my research.

Collective Identity

The evolution of social movement theory in North America and Europe saw a shift away from Collective Behavior theories as well as "old" social movement theories that helped to explain social movement action that was primarily driven by material incentives and toward "new" social movements (Staggenborg and Ramos 2016). Movements such as the feminist, civil rights, and the early gay and lesbian organizing were not easily explained by dominant rational choice and political process theories (Polletta and Jasper 2001:284;

Staggenborg and Ramos 2016). Instead, the shift toward understanding movements concerned with, as Habermas states, the "defence of the 'life world'" (quoted in Staggenborg and Ramos 2016:29), produced the expansive body of work that explores the concept of collective identity. Definitions abound[7], however, Polletta and Jasper's (2001) articulation of a collective identity as "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution" (Polletta and Jasper 2001:285) is not only widely used in the literature, but it also demonstrates the breadth of social movement work the concept encapsulates.

Collective identity has become one of the most prolific concepts for understanding political movements. Collective identities enable social movements to mobilize new membership (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Rupp and Taylor 2003), serve as important cultural 'outcomes' (Earl 2004); build enduring ties (Gamson 1991; Rupp and Taylor 1999; Vallocchi 2001; Terriquez 2014), and shape a movement's oppositional consciousness (Mansbridge 2001; Stockdill 2001). Lastly, collective identities are invaluable for making social movements intelligible to the 'outside world' (Gamson 1991; Gamson 1995; Jasper and Polletta 2001; Fominaya 2010; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Rupp and Taylor 1999).

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[7] For example, Taylor and Whittier (1992) define collective identity as, "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (p. 105). According to William Gamson (1991), "Collective identity refers to a process in which movement participants socially construct a 'we' that becomes, in varying degrees with different individuals, part of their own definition of self" (p. 45).

Yet, it is this very breadth that has made the concept so difficult to pin down. As Polletta and Jasper (2001) lament, the tendency to use collective identity to 'fill in theoretical gaps' has undermined its analytic specificity, motivating scholars to advocate for more precise usage. Similarly, Fominaya (2010) cautions,

> Although collective identities can be understood as (potentially) encompassing shared interests, ideologies, subcultures, goals, rituals, practices, values, worldview, commitment, solidarity, tactics, strategies, definitions of the 'enemy' or the opposition and framing of issues, it is not synonymous with and cannot be reduced to any of these things. (P. 398)

Thus, when using collective identity as a lens through which to examine social movement action, we must be precise in what the term denotes. To better articulate how I draw on collective identity in my own work, I will first explore some notable contributions.

Scholars have conceived of collective identity and its contribution to social movement work differently. As one of the most widely cited frameworks for understanding what collective identity *does*, Taylor and Whittier's (1992) model positions collective identity as a process by which social movement actors 1) come to see themselves as part of the collective; 2) develop a shared group consciousness, and 3) mobilize in "direct opposition to the dominant order" (p. 110). Using the case of the lesbian feminist movement, Taylor and Whittier (1992) demonstrate how women forged a lesbian feminist collective identity by 1) mobilizing women by differentiating their experiences from men's, 2) building an oppositional consciousness through creating a shared awareness of their subordinate position, and 3) challenging patriarchal oppression of women in an

effort to better the lives of all women. By focusing on the processual aspects of collective identity work, Taylor and Whittier (1992) emphasize how movements come to create a shared consciousness by focusing on similarities among lesbian feminists. Despite the appeal of their framework, the last two components have not weathered the test of time.

The assumption of a shared consciousness is problematic when considering how different groups with different perspectives and goals draw upon the same collective identity. For example, feminist organizations that seek very different goals still draw upon the same collective identity despite these differences (Kretschmer 2014; Rupp and Taylor 1999). Further, Taylor and Whittier's (1992) third criterion, direct opposition of the dominant order, also invites critique as groups who aspire to maintain, rather than disrupt, the dominant order can also coalesce around a collective identity. For example, White Nationalists draw upon the dominant model of white supremacy, not to oppose, but to sustain and strengthen the status quo. Similarly, Men's Rights groups coalesce around the fear that male supremacy and patriarchal families are under attach attack. For example, Heath's (2003) research on the Christianity-based Promise Keepers movement demonstrates how "...resistance to hegemonic masculinity can interact with a desire to reinstate men's position of authority in the family and society" (p. 441). Thus, movements need not resist the status quo, they can also mobilize to strengthen and sustain it. In light of these critiques,

others have developed new ways of understanding collective identity and its components.

In another widely-used approach, William Gamson (1991) pulls back the analytical lens to examine the interplay between different levels of collective identity that shape the process of going from *individual* to *collective* in a given movement. Gamson (1991) argues that collective identities are made up of three embedded layers: the organizational, movement, and solidarity, and "the most powerful and enduring collective identities link solidarity, movement, and organizational layers in the participants' sense of self" (p. 41). For Gamson (1991), moving from individual realities to collective experiences is fundamental to the notion of collective identity. Others still have drawn upon the earlier models developed by Taylor and Whittier (1992) and Gamson (1991) to create hybrid theories. For example, Rupp and Taylor (1999) pull from components of both Gamson's (1991) and Taylor and Whittier's (1992) earlier models to explain how different feminist groups within the same feminist movement can have significantly different means of not only understanding the movement, identifying strategies, tactics, and political priorities, while still organizing and working under the same movement umbrella. This 'hybrid' model opened up a space to theorize how "identity politics can lead to new forms of solidarity that respect both particularities and similarities" (Rupp and Taylor 1999:382). Arguably, Rupp and Taylor's (1999) revised model which drew more on the interconnected levels of organizing than the focus on shared experiences in Taylor and Whittier's (1992)

earlier model, was an attempt to deal with the fact that groups can align with the same collective identity while simultaneously having distinct political priorities. For example, the LGBTQ2+ movement has been shaped by political "infighting"; however, distinct individuals, groups, and organizations, continue to come together to protest in the name of the same movement (Ghaziani 2008). Thus, Rupp and Taylor's (1999) model is a means of avoiding some of the pitfalls that come with the presumption of shared experiences and shared consciousness that Taylor and Whittier's (1992) earlier model assumed. The articulation of collective identity in Rupp and Taylor's (1999) model also illuminates the significance of intramovement boundary work.

Collective Identity and Boundary Work

While collective identity boundary work requires a sense of we-ness, who 'we' are is often shaped by explicit declarations of who 'we' are not. As Gamson (1997) states, "All social movements, and identity movements in particular, are thus in the business, at least sometimes, of exclusion" (p. 179). Therefore, in many cases, who 'we' are necessitates clearly drawn boundaries to distinguish those with whom we have divergent politics and ideologies. Both Gamson's (1997) and Kretschmer's (2014) work depict intramovement contests over political ideologies and identities as a means of effectively excluding groups from participating in movements. Gamson's (1997) study demonstrates how the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) came under fire for its affiliation with the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA)

forcing the ILGA to formally expel the group from its association. The exclusion of transwomen was also central to the kind of feminist politics that informed the Michigan Womyn's Festival and the creation of a very specific form of feminist collective identity (see Gamson 1997). In both cases, the boundary work that articulates who 'we' are, is simultaneously identifying who 'we' are not by excluding movement 'others'.

Kretschmer's (2014) work also elucidates how feminist groups who did not conform to the shift within the movement during the mid-late twentieth century toward a focus on abortion rights were compelled to do so. Two specific organizations were forced to make formal declarations about their stance on the pro-choice priority of the movement. In the end, the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL), conformed to the shift by adopting a commitment to abortion rights; however, the group Feminists for Life (FFL) broke free from the movement and instead created solidarity ties with the "New Right" in the United States. According to Kretschmer (2014), the political prioritization of abortion rights in the American feminist movement was not only brought to light by the pressure from the conservative countermovement of the "New Right", but this boundary work forced all feminist groups, each with nuanced political distinctions, to take a stand on a specific issue as a means of drawing a boundary around the overarching politics of the movement. Clearly, boundary work within movements is obligatory; yet, who gets excluded, and how that exclusion process shapes the movement's political priorities, requires further analysis.

Collective Identity, Intersectionality, and "Diversity"

There is a tension between the 'we-ness' that links all collective identity theories together and the ways in which our experiences vary greatly based on our social location. Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) have attempted to address this reality by implementing amendments to organizational operations. Within the LGBTQ2+ movement, there is growing understanding that organizations need to adopt multi-issue and/or intersectional approaches to their operations. Unfortunately, few organizations have been successful with initiatives aimed at 'including' intersectional practices. For example, Jane Ward's (2008a; 2008b) research involving two LGBT organizations in California demonstrates just how difficult it is to change a movement to better meet the needs of all queer folks. Ward (2008a; 2008b) finds that despite best intentions, barriers located in the institutional memory of organizations, the funding expectations, and cultural logics of 'diversity' stifle attempts to significantly change the day-to-day operations of these organizations. According to Ward (2008a), there is a gap between "diversity rhetoric and structural realities in the lesbian and gay movement and the limited influences of diversity practices on the creation of intersectional collective identities" (p. 251).

Other movement organizations have experienced similar difficulties. Srivastava's (2006) examination of Canadian feminist organizations attempting to incorporate anti-racist practices found that transitions toward multi-focal frameworks are difficult. In this case, attempts to incorporate anti-racism were

undermined by the emotionally charged defensiveness of white women (Srivastava 2006). Ultimately, this response effectively stifled the adoption of feminist/anti-racist practice. In both cases, deliberate attempts to challenge hegemonic whiteness in the LGBTQ2+ movement and the feminist movement effectively reaffirmed the role of whiteness as central to the respective organizations. Attempts to incorporate multi-focal and/or intersectional frameworks in social movement work is difficult, albeit not impossible, and the contemporary LGBTQ2+ movement continues to struggle with addressing the needs of those most marginalized by the status quo within and beyond the movement.

Challenges notwithstanding, some scholars are hopeful about the possibility for successful integration of intersectional politics in the process of mobilizing collective identity (Terriquez 2014), as well as building a multidimensional oppositional consciousness (Stockdill 2001). In her research on the experiences of LGBTQ undocumented youth, Terriquez (2014) draws on Gamson's (1991) identification of three intersecting levels of collective identity work (movement, organizational, and individual level) to demonstrate how integrating a commitment to intersectionality at all levels helps mobilize and sustain movement membership. Stockdill (2001) is similarly optimistic when he argues that developing a multidimensional oppositional consciousness (MDOC) is possible provided activists employ a range of strategies including 1) constructive dialogue about intersectional politics, 2) empowerment initiatives that challenge

"internalized" oppression, 3) ensuring movement work is embedded in the communities that marginalized LGBT folks live, and 4) using cultural traditions in ways that align with marginalized members. Only by engaging in expansive consciousness raising efforts with a multidimensional ideology can one snap the "ideological bolt that locks together systems of domination" (Stockdill 2001:214). Thus, while ideological frameworks can stifle the integration of intersectional politics, so too can ideological frameworks facilitate intersectional organizing. For example, Luna's (2016) research on the feminist organization SisterSong Women of Color Health Collective, reveals that different ideological stances on 'difference' can shape how movements engage in their work. While Luna (2016) is clear that each ideology has its benefits as well as potential limitations, those that focus on "sameness-in-difference," where differences among women are not only noted but integrated into the organizational framework, are most closely aligned with intersectional logics insofar as the "sameness-in-difference," logic "facilitates precisely the kind of continual questioning that seeks to avoid such reproduction of inequality" (p. 785).

Ultimately, literature attests to the fact that groups are aware that they must do better in addressing 'diversity' of experiences in their organizing. And while many organizations have failed in efforts to effectively incorporate 'multi-issue' logics and practices into existing SMO practices (e.g. Ward 2008a; 2008b Srivastava 2006), others have provided evidence of 'success' stories. Yet, while some activist groups are becoming increasingly aware of the need to address the

complexity of experiences within their given movement, the models we use to study movements have not adequately incorporated intersectional frameworks. Therefore, while collective identity theories have identified valuable analytic sites including *collective consciousness* and *boundary work* (e.g. Taylor and Whitter 1992), collective identity theories alone do not provide an adequate framework to understand how intersecting power relations shape the process of collectivity and consciousness raising that happens through drag and queer performative protest. Therefore, I turn to the scholarship on social movement storytelling to help address this gap.

Storytelling and Social Movements

Storytelling is not only a means of strengthening (Davis 2002) and/or forging (Benford 2002:71) collective identities, but storytelling's ability to illuminate the complex connections between the storytellers and their various audiences, as well as contextual factors such as when, where, and how stories are told, make storytelling frameworks ideal for research into how intersecting power dynamics shape movement work in LGBTQ2+ spaces. In this section, I discuss the scholarship on storytelling in social movement work by addressing the insights I have gained and the gaps in the literature that remain unfilled.

Stories guide many areas of social life and social movements are no exception. As an early champion of the need to examine the role of story in social movements, Charles Tilly (2002) argues, "People package arguments in stories, reply to queries by means of stories, challenge each other's stories, modify or

amplify their stories as the flow of conversation dictates, and sometimes even construct collective stories for presentation to third parties. They recast events after the fact in standard story form" (Tilly 2002:9). However, while sociologists are encouraged to confront how stories shape all social movement work, there are constraints that must be addressed. Perhaps the biggest constraint is found in the tension between simplicity and complexity. For the most part, effective social moment stories have a limited number of characters, they take place in a limited time and space, and the sources of struggles are clearly identified (Tilly 2002:30). In other words, social movement stories tend to be simplified in order to convey clear messages to audiences. Yet, while social movement *stories* may be simplified, social movement struggles and the strategies groups choose are far more complex. Thus, the stories alone cannot be the only site of analysis. Rather than focus solely, or even disproportionally on the stories themselves (i.e. the content), stories should be situated in analyses that examine the entire *process of storytelling* in social movements (Davis 2002; Polletta 1998; Polletta et al. 2011; Tilly 2002). While stories are important aspects of the storytelling process, they are only *one* feature of the overall interactive process.

Storytelling processes require not only a story and a storyteller, but also an audience. According to Davis (2002), "Storytelling processes are social transactions that engage with audiences in a 'communicative relationship'" (p. 19). Further, "Stories do not just configure the past in light of the present and future, they also create experiences for and request certain responses from their

audiences. They are fundamentally transactional, and this, in addition to their organizing operations, accounts for their discursive power" (Davis 2002:12). Therefore, sociologists do not simply interpret the content of activists' stories, but rather analyze the interplay between story, storyteller, and audience. As Swerts' (2015) research involving undocumented youth in Chicago demonstrates, the interaction between story, storyteller, and audience varies in nuanced and important ways. Activists use storytelling as a "community-building process" when storytelling engages with organizations and new members, a "mobilization process" when appealing to movement organizers, and a "claims-making process" when engaging extra-movement actors such as the media and politicians (Swerts 2015:350). In other words, the kinds of stories activists tell are directly related to the specific audience. Storytelling processes are also used by movement members to provide a means of making sense of movement events. For example, in her study of the cafeteria sit-ins of the 1960s, Francesca Polletta (2010) finds that stories help activists make sense of the movement. As such, using language such as "like a fever" or "exploding" to describe the movement action, is a means of shifting focus away from the planning and thought behind the action and gaining control over the overall movement narrative (Polletta 2010). As these examples demonstrate, storytelling is directly tied to issues of agency and power.

Storytelling processes are complex, yet they hold tremendous potential. As Benford (2002) states, there are always two narratives in social moment storytelling: the narrative of the status quo and the narrative of chance (p. 55). The

status quo, or the "hegemonic narrative" (Neile 2009), is the direct target of storytelling processes. As Neile (2009) argues, "It is the job of the storyteller-as-community activist to recognize these hegemonic narratives and to undermine them with effective counter stories that reflect the experience and the value system of the marginalized" (p. 70). That which undermines the hegemonic narrative is the narrative of chance. This narrative of chance is unique to storytelling processes. Not only can novel and creative stories incite change in movement groups and audiences, but storytelling is also particularly well positioned to benefit from ambiguity. For Polletta (2010), ambiguity or "polysemy" (multiple meanings) is a resource for movements insofar as it "can help to build solidarity - provides people with a view that dissimilar views can coalesce" (p. 174). In other words, effective stories are *not* supposed to provide all of the answers, instead, spaces for interpretation "can appeal to diverse groups of people primarily for their 'inexplicable character'" (Polletta 2010:45). This 'openness' of storytelling is a valuable resource (Tilly 2002; Polletta 2010); however, not everyone has the same access to resources in social movement work.

Along with colleagues, Francesca Polletta (2011) argues that storytelling processes—who gets to tell stories, where and how they are told—are all embedded in power relations. As such, storytelling processes can provide a great deal of insight into how "power is socially organized and unevenly distributed" (Polletta et al. 2011:111). Benford (2002) also focuses on the relationship between narrative and control. In his examination of the relationships between movement

and individual identity narratives in the peace movement, he finds that movement narratives can constrain individual narratives (Benford 2002). He argues, narratives are both an object of control and a mechanism of control that helps movement members tow the "party line" (Benford 2002:67). Others pay more attention to the unequally distributed access to powerful narratives. For example, some stories 'carry more weight' than others in social movements (Polletta et al. 2011:114). Polletta and colleagues (2011) argue that, "[d]isadvantaged people are often less well trained in the requirements of telling an institutionally appropriate story, they are less likely to be seen as narratively competent, and their very experiences make them less able to tell the kind of story that is required" (p. 123). While this may be true in contexts that where hegemonic power relations shape the storytelling process, I am optimistic that new spaces can provide new ways of accessing the potential of storytelling. As such, I now turn to the body of literature on the role of space in social movement work.

Social Movement Free-Spaces

As sociologist Ann Tickamyer (2000) states, "Relations of power, structures of inequality, and practices of domination and subordination are embedded in spatial design and relations. Thus, spatial arrangements are both products and sources of other forms of inequality" (p. 806). Early social movement research that drew attention to the role of space found great potential in the creation of 'free spaces'—pockets within a given movement wherein specific kinds of consciousness raising could occur—in social movement organizing.

Since then, the concept has been used in myriad ways to explain the relationships between spaces, consciousness, politics, and social movement action.

William A. Gamson (1996) states, "Whenever there is a significant power difference, the less powerful group needs some safe space where they are free—for awhile—to be themselves without pressure or self-consciousness about what members of the more powerful group may think or how they will react" (p. 37). As such, research on social movements sought to theorize not only the significance of 'free spaces,'[8] but to also establish the connection between free spaces and the development of a collective consciousness (Evans and Boyte 1992). Introduced by Evans and Boyte (1992) in an attempt to theorize the significance of 'autonomous' spaces in social movement action, they conceptualize free spaces as "the environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue…free spaces are settings between private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence, and vision" (p. 17). For example, free spaces fueled the civil rights movement through the creation of spaces like the black church where, "the autonomy of the church provided a bedrock for community cohesion and autonomy, and its religious resources furnished, in such an environment, the main wellsprings of cultural renewal" (Evans and Boyte 1992:49). Similarly, emergent

[8] Like Francesa Polletta (1999) I use the terms "free space" and "safe space" interchangeably.

free spaces in the feminist movement were found in middle-class schools and living rooms across the United States and Canada, spaces wherein women could draw connections between their gender and shared experiences (Evans and Boyte 1992:79). Ultimately, "[u]nder certain conditions, communal associations become free spaces, breeding grounds for democratic change" (Evans and Boyte 1992:187). Yet, while this early work touted the potential of free spaces, more investigation is needed into the relationship between the "certain conditions" needed. Furthermore, whereas scholars recognize that "less powerful groups" (Gamson, W. 1996) require access to free spaces, these initial articulations do not adequately examine the complex relationship between power, culture, and space.

Research on free spaces grew immensely throughout the 1990s, after the aforementioned discussions. According to Polletta (1999), the free space concept is appealing: "Not only does it discredit a view of the powerless as deludedly acquiescent to their domination, since in free spaces they are able to penetrate and overturn hegemonic beliefs, but it promises to restore culture to structuralist analyses without slipping into idealism" (p. 1). Thankfully, much like with the body of literature on collective identity, Francesca Polletta (1999) has done the work of 'taking stock' of this scholarship. Specifically focusing on the role of 'associational ties,' Polletta (1999) distinguishes between movement free spaces that are Indigenous (dense ties and isolated networks), Trans-movement (extensive ties), and Prefigurative (symmetric ties) (p. 9). It is the latter, prefigurative free spaces, that characterize the work that happens in "women's

only spaces" and other "alternative zones" like LGBTQ2+ spaces. I used this concept of prefigurative spaces to better understand the kinds of storytelling processes that happen in drag and queer cabaret spaces. Yet, while I agree with Polletta (1999) that prefigurative free spaces have tremendous potential to articulate new political priorities and mobilize new members (p. 11), I am concerned about the prioritization of the *symbolic* spaces and the development of associational ties over *physical* space.

While certainly both realms of symbolic and physical space are important, physical space seems to drop out of the analysis once associational ties have been established. As Polletta (1999) states, "It seems clear, then, that while physical settings are important to establish or reaffirm social relationships, it is the relationships themselves rather than the physical sites that are important in explaining their role in mobilization (Polletta 1999:12). Here, I am cautious of the spatial hierarchy emerging. Certainly, physical spaces are not *merely* symbolic and/or a stepping stone to building associational ties. In light of the role of 'safe spaces' in the LGBTQ2+ movement, as such, I find myself drawn to the work that delves deeper in the relationship between movements and physical space.

Physical space is an important boundary maker that often justifies the maintenance of an unjust status quo. As such, challenges to the hegemonic organization of public space have long been strategies of social movement action. Standing in front of a notable building, sitting in a particular spot on a bus, barricading an entrance, or marching down a specific street, each of these means

of taking up space can have significant political implications (see Currans 2017). For example, Marches on Washington have long played a role in the gay and lesbian and LGBT movement in the United States (Ghaziani 2008). Ghaziani's (2008) detailed analysis of four specific LGBT marches in Washington illustrates the relationship between movement politics and the importance of physical space. Currans' (2017) research on an array of political movements goes even further in addressing the relationship between social movements and space by unpacking the political implications of physical space in political organizing. Currans (2017) argues, that space is not only *used* symbolically, but spaces can be *transformed* by movements. Therefore, the transformation of public space by protest marches like Take Back the Night, Dyke Marches, and Slut Walks illuminates the prominence and significance of physical spaces in political protest (see Currans 2017). Thus, I see the need to supplement Polletta's (1999) delineation of prefigurative spaces with more attention to the role of *physical* space particularly in LGBTQ2+ movement organizing as physical spaces hold long-standing significance. Pride spaces are a prime example.

The symbolic significance of Pride in the LGBTQ2+ movement cannot be overstated. The first widely recognized Pride event was held in New York on June 28, 1970. To commemorate the one-year anniversary of the infamous Stonewall Riots wherein members of the Lesbian and Gay community resisted the police brutality commonly exerted on gender and sexual minorities, Pride was a public protest and celebration of significance of Stonewall, an event many herald as the

birth of the gay liberation movement in the United States and Canada. Yet those who were integral in leading the resistance to police brutality–drag queens, butch dykes, and transfolks, many of whom, such as Marsh P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, were black and Latinx–were rapidly marginalized in movement spaces. For example, despite her pivotal role in the Stonewall Riots in 1969, Sylvia Rivera took to the stage a mere four years later amid boos and jeers to assert her space in the movement and her right to be there. Her infamous "y'all better quiet down" speech is a testament to how rapidly the movement came to hierarchically organize its membership and its priorities. As many scholars and activists argue, the evolution of the movement has become one that prioritizes the needs of middle-class, white, cis-gender, gay men (Armstrong 2002; Vaid 2012).

Pride is symbolic of the movement. Building on the momentum of the liberation movement in the United States, Canadians were beginning to organize in protest and celebration in the early 1970s. Toronto held its first pride in 1972. Since then, other cities in Ontario have recognized pride as integral to their LGBTQ2+ communities, although not without a struggle. For example, recall my own foray into protest in 1995, wherein London's Mayor Dianne Haskett refused to proclaim a Pride day. Further, it was only as recent as 2016 that Hamilton, Ontario city council provided any sort of municipal funding for Pride (Craggs 2016). In the years since the mid-1990s when I first began attending Pride events throughout Ontario, I have witnessed the increased corporate presence, the growing number of attendees, the increased focus on the inclusion of allies, the

reduction in the presence of religious protesters[9], and a shift toward celebration over protest. These changes notwithstanding, Pride continues to hold significance in the movement for its ability to transform public space in the name of LGBTQ2+ peoples.

The relationship between LGBTQ2+ communities and public space is changing. No longer relegated solely to back alleys bars and public 'tea rooms' (Humphries 1970), LGBTQ2+ peoples have moved into open public spaces (Bell 2001). In his work, *Fragments for a Queer City*, David Bell (2001) challenges the logic that queer spaces are characterized by the strict dichotomous insider/outsider divide that queer spaces once were. Whereas at one point, queer pockets of the city burgeoned under secrecy and invisibility, this no longer works to describe the queer spaces of today. Bell (2001) argues that queer spaces or "the city's sex zones" have become "more diverse, much more complex, and much more a part of the urban fabric…" than perhaps they once were thought to be (p. 84-85). Instead, Bell (2001) argues that gay bars are indeed public spaces. Ghaziani's (2014) ethnographic research in the 'gayborhoods' of Chicago's 'Boystown' (and to a somewhat lesser degree, Andersonville) similarly reveals the changing and complicated relationship between queerness and urban space. However, Bell and

[9] Although at the time of writing in 2018, there has been a recent growth in the presence of religiously based protest groups at Pride events throughout Ontario. In larger cities like Hamilton and Toronto, protesters are relegated to the margins of the events; however, in smaller areas like Dunville, Ontario, protesters blocked the mainstage with large banners to object to the festivities at Haldiman-Norfolk pride.

Ghaziani diverge in significant ways. Bell (2001) simultaneously *celebrates* the moving of queerness into the public (i.e. the realm of 'institutionalized normative heterosexuality' (Seidman 2009)) and is *wary* of how this shift also comes with a "relinquishing of control" and the "opening up of 'gay space' to (straight) colonization" (p. 86). Ghaziani (2014) on the other hand, is far less skeptical of the kinds of changes occurring in the gayborhood. Instead, these changes are reflective of larger movement narratives, such as the logic some adopt that we are currently in a "post-gay era" (Ghaziani 2011), and as such, the purpose of the gayborhood is simply *changing* rather than disappearing. He states, "Gayborhoods have provided much-needed safe spaces to sexual minorities when they suffered from cultural invisibility, stigma, and powerlessness. But assimilation and strides toward social equality have redrawn the landscape, and residents now imagine the entire city as gay in some ways" (Ghaziani 2014:74). Change is certainly inevitable; however, some scholars are more critical of the kinds of changes occurring in LGBTQ2+ spaces.

For some, the way change is happening in urban queer spaces can illuminate the complexity and contradictory ways political priorities can be used against us. For example, tracing the evolution of queer urban spaces in the United States, Hanhardt (2013) argues that advocating for urban 'safe spaces' has produced contradictory results. While queer safe spaces are integral to the survival of an urban queer public life, 'safety' has also been used as a political justification for the displacement of marginalized queers from appealing urban

neighborhoods (Hanhardt 2013). This evokes questions about inequality within queer communities as some queer folks are deemed more desirable in specific realms of public space.

Integrating Frameworks

While there is nothing inherent to collective identity, storytelling, or context/space-based frameworks that bar intersectional analyses, none of these frameworks make explicit the need to understand social movement processes as entrenched in and shaped by intersecting power relations. Collective identity theories focus on issues of boundary work, collective consciousness, negotiation (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Scholars advocate for attention to context (Reger 2008), to processes (Fominaya 2010; Polletta and Jasper 2001), to multi-level analyses (Rupp and Taylor 1999; Gamson 1991) in understanding how collective identities form and evolve. Therefore, while these approaches do not negate attention to intersecting power relations, none of them are explicit about the need to situate these processes in within intersecting power relations. Storytelling frameworks nod to the fact that attention should be paid to who, what, when, where, and how stories are told in social movements, thus, acknowledging not only the strategic element of storytelling but how strategy relates to power; however, these models stop short of integrating *intersectional* frameworks into these processes.

Free space literature incorporates attention to power; however, hegemonic relations of rule are presumed to exist outside movement free spaces. As such,

'free spaces' themselves are understood to be 'free from hegemonic rule' (if only for a limited period of time). However, this framing posits free spaces as somewhat neutral in their protection from the 'outside world.' Intersectional frameworks tell us that this is not the case, all social relations are situated within and informed by intersecting power relations. Ultimately, I draw on these large bodies of literature for their ability to guide my research on the relationship between collectivity, political priorities, and context; however, I bring an intersectional framework to the fore in my understanding that *all* social movement processes are shaped by intersecting power relations. In doing so, I shed light on the relationship between collectivity, fragmentation, and intramovement inequality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced a brief history of the LGBTQ2+ movement, grappled with the scholarly work of collective identity, storytelling, and the politics of space in social movement organizing. I have done so not only to establish the frameworks that guide the following chapters, but also to identify the need to amend these models with an approach that foregrounds the role of intersecting power dynamics. Each of the theoretical models does not necessarily negate a focus on intersecting power dynamics; however, none of them explicitly integrate an intersectional focus into the theoretical framework or the analytic processes. My research seeks to address this shortcoming. I am driven by a desire to better understand how intersecting power dynamics shape movement work,

specifically the kind of performative storytelling work that happens in moment 'free spaces' and shared spaces like Pride. I find there is much to draw from the existing models. Yet, there remains much to be said about how exactly I incorporate an intersectional framework. Further, I have yet to articulate how I approach answering the questions that guide my dissertation research. I address the methods as well as the epistemological and analytic frameworks that drive my research in the following chapter.

Epistemological Framework & Methods

This research journey began with my interest in performance and its potential to build community through dancing, laughing, and affirming the lives of LGBTQ2+ peoples, while critiquing heteronormativity and rigid binary understandings of gender and sexuality. However, I had only a superficial awareness of the complex ways in which these moments of unification and critique worked simultaneously to sustain hierarchies and inequality. I have had a personal interest in drag and queer performance more broadly since the mid 1990s, it was not until 2008 that I began to seriously investigate the relationship between performance, identity, and the LGBTQ2+ movement. I have answered the questions that drove this project and I am left with new questions and directions for future inquiry. Throughout this chapter, I explicate both the epistemological logic and the methodological process that guided this project. I begin by unpacking the epistemological framework that shaped the process of data collection and analysis. I then provide specific details on the sites of analysis and the methods. I end the chapter by detailing the coding and analytic process that shaped the succeeding chapters of the dissertation.

I began this endeavour inspired by questions about the relationship between the practice of queer performance and the lives of performers themselves. Similar to Shapiro (2007), I was drawn to understanding how drag performance shaped the lives of those who performed, specifically in terms of how they understood gender and sexuality. These kinds of questions fueled my initial

research direction at the Master's level. However, as this primary research stage progressed and my immersion in both performance communities and the literature deepened, new questions arose. I began to see emergent hierarchies in drag communities that shaped not only who got to participate, but how those hierarchies informed the norms of performance. I also began to question how intersecting power dynamics shaped drag performance as I grappled with new questions about the larger political significance of queer performance, of the spaces wherein LGBTQ2+ folks congregate to participate in these productions, and how this cultural practice shaped the internal dynamics of the LGBTQ2+ movement. Most notably, I sought to better understanding the relationship between performance, collective 'we-ness,' and social change. While my earlier Master's research planted the seeds of this project, two additional factors influenced the shape of the research I embarked upon in my Ph.D. research.

First, I became acquainted with the invaluable work of Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor. Their body of scholarship situates drag in the realm of social movements, and more specifically, positions drag as a key part of the movement's tactical repertoire. This body of scholarship (Kaminski and Taylor 2008; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Rupp, Taylor, and Shapiro 2010; Taylor et al. 2004) laid the groundwork for this project insofar as it provided a framework upon which to build my own study, which not only explores drag in a different context than they did, but expands to include other forms of queer performance.

Second, my immersion in intersectional and queer studies and communities has fostered a heightened self-awareness of how my own social location greatly informs the questions I ask and assumptions I make throughout this dissertation. As a 40-year-old, queer, white, able-bodied, cis-gender woman who is precariously employed but has some of the markers that confer cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) (i.e. university degrees and affiliation), my commitment to reflexive research undoubtedly shaped the development of this research. My location within these social categories both facilitated and hindered the research process. On the one hand, my whiteness and my able-bodiedness afforded me opportunities to access (and feel comfortable in) popular LGBTQ2+ spaces; yet, this also worked to limit my initial focus as I did not set out to examine queer cabaret and performative protest that happened beyond the 'gayborhood'. It was only after speaking with one of the few QPOC[10] performers I met in popular drag king spaces I was challenged to problematize my understanding of what performance is doing, who is participating, and where this work is happening. In other words, I was forced to reflect on how my positionality was shaping the research process. As a result, my research questions evolved to address how intersecting power relations shape movement work, specifically the work done by LGBTQ2+ folks who use performance as part of the 'tactical repertoire' (Taylor et al. 2004) of the movement.

[10] Queer People of Colour

LGBTQ2+ performance spaces act as a case for me to examine the tensions between collectivity and fragmentation. However, unlike a lot of social movement research, LGBTQ2+ performances are not easily tied to specific SMOs. Social movement work that happens without ties to a given organization introduces new challenges. For example, cultural phenomena like performance communities can be difficult to measure (see Ghaziani 2009). Here I look to the body of scholarship that has theorized the relationship between art and protest (Jasper 1997), play and social movements (Shepard 2010), as well as performance and collective identity (Rupp and Taylor 2003; Taylor et al. 2004). I see great benefit to positioning this analysis in the realm of social movements, particularly as a process of collectivity and fragmentation. In this way, I am driven not by measuring performance cultures and their impact, but rather the *intramovement* processes of collectivity, consciousness raising, and the articulation of political priorities, all of which can be analyzed by employing the analytics tools of boundary work, negotiation, and the articulation of a shared consciousness (see Taylor and Whittier 1992). I also pay particular attention to the role of context in shaping this collective process (Reger 2008). My examination of these intramovement processes is also informed by my overarching epistemological framework.

Epistemological Framework

As Mackinnon (2013) states, "method concerns the way one thinks" (p. 1019). Thus, my epistemological logic, my method, how I come to understand the

social world, is shaped by my commitment to intersectional research. That said, I am aware that with the great proliferation of intersectionality discourse and research both inside and outside of the academy comes a responsibility to articulate how I have come to understand the 'concept.' Further, I am also tasked with a need to establish logical connections between intersectionality as a broad epistemological approach to research and the specific ways this framework informs my research on LGBTQ2+ social movement action. While drag and queer cabaret offer a unique case to examine collectivity, specifically the boundary work, consciousness raising, and the articulation of political priorities, I come from the position that all of this work is situated in larger intersecting power relations. As such, this research is driven by an epistemological framework that foregrounds the need to attend to intersecting power relations in the set-up, the data collection, and the analysis stage. Here I provide a brief overview of how I take up the body of scholarship on intersectionality to inform this research project. I begin with a brief overview of the key points of intersectional research that guide me before attending to the methods of data collection and the analytic process.

Much of the activism driven by critical feminist, anti-racist, and LGBTQ2+ movements sought to shift the focus away from individual experiences and toward how larger sociopolitical institutions—rooted in patriarchy, white supremacy, and compulsory heterosexuality—effectively marginalize, erase, and oppress women, people of colour, and non-heterosexuals. Under this logic,

women are oppressed by patriarchy, people of colour are oppressed by white supremacy, and gays and lesbians are oppressed by heteronormativity. This shift away from individual experiences of marginalization and discrimination to larger structural oppression was integral to the understanding that social institutions disadvantage certain groups of people and how marginalization and oppression are not individual but rather group realities; however, this focus on sameness and common experiences among social categories fails to address the complex ways in which women, non-white folks, and LGBTQ2+ people throughout the world are differently situated in a complex and intersecting *matrix of domination* (Collins 2000).

The idea that oppression and marginalization cannot be easily explained away by unifocal analyses of hierarchy has received much support; yet, the degree to which scholars can actually do 'intersectional research' has elicited some critique. Some argue that scholars who have taken up intersectional studies have morphed the epistemological logic in ways that make intersectional studies too identitarian and too static (see Carbado 2013; Cho et al. 2013), and instead should be focusing more on the complex processes of intersecting power relations. Cho et al. (2013) identify issues with the,

> utility of various metaphors including the road intersection, the matrix, and the interlocked vision of oppression; the additive and autonomous versus interactive and mutually constituting nature of the race/gender/class/sexuality/nation nexus; the eponymous "et cetera" problem—that is, the number of categories and kinds of subjects (e.g., privileged or subordinate?) stipulated or implied by an intersectional approach; and the static and fixed versus the

> dynamic and contextual orientation of intersectional research. (P. 787)

Ultimately, these debates are important for helping to situate scholars and their intersectional work in ongoing discussions of how one *should* do intersectional research. I draw on these debates to set up the groundwork for how I put my intersectional epistemological framework into action throughout the research process.

First, I employ McCall's (2005) work to articulate how I understand the role of social categories. There is great variation in how scholars use categories: at one end of the spectrum are those who take an anti-category approach, with an inter-category approach at the other end (McCall 2005). Much like the perspective McCall (2005) advocates for, I situate my own approach to research with the understanding that "there are relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are" these relationships are the focus of analysis (p. 1875). In other words, while I recognize categories are problematic, particularly when reified, I do see the value in attending to social categories as sites of analysis. Identity categories can be beneficial when used strategically in social movement action (Bernstein 1997; 2002; 2005; 2008). As such, in recognizing that relations of inequality exist between and among groups, but that these relations are not static or absolute, I take note of identity and group categories in my observation and interview processes.

Second, I pay ongoing attention to the way intersecting power relations shape the process of research from the construction of boundaries in determining who and where to conduct my observational analysis, but also in the ways I engage with people for interviews. In keeping with an intersectional methodological approach, I aspire to not only address the unequal power relations but not participate in reaffirming them through interaction. Here, I also draw insight from the body of work on reflexivity and researcher positionality that has undergone much consideration in feminist traditions (see Harding 2004). As Day (2012) argues, there are many ways to engage in reflexive research, but at the core, there must not only be a critique of the "subjects as a unitary group," but also "subject positions within these power relationships should be similarly investigated" (p. 70). As such, I adopt an approach similar to what Findlay (2002) calls, "reflexivity as social critique," wherein attention is paid to not only how power relations shape the entire research process, but with a specific focus on how I manage the unequal power imbalances between researcher and participant. I discuss how this attention to intersecting power relations 'plays out' next.

Methods

As discussed above, intersectional research is difficult insofar as it is challenging to place parameters around a social world that is categorically complex. In this project, I look broadly at how groups, with no explicit ties to particular SMOs, use performance as a means of developing a collectivity, (via boundaries and collective consciousness) and articulating political priorities.

Specifically, I focus on drag (kings and queens) and queer cabaret (spoken word, dance, drag, song). I draw on drag and queer cabaret as they are both forms of creative protest that establish connections between the performance and the LGBTQ2+ movement. These distinctions are made evident in the kinds of stories told through performance, who tells the stories, and where they are told. For example, whereas popular drag is most synonymous with urban LGBTQ2+ spaces and/or establishments, queer cabaret protest disproportionately happens in spaces outside the gayborhood. Further, queer cabaret is often explicit in centering the stories of marginalized QTBIPOC[11] folks. And while drag tends to involve gender-bending through performance and lip-syncing to popular music, queer cabaret takes various forms (of which drag is included). As such, notable patterns differentiate popular drag from queer cabaret; however, these boundaries are not easily drawn. There is permeability in the boundaries that shape drag and queer cabaret storytelling. Therefore, while I delve into the political significance of the work that happens via popular drag and queer cabaret throughout the dissertation, I do not wish to erect firm boundaries around these two groups. As such, this is not a comparative project[12] per se, but rather I see these different storytelling

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[11] Queer Trans* Black Indigenous People of Colour

[12] Arguably, all sociological work is comparative in some way as we tend to focus our analysis on the significance of categories and patterns in order to identify 'root causes'. In other words, 'committing sociology' lends itself to analyses of categories, groups, and patterns. However, as I neither began this project with specific group comparison in mind, nor are the boundaries around drag and queer cabaret as clear as they are in a movement/countermovement dynamic, I am hesitant to use the language of comparative work to describe my research.

forms, spaces, and political ideologies as distinct yet related means of social movement protest.

Observation

I conducted observation 'in the field' in an array of social settings. What I have come to call 'popular drag' is associated with LGBTQ2+ culture and geographical location. The drag shows I observed either explicitly billed themselves as 'drag' shows or were held in known LGBTQ2+ venues and/or neighbourhoods (e.g. Toronto's Church Street). While I have spent many years watching live drag shows (not to mention ten full seasons of *RuPaul's Drag Race*), I relegate my analysis of popular drag to the field notes and experiences gained via my in-person attendance in the field at twelve drag shows[13] totaling approximately thirty-two hours of observation, nine shows that I classify as queer cabaret, totaling approximatively twenty-five hours, and five Pride weekends totaling approximately twenty-two hours. While Pride spaces tend to feature popular drag more prominently than queer cabaret, I did observe queer cabaret at Pride events in two observational sites.

I attended shows in mid-sized and large urban spaces in southwestern Ontario[14]. Following each show, I took handwritten notes in a notebook, wherein I

[13] While I attended many more drag shows over the years, I have only included the shows wherein I took field notes and specifically attended the shows in an effort to observe.

[14] Observation sites include Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo (pop. 527,765), London (pop. 521,756), Hamilton (pop. 787,195) and Toronto (pop. 6,346,088).

paid specific attention to the physical space, (including layout maps, notes on signage, building location, size, area of town), audience composition, (specifically I made note of who was there and who was not there in relation to social identity categories, for example I took notes on the approximate age, race, gender, etc. of performers and audience members), the performers themselves (the style, songs, type of performance), as well as interaction between the performers and audiences (tipping practices, explicit rules about audience interaction with performers). I also made thematic notes about each. For example, while I was less focused on analyzing the symbolic significance of song selection, I did make general notes on song genre and themes[15]. Additionally, I made notes on whether the performance was a primary focus (versus backdrop) in the venue, whether there was a cover charge, and where proceeds were going (performers, charity, etc.). I also collected any promotional material made available at live shows. After having compiled handwritten notes, I then sifted through these notes 'cleaning them' while I converted them to word documents. In the case of a hand-drawn map, I scanned the drawing and created a .pdf file from the scan. Notes and images were then uploaded into NVivo10, while promotional materials were kept in a folder in my file drawer. The process of analyzing these notes was ongoing.

Population numbers derived from 2017 Statistics Canada data (https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/12-581-x/2018000/pop-eng.htm).

[15] For a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between drag, music, and collective identity, see Kaminski and Taylor (2008).

As part of my reflexive approach, I also paid attention to my position in observation spaces. As part of a large crowd during Pride events, I was relatively less concerned about the role of my body in these spaces. Aside from ensuring I was not blocking anyone's view, I did not make major attempts to alter my role or my body in these spaces. Drag shows were similar insofar as I made few attempts to locate myself and my position in these spaces. However, these experiences stand in stark contrast to how aware I was of my body and my social location in queer cabaret spaces. Queer cabaret spaces are organized strategically to unsettle the status quo. Because these spaces were not designed to prioritize *my* needs, I became very aware of my own body and positionality. As such, I made sure to sit near the back of the room and stand when needed in an effort to ensure people who may need to sit have the option to do so. Despite it being a queer space, the kind of space I have long felt comfortable in, I was particularly cognizant of my sense of unease in queer cabaret spaces. I reflected on these experiences throughout in ways that I believe helped and hindered me in the interview recruitment process.

Interviews

In addition to observation, I conducted thirty-five semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ2+ movement actors (seventeen queer cabaret; eighteen popular drag). Interviews took place in an array of coffee shops, participants' homes, bars, and other public spaces (each interview location was agreed upon by me and the participant). Many of the people I spoke with used storytelling as their

main contribution to the movement; however, others connected their work on stage to other forms of LGBTQ2+ community organizing and activist work. In accordance with my university ethics approval (#2013121), prior to each interview, participants were given an opportunity to read and sign a consent form (Appendix A). Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions prior to beginning the interview as well. Additionally, participants were encouraged to fill out a demographic form to provide more information about their lives and the identity labels they deemed significant (Appendix E). Participants ranged in age from 21-70 years old at the time of interview. All of the popular drag performers I spoke with were white (although I would not go so far as to say that this is representative of the drag queen scene in Toronto). There was far more racial diversity in the queer cabaret storytellers. Only two performers self-identified as white and one as "light skinned". It was also more likely that queer cabaret performers sought to provide 'other' identity categories they deemed significant including identities related to mental health status, specific sexual identities, and familial roles like "parent". I provide more detailed information about the interview participants in Appendix G.

Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours. The style was conversational and questions were informed by a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B). While I followed a semi-structured interview guide, participants were strongly encouraged to steer the conversation into a direction they deemed important. I believe I was successful in my attempts to balance

building rapport while also maintaining enough distance to ensure key points of information were not left implicit (see McCorkel and Myers 2003).

Interviews took place in two stages. The first round of interviews took place between 2009 and 2010. This stage focused entirely on drag king performers. The insights garnered through this data fueled the development of new interview questions. The second stage took place between 2013 and 2015 and expanded to include drag queens and queer cabaret performers. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, I took brief hand-written notes during interviews. These hand-written notes were helpful to me during the process as they served as reminders for probing points and follow-up questions. These notes were also helpful in shaping the interview guide throughout the research process. While the interview guide was semi-structured, there were points during the interviews wherein it became clear that a given question and/or phrasing was inappropriate for the project. For example, during one interview with a queer cabaret storyteller, I asked a question about the role of 'inclusion' in LGBTQ2+ movement organizing. The participant stopped to inform me that 'inclusion' was in opposition to the kind of justice they sought to achieve through their work (Manish interview). In another case, participants were adamant about their refusal to adopt labels such as 'activist' and social movement, instead wishing to be referred to as an "organizer" working toward queer social justice

(Vena Kava interview). These interactions among others informed the interview guide going forward in the interview process[16].

Recruitment for interview participants can best be described as a multi-entry snowball method. As a long-standing member of my hometown queer community, I have developed connections with drag performers in the area. I began by interviewing a few members of a drag king collective in London. From there, I was referred to other drag performers in other cities. I solicited more participants while attending performances. In doing so, it became clear that my lack of a social media presence was hindering my recruitment. I created a Facebook page wherein I blended my personal and professional life by adding members of the movement as well as select friends, family, and colleagues. Social media legitimized my membership in the community in ways that identifying myself as a researcher from a university did not. Overall, accessing performers from popular drag contexts was relatively easy. I ceased interviewing drag performers after eighteen interviews as I wanted to ensure a relative numerical balance between drag and queer cabaret performers, a group that was significantly more difficulty to recruit.

Unlike the recruitment approach to drag which was met with relatively little resistance, recruiting queer cabaret performers was significantly more

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[16] As Dorothy Smith (2005) argues, interviews are an investigative endeavour; therefore, questions will take new shape as insights are gained throughout the research process.

difficult. Again, I used a direct solicit approach at shows and via Facebook (see Appendix C; Appendix D); however, queer cabaret storytellers were *far* more likely to require further explanation about how the project would directly benefit them and their immediate community, more time and consideration to reflect on whether they would be willing to participate, and inquiry into how I intended to compensate people for their time. For example, consider the direct message I received from a member of the community who I had not yet met:

> Can you articulate how interviewee's knowledge, experience and insight will be credited in your research and also if or how your personal identities intersect with the voices you want represented in this research, and what privileges you may hold in conducting this research? I feel it'll help myself/community decide if this project is something that feels aligned with their needs as participants/interviewees. Thanks!

This response was not uncommon and clearly depicts some of the (understandable) difficulties I faced when trying to recruit queer cabaret storytellers, particularly in urban spaces where I was unknown. After much deliberation, I responded with lengthy articulation of how I attend to power and positionality and how I see my work contributing to LGBTQ2+ activist work. I also located myself in my work and my own queer community[17]. After thanking me for the response, this person opted not to participate. I bring up this interaction here for two reasons: not only does it demonstrate the lack of ease with which I

[17] The full response can be found in Appendix F.

recruited queer cabaret storytellers[18], but this kind of thoughtful reluctance on the part of many queer cabaret performers illuminates the deeply entrenched power imbalances that shape academic research projects.

I took two key messages from these types of interactions. First, there is an important imbalance of power in the research process that for some is akin to "mining [marginalized] people for their experience" (via Facebook post of potential participant). As Harding and Norburg (2005) argue, "Dominant groups are especially poorly equipped to identify oppressive features of their own beliefs and practices" (p. 2010). I have come to see my interviews with marginalized queer folks as evidence of my own ill-quipped approach. Secondly, on a strategic level, academic researchers are not a coveted audience for queer cabaret performative storytelling in the LGBTQ2+ movement. Comments made by queer cabaret artists positioned university-based research as disconnected and ineffectual in implementing meaningful change. Ultimately, these experiences of resistance and reluctance were a prime motivator in my decision to cease the process of soliciting interviews with queer cabaret storytellers after the seventeenth interview.

Whereas many researchers 'leave the field' after reaching 'theoretical saturation', I decided to stop soliciting interviews upon coming to important

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[18] In other cases, the power imbalance was not the direct concern, instead, potential participants cited previously negative experiences with "clueless" and "patronizing" researchers as contributing factor in their decision not to participate (via communication with community member).

realizations. Simply stated, I became concerned that I was gaining more from this process than the participants. This imbalance of power became far too stark for me to move further with interviews. While I was fortunate to have received funding through my university and an Ontario Graduate Scholarship, I did not secure funding to be allocated to participants in the form of remuneration. As such, my ethics application was approved on the basis that no remuneration would be provided to participants. I found myself taking more than I was able to provide *directly* to participants (particularly as many of the queer cabaret storytellers I spoke with described their experiences with social assistance and living "cash poor"). In other words, while participants were able to facilitate the completion of my research process (and likely subsequent accreditation of the PhD), I was constrained in my ability to 'repay' participants for their time and insights. And while I made sure to communicate my appreciation verbally and with follow-up 'thank you' messages, the imbalance in the interview process created growing concern. This, coupled with the existence of reoccurring themes emerging through interviews encouraged me to cease the interview process. In short, while I did not reach theoretical saturation in the traditional sense, I did reach saturation in terms of my unease with the unequal power relations that shaped the interview process.

Consent, Confidentiality, and Credit

All too often informed consent is seen as an institutional hoop one must jump through to quell the fears of the university research ethics boards. In this particular project, the notion of consent was integral to understanding who it is

that drives this project (the participants), who I am as a researcher to analyze these ideas, and what responsibility I have to disseminate this information to a larger audience. I prioritized consent and clarity throughout the interview (and beyond). During the interview, I ensured the participant was not only aware of their rights to drop out or skip questions without penalty, but I also communicated that I wanted to honour their words and sentiments by sending participants a copy of their transcript to ensure they were comfortable with the wording of their ideas. Only two participants requested removal of information from the transcript. In both cases, the flagged statements were relatively tangential to the topics discussed in the interview and did not impact the insights I garnered through analysis. For example, one participant wanted to remove reference to their specific workplace, whereas the other felt a particular story about their mother was "a bit harsh". Ultimately, I removed the content these two participants requested. I also provided interview participants with the option to have their contribution remain confidential or to use a name of their choosing.

Issues of confidentiality are driven by concerns about not only implications of what people say but how that may make people vulnerable. In other words, confidentiality itself is related to intersecting power relations. Yet for some, confidentiality stifles meaningful social change in ways that sustain unequal power relations (Baez 2002). Considering these perspectives and the earlier concern about crediting performers with their ideas, I provided all interview participants with the option to have their contribution be credited or

confidential. In the case of confidentiality, participants were given a pseudonym and all identifiers were removed. Few took this option. Instead, much like the response from the community member wherein they questioned "Can you articulate how interviewee's knowledge, experience and insight will be credited in your research…", many participants wanted their stage names used in publication in an effort to have their insights, thoughts, and arguments, credited. Thus, I adopt an approach to confidentiality and credit that attempts to respect the privacy of those who request it, while also respecting the desire of those who seek to have their stage names recognized in connection to their contribution.

Cultural Artifacts

While at LGBTQ2+ storytelling events, I also gathered any pamphlets, promotional materials, or documents that could help to provide insight into ideologies, boundaries, collective identity, and political priorities. Additionally, I gathered data online using social media sites like Facebook. By virtue of my participation in the online communities via Facebook's 'friend' networks I was given access to content shared by drag and queer cabaret storytellers online. As such, I garnered great insight into political priorities by observing what people shared regarding the movement and/or LGBTQ2+ communities. While I did not gather this information in a systematic way as it was not intended to serve as data for a formal content analysis, instead, cultural artifacts served to support the first two methods of data collection and provide additional insight (for a similar approach see Currans' (2017) use of 'ephemera'). As such, cultural artifacts

helped to situate me within an ongoing discussion that many of my participants were involved in about LGBTQ2+ politics and priorities. I did however, track the statements that were directly messaged to me as well as any evidence of 'infighting' wherein comments or conversations about internal political contests were had online via social media.

The Coding Process

Practically speaking, data analysis consisted of a multi-step process wherein I began by coding broad concepts, then honed these concepts by developing categories and establishing themes (see Aurini, Heath, and Howells 2016). After uploading all of my data, including field notes, analytic notes, interview transcripts, and images, (aside from the hardcopy documents that I obtained at shows) into NVivo10, I took the 'first pass' through the data. This 'initial coding' (Charmaz 2006) or 'first cycle' stage began with the creation of 'descriptive codes' (Aurini et al. 2016:192). As Charmaz (2008) notes, this stage is characterized by a 'line-by-line' coding process which allows for more openness to varied explanations and understandings of the data (p. 155). At this stage, I created numerous broad codes such as, dialogue, emotion work, visibility, audience interaction, empowerment, and honoring mentors. During this stage I made annotations and notes on documents as I coded. In many cases, data was coded under multiple coding categories.

From here, I adopted a more focused coding process akin to what Charmaz (2006) calls, "axial coding" which "specifies the properties and dimensions of a

category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give you coherence to the emergent analysis" (p. 60). Here, I moved from the broad descriptive codes to a more focused creation of research "themes" (Aurini et al. 2016). However, while I began organizing the data in NVivo10, I found the use of Microsoft Word software to be far more intuitive for me. Thus, I developed more focused coding using themes as I transferred the codes from NVivo10 and into a Word document. The document then served as my codebook with focused themes under key headings and descriptive codes created through the line-by-line process located under (subheadings) the larger themes. I used this codebook to begin mapping out the relationship between key themes including, collectivity, inequality, boundary work, ideologies, and spaces, to inform my analysis.

The Analysis Process

While analytic insights grew throughout the duration of the project from the early days of data collection to the laborious process of transcribing interviews, much of the more focused analysis took place after compiling all of the interviews, field notes, and cultural artifacts. Analysis at all stages was informed by larger concerns regarding intersecting power relations, specifically, Choo and Ferree's (2010) methodological approach to intersectional research that calls for greater attention to "inclusion" and attention to relations of both subordination and domination (see Carbado 2013; Yuval-Davis 2006b). Throughout the analysis stage, I focused in on both patterns of similarity and difference. Moving beyond the 'gayborhood' with my research allowed me to

gather data on a more 'diverse' group of movement actors. In this way, the project became more 'inclusive' (for lack of a better word). That said, I was mindful of not "fetishizing" difference "without necessarily giving sufficient attention to its relation to unmarked categories, especially to how the more powerful are defined as normative standards" (Choo and Ferree 2010:133). My attempts to avoid the fetishization of difference also helped me avoid falling victim to what Carbado (2013) calls, 'colorblind intersectionality.' As Carbado (2013) argues, "it is erroneous to conceptualize intersectionality as a theory whose exclusive focus is the intersection of race (read: nonwhite) and gender (read: nonmale)…Framing intersectionality as only about women of color gives masculinity, whiteness, and maleness an intersectional pass" (p. 841). I adopt Carbado's logic in examining how other overarching systems of dominance including ableism and classism, also organize the work happening in these LGBTQ2+ movement spaces. Therefore, while analyzing the more focused data themes, I paid specific attention to how larger systems including white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism, classism, heteronormativity, and ageism have informed many popular LGBTQ2+ spaces to shape not only who is *included*, but who is *excluded*. Additionally, my analysis was informed by the understanding that the social movement processes I am examining are shaped by intersecting power dynamics. Therefore, my themes and their subsequent codes were understood as "analytic interaction rather than an additive model" (Choo and Ferree 2010:131). Affirming that, "intersectionality as a complex system assumes a methodology that sees everything as interactions, not

'main effects.' The challenge is to identify the local and historically particular configurations of inequalities, since every system is contingent and path dependent" (Choo and Ferree 2010:136). Therefore, my analysis steered away from presuming the primacy of any given relation or social category and instead examined the processes by which intramovement action and storytelling processes 'played out' on the ground as well as in relation to larger intersecting power relations.

Conclusion

Overall, this project was driven by a need to situate the LGBTQ2+ movement in larger intersecting power relations. As such, I have articulated how I understand power as shaping all social relations. I have discussed how that framework has informed the intersectional methodological approach taken in this dissertation as well as the challenges I faced in the field. I have outlined how I analyzed the data and the considerations I took throughout the entire process. I examine the fruits of this research labour in the chapters that follow.

Telling 'Our' Stories: Collectivity and Storytelling in Popular Drag Spaces

Stories are remarkably powerful tools for inciting social justice action. For marginalized groups, whose stories have been manipulated to serve dominant interests, storytelling is an act of challenging erasure, marginalization, and domination. The act of telling one's story can be a form of resistance to oppressive counter narratives (Chepp 2016). In addition to personal empowerment, storytelling[19] creates a connection between storyteller and audience that can foster the development of collectivity in social movement resistance (Polletta 1998; 2002; Swerts 2015). As such, storytelling is a means of shaping identity and 'group belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2006a:202). However, storytelling is a complex process whereby boundaries emerge; it is common for actors within the same social movement to tell very different stories of who 'we' are and of where 'we' need to go in our struggles for justice and equality. These different stories are the result of internal fragmentation within movements, fragmentation that occurs along relational ideological and biographical lines. However, we know relatively little about the processes whereby these divergent stories emerge and the political implications for movement groups.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between storytelling, movement collectivity, and fragmentation. Specifically, I apply a storytelling framework, one that examines both the *content* and *context* of storytelling processes, to the case of

[19] Much like Polletta's (1998; 2002; 2010) work, I too use storytelling and narrative interchangeably.

the LGBTQ2+ movement. While drag has long been a part of the movement's *tactical repertoire* used to engage outsider audiences (Taylor et al. 2004), I position popular drag[20] as *a storytelling processes*. In doing so I ask, how do members of the LGBTQ2+ movement use performance as a means of creating collectivity? And what does popular drag storytelling tell us about the relationship between social movement collectivity and the 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2006a)?

My findings reveal two major insights. First, within the LGBTQ2+ movement, popular drag is a valuable means of building collectivity within the LGBTQ2+ movement. Popular drag performers use the stage to tell stories that critique hegemonic gender and sexuality in ways that are empowering on a personal and communal level. In doing so, popular drag is a vehicle for LGBTQ2+ folks to tell stories that build solidarity within the movement and to create a sense of belonging. Second, while popular drag storytelling can foster belonging, collective critique and resistance to hegemonic gender and sexuality, failure to address the intersecting power relations that shape storytelling processes hierarchically organizes the collective group politics in ways that undermine potential collective belonging. In other words, the process of building collectivity simultaneously undermines solidarity within the movement. When popular drag storytelling—specifically *where* stories are told and *how* those stories are

[20] I use the term popular drag to distinguish this more popular style of drag found in LGBTQ2+ villages and bars from alternative drag and queer cabaret contexts.

regulated—fails to address intersecting forms of oppression rooted not just in homophobia but also in binary gender, racism, classism, and ableism, the process of storytelling constrains *whose* stories become part of the movement's collective narrative. Ultimately, I argue that while storytelling can be a powerful means of building collectivity and igniting resistance in social movement action, failure to address how intersecting power relations shape the storytelling process, undermines collectivity and internal movement solidary.

Drag and the Politics of Storytelling

The ubiquity of popular drag performance in LGBTQ2+ communities throughout the global west has inspired a significant body of scholarship that grapples with understanding the symbolic meaning and articulating the radical potential of drag to affect social change. Early work on popular drag emerged from the anthropological tradition and laid the bedrock for understanding drag as a practice predominantly enacted by cisgender gay men wherein drag performance provided a space for performing a 'gay identity' (Newton 1972). Since then, gender and cultural theorists have used popular drag as an exemplar for critiquing rigid essentialist notions of binary gender (Butler 1990; Halberstam 1997; 1998; Shapiro 2007; Volcano and Halberstam 1999). Others still have attested to the significance of the distinction between drag *queens* and drag *kings* (Halberstam 1998; Horowitz 2013; Rupp, Taylor, and Shapiro 2010; Schacht 2002), and the role of drag communities in facilitating personal identity transformation (Rogers

2018; Shapiro 2007). In each case, researchers found radical potential in popular drag's ability to destabilize hegemonic gender and sexuality.

Not until the early part of the twenty-first century when scholars began to ground their research on popular drag within the social movements scholarship did the larger political significance of drag as a tactic of the LGBTQ2+ movement become more explicit. Rupp and Taylor's (2003) ethnography on drag queens in Key West, Florida was integral to shifting the LGBTQ2+ cultural phenomenon into the realm of political protest. In doing so, Rupp and Taylor (2003) drew the connection between what drag *can* do as an act of political protest and what it *does* do for audiences. Using focus groups with audience members, Rupp and Taylor (2003) found that not only does popular drag erode the boundaries between "men and women" and "gay and straight", but it challenged straight audiences to rethink hegemonic gender and sexuality in ways that expanded the movement's collective identity. Their findings demonstrate the possibility for popular drag to have profound significance *beyond* the immediate LGBTQ2+ community as it facilitates the creation of what Myers (2008) calls, an "Ally Identity." By altering the perspective of straight audience members, popular drag has an explicitly political impact as it expands the movement's collective identity through allied recruitment.

Additionally, Taylor et al. (2004) establish a framework that articulates the significance of popular drag within LGBTQ2+ protest as part of the movement's "tactical repertoire." While Taylor et al. (2004) were cautious not to argue that *all*

drag performance be understood as politically significant, drag that: 1) *contested* hegemonic gender and sexuality, 2) aligned with the movement's *collective identity*, and 3) *intended* to incite change, should be understood as political protest (Taylor et al. 2004). This body of scholarship, along with others who attest to the role of drag performance in political activism (for example Shepard 2010), was integral to situating popular drag in the realm of political protest. Furthermore, by theorizing the political significance of drag as a tactical resource within the LGBTQ2+ movement, drag became understood as a mechanism for mobilizing membership and shaping the movement's collectivity identity.

The body of scholarship on popular drag emphasizes its potential for building and expanding the LGBTQ2+ movement's collective identity and subverting the oppression rooted in hegemonic gender and sexuality. Yet, as intersectionality studies tell us, one form of oppression does not work alone. Aside from the few studies that mention the significance of race[21] and class[22], research on popular drag has not been undertaken using an intersectional framework, one that understands gender and sexual oppression to be working in collaboration with other axes of oppression, including racism, sexism, classism,

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[21] Whereas Halberstam's (1997) argues that white and black performers have very different relationships with "kinging", Piontek (2002) argues the distinction Halberstam makes is less relevant in smaller mid-western locations wherein black and white kings do not have access to separate venues. Rupp and Taylor (2003) also mention race in that performers at the 801 Cabaret call the constructed nature of race into question by performing acts as another race or "cross-ethnicking".
[22] Berkowitz and Belgrave (2010) touch on issues of class as a means of hierarchically organizing drag queens within specific communities.

and ableism. This is a significant gap not only in the studies on popular drag but in the study of collectives and collective identity. Collective identity research disproportionality focuses on the relationship between us (as insiders) and them (as outsiders). Whereas Rupp and Taylor's (2003) work demonstrates how drag can encourage straight audience members to transcend that boundary of us v. them, we know relatively little about how popular drag shapes the internal politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006a) within these collectives. To address this gap, I situate my analysis of the Canadian popular drag scene within a storytelling framework, as storytelling frameworks require an analysis of not only the stories told in protest, but also how those stories are shaped by power relations.

Stories play an integral role in shaping social movement action (Benford 2002; Davis 2002; Tilly 2002; Polletta 1998; 2002; 2010; Sium and Ritskes 2013). Situating drag within a storytelling framework is worthwhile for three reasons. First, storytelling frameworks acknowledge the radical potential found in telling our stories. For marginalized groups in particular, storytelling can provide "a counterpoint to the myths promoted by the powerful" (Polletta 2010:3). For those whose stories are left untold, storytelling can be an empowering act of agency in opposition to the intersecting axes of oppression that constrain that agency in other ways.

Second, storytelling frameworks acknowledge the relationship between storytelling and collective identities, as storytelling is an interaction between storyteller and audience. As Davis (2002) states, "The storytelling process, as a

social transaction, engages people in a communicative relationship" (p. 19). Similarly, Sium and Ritskes (2013) argue that, "Stories are not only agentic and individual but they are communal sharings that bind communities together spiritually and relationally" (p. v). Thus, beyond the individual acts of agency, storytelling is also a means of building collectivity (Benford 2002; Davis 2002; Polletta 1998; 2002; 2010; Polletta et. al 2011). In other words, storytelling frameworks require analyses to go beyond the symbolic significance of the stories themselves and address the inherently social relationship between storyteller and audience.

Lastly, storytelling frameworks acknowledge that all acts of storytelling in social movements are situated within contextually significant power relations. Scholars of storytelling caution against understanding stories as decontextualized artifacts and instead foreground the need to examine the social rules that govern the storytelling process (Polletta 1998:420). According to Polletta et al. (2011) all social movements have stories; however, when we focus on the *process* of storytelling, specifically how stories are told, who is telling them, and on what occasions can specific stories be told, we gain insight into how "…power is socially organized and unevenly distributed" within social movements (p. 111). Therefore, research on storytelling *requires* analyses of the contextual factors and power relations that constrain and facilitate the stories that are told in social movement contexts.

While researchers have used an array of frameworks to understand the significance of popular drag, no study to date has examined *popular drag as a storytelling process*, one that examines the stories in conjunction with the context and intersecting power relations that shape what stories are told, where, how, why, and by whom. In doing so, I uncover important insights about the relationship between the LGBTQ2+ movement and the tactics we use to affect change. On the one hand, my findings support the existing research that attests to drag's potential to build collectivity and a sense of belonging. On the other hand, my findings extend the existing scholarship but demonstrating how drag simultaneously fuels internal movement fragmentation by failing to address intersecting power relations. I examine this complex and contradictory relationship in the following sections.

Storytelling and Collectivity

Storytelling is an interactive relationship between teller and audience. As such, popular drag spaces are sites of storytelling that aids in building LGBTQ2+ collectivity. Not only does drag provide a culturally relevant medium for performers to tell their stories and weave their experiences into the overall movement narrative of who 'we' are, but the interactive process that connects storyteller to audience member is a means of creating bonds to not only mobilize moment actors but also to strengthen ties to others within popular drag spaces. Additionally, the building of collectivity happens through storytelling that aims to

1) critique hegemonic gender and sexuality, and 2) entertain and celebrate collective resilience.

Collectivity and Critique

Drag stories critique hegemonic gender and sexuality in many ways. Most prominently, popular drag performers tell stories that "play" with normative understandings of binary masculinity and femininity and heterosexuality. While play can be a site wherein we become socialized into appropriate masculinity and femininity (Jordan and Cowan 1995; Martin 1998; Thorne 1993), popular drag demonstrates how play can be used to unsettle 'appropriate' gender. Long time performer, Drag King Flare, uses the stage to tell stories that challenge binary gender by transgressing masculinity and femininity boundaries. In one of Flare's performances, Flare enters the stage donning all of the markings of traditional masculinity. In a slightly campy depiction, Flare uses symbolic artifacts including chest and facial hair, clothing, and movement to communicate a version of masculinity to the audience. While there is an undertone of play in Flare's campy depiction of traditional masculinity as the audience is aware that Flare is in fact not a conventional man, it is the point where Flare's performed masculinity is upset that play becomes more explicit. Midway through Flare's performance, he begins to strip off the markings of masculinity to reveal pasty covered breasts and frilly pink underwear. Transgressing of the boundary that demarcates femininity from masculinity in this comedic manner is a means of playing with gender and in doing so, the audience reacts with applause. Flare's performance can be read as a

critique of gendered expectations as well as a challenge to the larger heteronormative assumptions tied to gendered bodies.

Unsettling the binary is a primary motivation behind Flare's drag storytelling. Flare recalls this particular performance, he states,

> What it was for me was about going, look, I look like a guy, but I'm actually a woman and I want you to accept me as that…there might be something about seeing a woman who looks like a man but knowing deep down that they're a woman, that is a different level of sexuality to express.

Flare often draws connections between on and off stage realities. The stage comes to represent a space for Flare to tell a version of their own queer story, one pushes the boundaries around masculinity and femininity through play in a way that critiques 'appropriate' gender and unsettles hegemonic heterosexuality.

Playful stories that push the boundaries around hegemonic gender and sexuality are common on popular drag stages; however, performers tell these stories in different ways. Whereas Drag King Flare challenges the rigidity of the gender binary, Reese Rider uses performance to tell stories that call hegemonic masculinity into question. Standing approximately 5'5" with a slender build, drag king Reese Rider emerges on-stage in tight dark clothing. Far less campy than many kings Rider performs alongside, he adopts a style more akin to impersonation. Yet, despite the more imitative style of masculinity, he also incorporates play in ways that undermine the normative masculinity he mimics. For example, in a break from his typical depiction of masculinity, part way through his song Rider unfurls a three-foot long prosthetic phallus dangling from

the front of his pants. Throughout the song, he strokes the phallus, swings it around like a lasso, and simulates anal sex with another drag king. As a transman, Rider's performance scrutinizes the often-un-interrogated phallocentric bedrock upon which normative masculinity rests. Furthermore, by simulating anal sex with another masculine-presenting drag king, the performance interrogates the association between *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and heterosexuality. For both Drag King Fare and Reese Rider, the popular drag stage is a space to tell their stories of critique and do so in a playful and at times comedic way.

While the stories we tell may be personally empowering, the *process* of storytelling is a social not an individual process (Chepp 2016; Polletta 1998; 2002; 2010; Swerts 2015). Moving beyond *what* stories are told on stage to question *why* performers take to the stage to tell their stories, the connection between collectivity and storytelling becomes explicit. In addition to stories of critique, drag performers also tell stories intended to entertain as well as build collectivity and celebrate queerness.

Collectivity and Celebration

All of the performers I spoke with attested to the need to celebrate and to entertain audiences, as integral to "good drag". Relative newcomer to the drag stage, Sapphyre Poison, describes this need for collective celebration in the LGBTQ+ community,

> I feel like drag plays a lot of important roles but I think another big role is that it reminds people that as queer people, we can still

> celebrate. We can still have fun. We can still have a good time. We can rejoice in this grand tradition that we've had from years and years and years of performance art that is huge and is almost exclusively connected to the queer community.

For Sapphyre Poison, drag is a way to celebrate a long and deeply rooted tradition of LGBTQ2+ community resilience. Poison's point that drag serves as a 'reminder' that we queer folks deserve celebration and fun, illuminates not only the reality of struggle that many community members experience in a heterosexist society, but that drag is a vehicle for creating opportunities to celebrate. In this way, the process of telling drag stories is a means of connecting with others; it is an interactional and communal process.

In some cases, the stories themselves may not hold deep emotional meaning or explicit political significance to the performer or the audience; instead, these stories are told in an effort to encourage audience members to "let down their guard" and to have fun, a luxury many LGBTQ2+ folks do not have in other areas of their lives. Performances such as Johnny P. Rocket's version of the country hit *Hold My Beer* by Aaron Pritchett, a campy depiction of white cowboy masculinity, are intended to invite audiences to open themselves up to joy and lightness while simultaneously appropriating the kind of masculinity that is valorized and celebrated in straight men. Similarly, when all of the evening's performers in the Toronto Drag Kings troupe take to the stage to dance and lip-sync to LMFAO's club hit, *Shots*, the audience is expected to get rowdy, to party, and let the stressors of the everyday fall away. Rockin' Rolley's Elvis impersonation, Jasper Cox's interpretation of John Meloncamp, Johnny Flash's

version of Dolly Parton, and Xtacy Love's rendition of Adele's *Hello* are likewise intended to entertain. For many of the popular drag performers I spoke with, telling stories to entertain is a way of communicating to the audience that drag provides a space to be light, to feel comforted in shared joy, and to relax in an environment that celebrates LGBTQ2+ stories.

Building and Sustaining the Collective

Popular drag storytelling nurtures collectivity in other ways as well, such as financially and emotionally supporting other LGBTQ2+ community members. Building collectivity and fostering community support are primary motivators for many drag performers. For Rockin' Rolley, this community support was a major impetus in beginning to tell their story on drag stages. Rockin' Rolley recalls their early days of drag in the 1980s and the connection to community support,

> We'd been doing a lot of fundraising and stuff like that, especially during the era of HIV/AIDS and the bars were a second, a sort of a gathering point and support point…it was basically the only internal support as far as the movement went and the activism…Back in those days we were raising money for say you know like, funeral costs and stuff, you know, right across the board; and raising awareness, doing activism and sort of trying to keep the community up and functioning and not falling apart.

Rolley's words establish a clear connection between the process of drag storytelling and the creation and sustainment of LGBTQ2+ collectivity. Others have demonstrated how the repressive socio-political context of 1980s at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic served to united gays and lesbians and strengthen their collective identity (Van Dyke and Cress 2006); however, Rolley's experience adds another layer to this understanding. While external forces can

shape the characteristics of a given collective, internal processes, in this case drag, can also help to build and sustain collective ties. The relationship between drag storytelling and fundraising is a tradition that endures to this day.

Generating money for LGBTQ2+ organizations and community members continues to play a prominent role in popular drag spaces throughout North America. For example, members of the Imperial Court System (ICS) continue to integrate charity into the fabric of the organization. Beyond serving as a "structural arrangement that bestows upon its members' feelings of respectability, affiliation, affirmation, friendship, and in some cases, experiences of interpersonal power" (Schacht 2002:81), the ICS maintains strong connections to charitable organizations. For example, each year, participants elect Monarchs who are afforded the responsibility of choosing the charity wherein the local funds will be donated. Past charities include, the AIDS network, women's shelters and local LGBTQ2+ community organizations (Robin interview). For many popular drag performers, like Buck Wylde, giving back to the LGBTQ2+ community is central to why he performs, Wylde states, "Mostly it's to raise money for charity. That's like the 90% of it and 10% of it is honestly self-satisfaction." The long history and enduring relationship between drag storytelling and generating money for LGBTQ2+ community organizations demonstrates how the broader storytelling *process* works in conjunction with the stories themselves to build LGBTQ2+ collectivity, a collectivity that demonstrates our shared commitment to taking care of each other in the face of oppression.

Building collectivity takes many forms. In addition to charity work and financially supporting the LGBTQ2+ community, some performers seek to build collectivity through sharing their *own* stories of struggle and triumph as role models for others in the audience. For performers such as Justin Rockhard, the stage is a space to tell his story of gender as a transman. Donning leather pants, a fluorescent pink thong, and an unbuttoned black leather vest, Rockhard reveals his top surgery chest scars to the audience to establish both his sexiness and his trans-ness. His 80's glam rock style elevates the mood of the room as Rockhard uses his athletic build and feathered blond hair to lure the audience in with his sex appeal. For Rockhard, telling his story is a means of building connections within the LGBTQ2+ community, Justin states,

> It has to be clear that I am a trans performer…'cause a lot of guys are stealth and that's the way it stays so I wanted to change that... I had a guy, came off stage and I had a guy come out of the crowd…he grabbed me with both hands, looked me straight in the eye and said I just had top surgery a month ago. And it looked like he just didn't have anyone to relate to and tell. So I looked at him and I said, hurts like a motherfucker doesn't it [laughs]. And that's all I remember, and I was like, ok it's working and it continues to work and that's why I do it. I do it to support the trans community…put myself on display so people can have something tangible…to be a beacon for people to come to.

Despite his ability to 'pass' having many of the markers of idealized white masculinity, Rockhard uses the stage to tell stories in a way that renders his trans-ness visible. In this way, popular drag affords Rockhard an opportunity to not only weave his own story into the LGBTQ2+ narrative of who 'we' are, while having his story affirmed, but the visibility created via popular drag also serves as

an opportunity for building and strengthening collective ties to other LGBTQ2+ folks. These processes of affirmation also strengthens ties to the movement.

Whereas Justin Rockhard tells his story to affirm others stories like his in the audience, for other popular drag performers, having their stories substantiated by the audience strengthens performers' connections to a LGBTQ2+ collectivity. As a bartender in a "gay club" that regularly features popular drag performers, once-reluctant performer Sapphyre Poison, was urged by patrons and friends to perform. Since then, Sapphyre Poison has become a prominent figure in drag community in Ontario. For Sapphyre Poison, being celebrated for their body and sexuality on stage helped them to overcome some of the negative body narratives they developed growing up in a conservative Christian household. Sapphyre Poison recalls,

> I had a lot of issues accepting I was gay, and on top of that, I started to realize that I didn't identify being a man and I didn't identify as being a woman and doing drag allowed me to sort of bridge these two sides of myself into one identity on stage. When I started doing drag, I had severe body dysphoria…I felt very unattractive, I felt unsexy and felt uncomfortable in my skin. And through drag, I was really surprised to see that once I put on the dress, all these people, men and women, get really turned on…I found it really sort of freeing that I could erase all of the body standards that I have been trying to live up to and just to accept my body and learn to love it.

For Sapphyre Poison, the stage allowed them to share stories of who they are as a gender non-conforming, queer person, stories that in many contexts were erased or shunned, yet celebrated and affirmed on popular drag stages. Sharing these stories created a space for Sapphyre Poison to feel "at home" in their own body.

Both Sapphyre Poison and Justin Rockhard's stories demonstrate how personal stories of struggle and triumph can empower the storyteller as well as the audience by way of celebrating stories about gender non-conformity and LGBTQ2+ sexuality. In this way, the storytelling of popular drag is an interactive process, one that helps to build and sustain collectivity within the movement.

In short, the stories told on popular drag stages seek to resist and undermine the significance of hegemonic gender and sexuality. Popular drag performers tell these stories to connect with audiences in ways that builds and sustains LGBTQ2+ collectivity. Upon popular drag stages, performers tell stories of resilience, of joy, and of pain, all of which stem from their experiences as gender and sexual minorities. However, when contextualizing these stories in specific geo-spatial locations and intersecting power relations, it is evident that not all stories are afforded the same opportunity to contribute to the LGBTQ+ narrative being created in popular drag spaces. Therefore, understanding the role of storytelling in LGBTQ2+ protest requires grappling with not only *what* stories are told and *why*, but also *where* and *how* these stories are told. The findings reveal that while the former two aspects of the storytelling process build collectivity, the latter two undermine it.

Storytelling and Fragmentation

Unlike other approaches to drag analysis, storytelling frameworks require researchers to situate stories in their contextual and biographical factors. Doing so illustrates how storytelling processes can *undermine* collectivity and instead

create and sustain *fragmentation* within the LGBTQ2+ movement. Failure to address intersecting power relations that organize the contexts wherein drag stories are told delimits who can tell their stories on drag stages. Furthermore, the way intersecting power relations contribute to the establishment of popular drag norms and the subsequent regulation of drag storytellers also determines who is welcome and encouraged to tell their stories and contribute to the shared LGBTQ2+ narrative. This process ensures *certain* drag stories become centred while others are excluded or marginalized from the overall collective narrative building process. In this section I outline the mechanisms—the organization of popular drag spaces and interpersonal regulation—in popular drag storytelling that work to centre certain stories while excluding others. Simply stated, popular drag spaces are often inaccessible to LGBTQ2+ folks with physical disabilities and folks who are cash poor. Furthermore, interpersonal regulation fueled by the establishment of popular drag norms that are embedded in intersecting power inequities, marginalizes the storytelling of people of colour and non-binary LGBTQ2+ peoples.

Storytelling and Popular Drag Contexts

Popular drag shows[23] are most often held in established LGBTQ2+ locations such as 'gayborhoods' (Ghaziani 2010), clubs and bars that explicitly

[23] While other forms of queer protest such as alt-drag and queer cabaret exist in 'gayborhood' spaces, they are more likely to occur outside of popular drag bars and LGBTQ2+ venues.

cater to LGBTQ2+ patrons, or at community events such as annual Pride celebrations/protests. In larger cities such as Toronto, popular drag is a nightly staple in any number of bars along Church Street[24]. In fact, drag is a big lure for tourism and economic development in LGBTQ2+ communities. As such, drag is somewhat ubiquitous in these gayborhood spaces. It is this relationship that affirms drag as something central to 'our' communities and activism. As drag king Andy states, "You can't go anywhere in the city and catch a drag show, it's not like open mike or something like that. You come to the village to see drag shows. Know what I mean. It's kind of like something that's ours still." As Andy's statement reveals, drag is unique to queer spaces, most notably "the Village." Andy is not alone in making this connection, one that links drag stories to queerness and specific urban spaces. Further, not only is a connection established but it effectively affirms the collective ownership over community spaces; drag belongs to the village and the village is 'ours'.

Claiming urban spaces is a means of transforming them and symbolically imbuing them with new meaning (Currans 2017). For many popular drag performers, drag bars and LGBTQ2+ venues are 'safe spaces' wherein they can share their stories of gender and sexual non-conformity without the persecution these stories may garner in other contexts. In this way, queer spaces are culturally

[24] Church Street, also referred to as "the Village," is the prominent area of downtown Toronto populated by LGBTQ2+ owned businesses that cater to LGBTQ2+ patrons, community centers, and residences wherein many community members live.

significant havens that stave off the problems of the 'outside world' (Feinberg 1993; Hanhardt 2013). The boundary between the safety of the drag bar and the outside world is something many performers draw attention to. Renowned Hamilton drag queen, Robin Derring, has been performing since the 1960s. Throughout our interview, Robin clearly distinguishes between drag spaces and non-drag spaces, "I don't go out in the street in drag…I don't walk *anywhere* in drag. I take cabs or I get rides, one or the other. It's just in my day and age you didn't do that." While Robin evokes age as a contributing factor in their maintenance of the distinct boundary between drag in the street (unsafe) and drag in 'safe spaces' (rides and in the venue), it is clear that certain urban spaces allow for more 'freedom' to be in drag. For Robin, and many others, "the street" signifies a space of regulation or danger beyond the comfort and safety within the walls of a given bar or the streets of a particular area of town. However, the binary boundary between safe/unsafe venues requires further analysis using an intersectional lens. In other words, issues of (un)safety require deeper inquiry into who exactly these 'safe spaces' protect.

Storytelling and Accessibility

While some may relish the comfort that LGBTQ2+ safe spaces provide, there are obvious barriers to accessing these spaces. The observational data reveal that LGBTQ2+ 'safe spaces' are not accessible to all. In fact, with the exception of Pride, wherein drag shows occur on city streets, no popular drag venue in any city I observed was accessible by wheelchair. In one instance, the furniture in a

LGBTQ2+ venue was rearranged to accommodate the drag stage. However, in doing so the DJ booth was situated directly in front of the only "accessible[25]" washroom. Patrons were informed of their options to either crawl under the booth to use the washroom during the break, or ascend the large flight of stairs to use the washroom on the top floor. Simply stated, inaccessible spaces work to exclude LGBTQ2+ folks with physical disabilities not only from telling their stories on drag stages, but also engaging in the collective narrative created through drag and the interaction between drag storytelling and audience.

Popular drag shows are also often financially inaccessible to cash-poor LGBTQ2+ folks as well as inaccessible to queer youth. While some drag shows remain free to attend, it is becoming increasingly common for popular drag shows to demand a cover charge. This is particularly the case in cities wherein drag shows are not part of the everyday culture of a given bar or area of town. Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, cover charges ranged from five to twenty-five dollars. One drag collective has recently begun to offer VIP access for patrons who wish to pay more for a guaranteed seat. The tendency for popular drag to happen in bars and nightclubs, also erects a barrier to youth participation. In Ontario, anyone below the age of nineteen years old is prohibited from entering

[25] In this case, the bar itself did not have a ramp to facilitate access to the venue; however, the venue had a small flight of stairs that likely could have been negotiated with assistance. When inside the bar, the washroom itself could accommodate a wheelchair.

bars and nightclubs. At all of the popular drag shows[26] in which I attended, this minimum age was enforced. In these ways, context serves as a boundary making tool which restricts LGBTQ2+ youth and peoples with physical disabilities from participation in the collective process that happens through popular drag storytelling.

By paying attention to intersecting power relations, the complex tension between the safety afforded to some to participate in popular drag storytelling and the inaccessibility of these spaces to others sheds light on how specific stories and storytellers become centered in popular drag spaces. By not taking into account the myriad ways in which LGBTQ2+ folks experience the world, storytelling contexts can recreate forms of marginalization and exclusion within the community. Thus, while popular drag contexts are integral to the storytelling that seeks to dismantle the oppression rooted in hegemonic gender and sexuality, the way in which these spaces are organized can simultaneously work to fragment movement solidarity by disallowing all members of the LGBTQ2+ community access to these spaces.

Storytelling and Regulatory Boundary Work

While some LGBTQ2+ folks cannot access these spaces to share their stories, others who have sought to do so have become disenfranchised with the

[26] This is with the exception of Pride events wherein I observed popular drag. Pride events have popular drag in a mix of private and public spaces, the latter are not prohibitive to all youth.

process of building collectivity through storytelling in popular drag spaces due to the culture of racism that permeates the 'gayborhood'. During my observation, off-handed racist remarks made in 'jest' were all too common. Furthermore, storytellers themselves also recounted experiences of racism in popular drag spaces. For example, Red Mango, recalls their decision to cease participating in popular drag spaces:

> I didn't see myself reflected in the drag in this city. Like I felt like a lot of the drag queens I saw were extremely racist, flat out…I used to do back up dancing for a drag queen and she was Filipino and like much bigger and she got hated on in the dressing rooms by other drag queens. It was vicious to see how they police each other in something that's like for us.

Red Mango's experience with racism in popular drag gayborhood spaces demonstrates how racism effectively shape the collective boundaries of popular drag spaces. By situating drag in the realm of queerness, as a cultural practice that *should* be "for us," Red Mango draws the connection between their queerness and drag storytelling. However, the experiences of racism which ultimately led to Red Mango not feeling like their experiences were reflected through drag became a barrier to participation. Red Mango no longer tells their stories through popular drag.

The association between popular drag spaces and whiteness was a reoccurring theme in my interviews with QTBIPOC storytellers. Like Red Mango, Chase also sought to build collectivity through participating in popular drag spaces. I saw Chase perform at an event called *Kings on Demand*. This event was touted by many as an attempt to bring white and POC drag kings together in a

space to tell their stories together at a time when the kinging community in Toronto was bifurcating. Chase recalls this particular event and the tension that came with being in the 'gayborhood':

> We feel this tension being in those spaces because we know it's not necessarily safe for us…they've been very oppressive to us in certain circumstances, which is why we feel so unsafe there. We try to bring other QPOCs there to support us but they don't necessarily feel safe there and I don't necessarily blame them for not showing up.

For Chase and many other QTBIPOC storytellers, the link between popular drag and gayborhood spaces is problematic. The whiteness that is centered in gayborhood spaces creates racialized "tension". While shows like *Kings on Demand* are an attempt to "bridge the community" (interview with Drag King Flare) by encouraging QTPOC kings to participate in gayborhood spaces, failure to address how intersecting power relations work in popular drag spaces undermines the safety of many storytellers of colour and shapes the politics of belonging.

For some, queer spaces are presumed to prioritize whiteness unless otherwise stated. BeeCee Clette recalls feeling 'unsafe' in popular queer spaces:

> Yeah it was like a queer space, but not specifically a queer people of colour space and I didn't feel completely comfortable there. Um, and it's just small things like the way people do things like for example, if they were recording you, you would expect them to ask you for consent...it's just like happened that those terrible experiences happen in spaces that are mostly run by white folks.

Here, BeeCee Clette distinguishes "queer space" (read: white) from "queer people of colour space" to demarcate comfortable from uncomfortable spaces. Queer

spaces that do not explicitly aim to meet the needs of QTBIPOC folks can undermine intramovement solidarity as racism serves as a barrier to participating in collectivity building projects like storytelling.

Gender regulation in popular drag community spaces also establishes a boundary around whose stories are celebrated on stage. Despite the tendency for drag to challenge gender norms, many performers are critical of the explicit body regulation that happens in drag spaces, specifically for those who are trans* and/or gender non-binary. In some drag contexts, there are official policies that exclude transgender performers from participating in competitions. Justin Rockhard's experience uncovers how structural policies found in popular drag contexts create boundaries around *acceptable* and *unacceptable* drag. Rockhard recalls,

> I started at [popular Church Street venue], at the time they had a no-transguy policy…so there were certain stipulations that if I actually changed my gender legally I wouldn't be allowed to perform anymore so when I did, I was actually kicked off stage. So, I actually had an end of my career come about I would say six months into it.

While this particular policy has been retracted since the interview, the existence of this policy exemplifies how contextual spaces and their organizing logics work as boundary-marking mechanisms to shape the storytelling process.

Others have also experienced other, less formal policy-based, forms of bodily regulation in popular drag spaces. There is a gender paradox within popular drag spaces that simultaneously celebrates gender play while policing 'acceptable' gender. In recalling a situation where she was performing "in the

village," Judy recalls being "read"[27] for having a "bad tuck" [visible evidence of a penis while in drag]:

> There is policing of bodies for drag performers especially by judges and in competitions and by other drag queens and other performers. There is a push to get people to conform a bit from that standpoint…but when it's those specific points of the body that are often symbolic then there's definitely more of a political distinction than, 'oh you're a lazy drag queen' because you forgot to shave your armpits.

Despite being a popular practice in drag queen spaces, Judy notes how 'reading' specific body parts is not comedic but rather, there is political significance to having genitalia policed by others in drag spaces. As a trans woman, Judy notes the contradiction within drag spaces that police bodies in ways that challenge the storyteller's belonging. Similarly, Miss Fluffy Soufflé and Chase also reference body policing in popular drag spaces.

> That first time I walked out and I could feel people being like, 'what is that?' And even the judge was like, 'what are you?' and I was like, 'a boy?' and she was like, 'how do we know that?' And I pulled out my fake boob and waved it in her face…you hear the worst fat phobia and misogyny and racism, it was terrible and that's a part of Church Street. (Miss Fluffy Souffleé)

> It's just so interesting, 'cause I initially started in the Church street drag scene and there they have very strict rules when it comes to binding and facial hair and packing and what songs you are allowed to do and how you're supposed to present them…there's this um, I would say a trans hierarchy and a gender hierarchy and so um, there have been times I've experienced transphobia in the white community. (Chase)

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[27] 'Reading' is the practice of calling out someone's flaws in a comedic manner. It is most commonly practiced in popular drag queen communities.

In each case, the bodily regulation is rooted in part in the storyteller's non-binary gender identities.

In popular drag, norms around binary gender are common and they are often affirmed by creating a rigid distinction between on and off stage lives. For example, drag queen Jade Labrett articulates this boundary, "Jade has the sassiness…that all comes from Jade…But [name] *as a person…as a male*, I'm a very timid. Similarly, Victoria Parks distinguishes her on-stage from off stage gender, "even as [real name], he's a lot more shy than Victoria". It is common for popular drag performers to draw distinct lines between their gender off-stage and their gender on-stage (Schacht and Underwood 2004). Interestingly, neither Jade Labrett nor Victoria Parks identified any barriers to performing based on their bodies. Conversely, in the cases of Judy, Miss Fluffy Soufflé, and Chase, wherein non-binary and gender-bending bodies incited negative policing within the popular drag context, each of them were encouraged to seek alternative queer spaces outside of the popular drag context to tell their stories. These accounts demonstrate the relationship between bodily regulation and storytelling.

Applying a storytelling framework to drag illuminates the significance of storytelling context and regulatory norms. An examination of the role of context, *where* stories are told, reveals the explicit and implicit ways in which certain stories are excluded. Furthermore, *how* stories are told and regulated by others in drag contexts demonstrates the constraints in storytelling, constraints informed by

intersecting power relations, to determine whose stories are centered on popular drag stages.

Storytelling, Boundary Work, and Power Relations

While Canadians are increasingly becoming more 'tolerant of homosexuality' (Anderson and Fetner 2008), one need only turn on the television or scan the internet to witness the alarming rates of violence directed toward the most marginalized members of the LGBTQ2+ community. To resist, LGBTQ2+ folks carve out spaces to tell stories that challenge and subvert the narratives that justify this violence and marginalization. The stories told on popular drag stages are personal insofar as telling one's story of resistance to domination can empower the storyteller. These stories are also fundamentally social as they build bridges between audience and storyteller to extend collectivity within the movement (Rupp and Taylor 2003; Shepard 2010).

But as the findings above demonstrate, stories themselves do not exist in a vacuum. Like all social processes, storytelling is situated in larger social relations of power (Davis 2002; Polletta 1998; 2002; 2010; Polletta et al. 2011). Where we tell our stories also matters. Demonstrating how context and geospatial factors work to exclude folks with disabilities, cash-poor and LGBTQ2+ youth from accessing the stage to tell 'our' collective stories illustrates how certain stories become *centered* in popular drag. Furthermore, while uncovering racism in popular LGBTQ2+ spaces is not novel (see Giwa and Greensmith 2010; Hanhardt 2013; Ward 2008c), this analysis of drag storytelling clearly demonstrates how

racism fuels the regulation and marginalization of QTBIPOC stories. Likewise, this regulation of how stories are told also works to marginalize non-binary LGBTQ2+ storytellers. Looking beyond the potential and the intentions of the stories themselves uncovers the complex and intersectional power relations that shape this process, a process that results in centering certain LGBTQ2+ narratives and marginalizing or excluding others entirely. This process of *centering* and *decentering* is directly related to the power relations that shape the process of storytelling.

In their work on storytelling and power, Polletta et al. (2011) draw attention to the uneven process of storytelling. They state, "Disadvantaged people are often less well trained in the requirements of telling an institutionally appropriate story, they are less likely to be seen as narratively competent, and their very experiences make them less able to tell the kind of story that is required" (Polletta et al. 2011:123). The findings presented here add further insight. By uncovering the mechanisms within popular drag storytelling that create hierarchies , this chapter demonstrates how outright exclusion and marginalization also work to limit the potential for certain groups to resist through storytelling. In other words, while some social movement actors are "less well trained" (Polletta et al. 2011), others are explicitly excluded and marginalized from telling their stories based on the culturally sanctioned boundary work.

The findings have significant implications for movement collectivity and the articulation of political priorities. While groups within the same movement

can develop divergent ideologies and still maintain ties to the movement (Rupp and Taylor 1999), there is no doubt that internal movement fragmentation in the case of popular drag storytelling works to undermine movement solidarity. The racism within popular drag contexts has caused storytellers to distance themselves from popular LGBTQ2+ spaces. Bodily regulation has pushed others away from the 'gayborhood'. The failure to address and counter the power relations that fuel racism in conjunction with those that contribute to gender and sexual oppression within the LGBTQ2+ community work to divide and fragment the movement. These forms of exclusion and marginalization can have significant consequences. As Terriquez (2014) notes, when intersectional identities of queer social movement actors are woven into the collective consciousness of the movement, their activism becomes "intensified". Therefore, uncovering the mechanisms within storytelling that work *against* this intensification process to potentially diminish the movement's collectivity becomes a cautionary tale. Simply stated, failure to acknowledge the intersectional realities of queer lives while working for 'our' empowerment undermines the potential for collectivity of the movement.

Conclusion

Positioning popular drag as a form of storytelling has unearthed valuable insights into collectivity and fragmentation within the LGBTQ2+ movement. First, the findings demonstrate how sharing our stories and sharing in each other's stories can solidify a commitment to collective LGBTQ2+ struggle. Through popular drag, 'we' tell stories that critique hegemonic gender and sexuality. 'We'

tell stories that are empowering and that seek to empower others. In telling these stories, popular drag stories can unite us and build collectivity.

Yet storytelling processes can also undermine collectivity and fragment the movement. In the case of popular drag storytelling, failure to address the intersecting power relations that shape the experiences of LGBTQ2+ folks effectively excludes and/or marginalizes certain stories. The result is the *centering* of particular stories while simultaneously *decentering* the stories of LGBTQ2+ people of colour, folks who are disabled, gender non-conforming, youth, and cash-poor.

In this chapter, I have revealed the complexity of the relationship between storytelling, collectivity and fragmentation in popular drag storytelling. While I have demonstrated how storytelling can fuel the development of collectivity, I have also shown how efforts to resist hegemonic gender and sexuality, when done independently of resistance to other myriad intersecting forms of oppression that shape our collective experiences, popular drag storytelling creates internal movement hierarchies that undermine the development of a more expansive collective narrative. Yet, the resistance does not end here. Out of this exclusion and marginalization in popular drag spaces, comes other forms of queer resistance. This resistance is an attempt to draw on the LGBTQ2+ tactical repertoire of drag (Taylor et al. 2004), while also addressing the needs of the most marginalized in the movement and creating queer spaces in which to tell 'our' stories. I explore these stories and storytelling processes next.

Queer Cabaret and Intersectional Prefigurative Politics

In the previous chapter, I explored how performative storytelling can foster collective resistance while simultaneously marginalizing specific stories from being told. In the case of popular drag, performative storytelling is a valuable tool for fostering collective resistance to social inequality; however, left unchallenged by an intersectional framework, storytelling processes can marginalize the voices of QTBIPOC, youth, queers with disabilities, non-binary, and cash-poor folks. That said, it would be naïve, to assume that because certain voices become centred in *popular* drag spaces, the stories of LGBTQ2+ folks along the margins of the movement go untold. On the contrary, I use the pages in this chapter to delve deeper into how the marginalization and exclusion identified in chapter four unfolds to reveal new ways of understanding the relationship between storytelling, intersecting power relations, and free spaces. Specifically, I address the following guiding questions: first, how do members of the LGBTQ2+ movement who have been marginalized and/or excluded in popular storytelling spaces respond; and second, how does this response shape the development of LGBTQ2+ collectivity?

Answers to these questions reveal that LGBTQ2+ movement actors respond by carving out new opportunities to tell their stories by moving beyond the 'gayborhood' (Ghaziani 2014) and expanding the parameters of drag storytelling to include an array of stylistic forms all of which are encompassed in the storytelling styles of 'queer cabaret'. Queer cabaret is an attempt to *re-center*

the power relations of LGBTQ2+ performative storytelling—a process informed by intersectional prefigurative politics—in order to provide marginalized LGBTQ2+ peoples with a platform to tell their stories, build community, and contribute to the overall collective narrative. In doing so, queer cabaret is an opportunity to expand the kinds of stories 'we' tell and complicate popular LGBTQ2+ movement narratives by embedding resistance to racism, classism, ableism, and normative body standards into the LGBTQ2+ struggle for justice.

As a case study, queer cabaret renders explicit the relationship between storytelling and context to illustrate how imbuing storytelling spaces with intersectional prefigurative politics is integral to fostering collectivity that moves beyond a political focus on gender and sexual oppression and instead, develops narratives of intersectional resistance. In doing so, LGBTQ2+ performative storytellers move beyond the gayborhood to tap into the potential of social movement storytelling for building collectivity, while also building a collective consciousness rooted in intersectional politics. Moving beyond the gayborhood is an attempt to minimize the ideological and biographical schisms discussed in the previous chapter. However, in doing so, queer cabaret introduces new challenges to LGBTQ2+ collectivity. I now turn briefly to the pertinent literature on the role of space and place in movement organizing to situate these insights.

Thinking about Social Movement Spaces

Context is key to shaping not only what stories are told but who gets to tell them (Polletta 1998; Swerts 2015). As the previous chapter demonstrated,

storytelling contexts are shaped by intersecting power relations. Specifically, storytelling that occurs in popular LGBTQ2+ gayborhoods effectively marginalizes people and their stories along lines of race, class, ability, and age. In this chapter, I seek to make these power relations even more explicit by focusing on how queer cabaret storytellers construct storytelling spaces and how that in turn, shapes the stories 'we' tell and the political ideologies 'we' prioritize.

Amin Ghaziani's work encourages us to interrogate the enduring role of the contemporary 'gayborhood'. According to Ghaziani (2014), the gayborhood is evolving in ways that demonstrate the changing gay urban landscape. In what some have dubbed a 'post-gay' era, wherein gays emphasize *similarities* to straight folks rather than *differences* (Ghaziani 2011), urban gayborhoods are undergoing significant changes (Ghaziani 2014). For example, gayborhoods are becoming somewhat more heterogeneous insofar as they are less exclusive to gays and lesbians and increasingly becoming home to straight folks (Ghaziani 2014). Yet, this does not mean that gayborhoods are becoming obsolete or insignificant. On the contrary, gayborhoods that have strong institutional frameworks, including community centres, bars, and local business, continue to play a significant role in urban gay life. Further, while there is evidence that the increasing presence of straight folks in areas like Chicago's Boystown and Andersonville points to heterogeneity in the gayborhood, gayborhoods remain relatively racially homogeneous and dominated by whiteness (see Ghaziani 2014). There are clear parallels between urban gayborhoods/spaces in Canada and the changes Ghaziani

(2014) studies in Chicago. And much like his acknowledgement that queer folks of colour have built community outside of these prominent gayborhoods, analysis of the collective movement work that happens beyond the gayborhood is beyond the scope of Ghaziani's (2014) work. However, it is the kind of movement work that happens outside/along the margins of the gayborhood spaces that I wish to explore further. Therefore, I turn to earlier scholarship on social movement 'free spaces' to help situate my analysis of queer cabaret storytelling, context, and intersecting power relations.

In the 1980s, scholars began to theorize the significance of free spaces in democratic social movements. According to Evans and Boyte (1986), "free spaces, are the environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue" (p. 17). Thus, free spaces occupy a valuable position "between private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence, and vision" (Evans and Boyte 1986:17). This 'valuable position' is characterized by the existence of relative autonomy, a key characteristic that distinguishes them from other social movement contexts (Evans and Boyte 1986; Gamson, W. 1996; Groch 2001; Polletta 1999). As William A. Gamson (1996) states, "[f]or an oppositional culture to develop and become shared and to plan collective actions, the potential challengers need some autonomous space where they are—at least temporarily—shielded from social control by agents of the policies or cultural codes being challenged" (p. 28). In

other words, movements need autonomous free spaces in order to develop the oppositional consciousness necessary to mobilize members and engage in movement action (Evans and Boyte 1986; Gamson, W. 1996; Groch 2001; Polletta 1999). Not surprisingly, the logic of the free space has been used (and amended[28]) in myriad social movement studies to explain how movement actors mobilize around specific political issues and carve out spaces that allow them to develop "counterculture" (Evans and Boyte 1986) or "oppositional culture" (Gamson, W. 1996).

Free spaces have provided social movement scholars with a means to explain how the early seeds of resistance grow, the ways in which movements mobilize new ideas, build collectivity, and stoke potential action at the community-based and/or cultural level. However, the far-reaching utility of free spaces has led some to critique the concept for its lack of specificity (see Polletta 1999. For example, research that employs the free space concept as a means of understanding social movement action has all too often blurred key analytical components of analysis such as the conflation of culture with structure (Polletta 1999). To address this imprecision, Polletta (1999) parses out different free space structures, each of which is characterized by their associational ties. Polletta's

[28] For example, Polletta (1999) recognizes that scholars have used different names to distinguish specific types of free spaces including 'havens', "safe spaces" (Gamson, W. 1996) and "abeyance structures" (Taylor 1989).

(1999) articulation of *prefigurative free spaces* is particularly pertinent to a study of collectivity in the LGBTQ2+ movement.

According to Polletta (1999), prefigurative free spaces are "[e]xplicitly political and oppositional (although their definition of "politics" may encompass issues usually dismissed as cultural, personal, or private), they are formed in order to prefigure the society the movement is seeking to build by modelling relations that differ from those characterized by mainstream society" (p. 11). In the case of the LGBTQ2+ movement, performative storytelling spaces are prefigurative insofar as they create a vision of society that does not take hegemonic power relations as a given.

To ensure the existence of prefigurative politics, groups will often restrict spaces to keep 'Others' out. As William A. Gamson (1996) states, "whenever there is a significant power difference, the less powerful group needs some safe space where they are free—for a while—to be themselves without pressure or self-consciousness about what members of the more powerful group may think or how they will react" (p. 37). The use of exclusion (for example, men's exclusion from women's only spaces) is an attempt to remove the group from the power dynamics found in other 'non-free spaces'. Similarly, LGBTQ2+ spaces also operate on prefigurative politics insofar as they provide shelter from the *institutionalized normative heterosexuality* (Seidman 2009) of social life by creating spaces for LGBTQ2+ folks and allies to coalesce. This inclusion/exclusion boundary making is necessary, according to Polletta (1999) to

ensure the movement work that happens in prefigurative free spaces is rooted in the "symmetrical" associational ties—characterized by "reciprocity in power, influence, and attention"—of participants (p. 11). In other words, those within the boundary of a given free space in prefigurative structures are presumed to have (or at least aspire to) similar access and relations to larger structural axes of power. It is the notion of *symmetrical association* that I wish to investigate further here, particularly in light of the findings presented in chapter four.

Symmetrical associational ties require further examination for two reasons, both of which are related to presumptions made about power relations. First, prefigurative free spaces are disproportionately presumed to be used by the 'social underdogs' to carve out spaces free from hegemonic ruling relations. These spaces are used to develop counter cultures and ideologies in order to resist those normative relations of rule in other 'non-free' spaces (see Gamson, W. 1996; Gamson 1997; Groch 2001; Ross 1990). Yet with any instance of inclusion/exclusion boundary work, more complex power dynamics are at play. For example, consider the evolution of "women's only" spaces. Whereas women's only free spaces were integral to consciousness raising in lesbian feminist sub-sets of the 1960s and 70s feminist movement in North America (see Taylor and Whittier 1992), the boundary work occurring in some 'women's only' free spaces has also come under fire for recreating hierarchies among women. In the case of the Michigan Womyn's Festival, a popular feminist 'free space', transwomen have been excluded in ways that reaffirm the hierarchies among

women (Gamson, J. 1996). Here, while the festival emerged out of a desire for a space where women were free from everyday patriarchal rule, contemporary exclusion of transwomen illuminates the complex and problematic ways in which nuanced power relations influence prefigurative politics.

Second, the notion of symmetrical associational ties presumes relations within a prefigurative 'free space' are characterized by "reciprocity in power, influence, and attention" (Polletta 1999:11), a logic that does not fully account for the complex and intersectional relations of ruling that shape the dynamics of a particular space. While free spaces are spaces wherein movement actors are shielded from the agents of power they seek to disrupt, as feminists of colour have long argued, power relations are not so simple. Instead, *all* social contexts are shaped by intersecting relations of power (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; 2016; Denis 2008; Zinn and Dill 1996). Thus, it is not surprising when studies find that popular LGBTQ2+ safe spaces tend to reproduce whiteness (see Fetner, Elafros, Bortolin, and Drechsler 2012; Giwa and Greensmith 2010), able-bodiedness (Mingus 2015), and economic elitism (Hanhardt 2013). Therefore, free spaces such as the ones found in popular drag storytelling contexts are far from symmetrical in the way power shapes whose stories are told and whose are not. In fact, as the previous chapter demonstrated, it is the asymmetrical relations of power that work to marginalize and exclude certain LGBTQ2+ peoples from telling their stories. Therefore, while free spaces are necessarily autonomous, free spaces are complex in the way power operates within them. Intersecting power

relations can shape the internal dynamics of storytelling 'free spaces' to perpetuate specific forms of exclusion and marginalization while simultaneously challenging others. Clearly power relations are at play in complex ways *within* free spaces and thus requires further investigation.

Ultimately, the literature on free spaces affirms to the need for movements to have opportunities to share ideas (and tell stories) away from the rule of oppressive power relations; however, the literature leaves space for analyses of *how complex power relations are addressed within free spaces*. Further, the 'free spaces' literature has not fully explored the significance of physical space in consciousness raising projects (see Polletta 1999:12). Work that examines physical space, such as Ghaziani's (2010; 2014) has helped to supplement this body of scholarship, as it delves into the significance of LGBTQ2+ physical space in the 'gayborhood' (Ghaziani 2014) and 'lesbian enclaves' (Ghaziani 2015). However, while Ghaziani's work points to the significance of space and place, much work remains to be done on how social movement actors forge LGBTQ2+ collectivity outside of prominent gayborhoods. In the previous chapter, I unpacked the mechanisms of popular drag storytelling processes that centered specific stories of resistance to hegemonic gender and sexuality, while marginalizing other stories and storytellers along race, class, ability, age, and gender lines. Yet, the story does not end there. I now unpack the insights garnered through my research in queer cabaret spaces.

Queer Cabaret and LGBTQ2+ Collectivity

Queer cabaret diverges from popular drag in notable ways. As an umbrella term, queer cabaret encompasses a range of diverse storytelling styles including (but not limited to) drag, spoken word, dance, song, comedy, and burlesque. For marginalized LGBTQ2+ peoples, queer cabaret is an opportunity to tell their stories and have those stories celebrated and affirmed. Not unlike the role popular drag plays in LGBTQ2+ movement building, queer cabaret is a means of creating and mobilizing solidarity *beyond the gayborhood*. Yet, unlike popular drag, queer cabaret storytelling is informed by intersectional prefigurative politics that are shaped by a commitment to re-centering the power dynamics of the storytelling process—moving storytellers and their stories from the margins to the centre—to build internal solidarity. In order to re-centre the storytelling process, queer cabaret operates on a set of prefigurative politics that prioritize *centering* marginalized peoples, through attention to physical location, accessibility, and the development of 'safe space' politics.

Queer Cabaret and Physical Location

Prefigurative politics require movement actors to infuse their protest with the very changes they wish to see as a result of the movement itself (Leach 2013). Therefore, centering the stories of marginalized LGBTQ2+ peoples is an attempt to subvert the hierarchies that oppress groups of people within and beyond movement contexts. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, prominent LGBTQ2+ spaces may signify safety to some group members; however, those

same spaces can signify oppression and violence to others. To address this, queer cabaret events occur most often[29] in physical locations outside of the realm of popular gayborhood spaces including cafés, community centres, public libraries, restaurants, bars, and hotel conference rooms throughout a given city. Organizers and storytellers are intentional about holding events *outside* of popular LGBTQ2+ spaces. This transformation of 'other' public spaces carries great political significance (Currans 2017). As Ghaziani (2014) notes, the prominence of white cisgender men in contemporary gayborhoods can motivate non-white, women, and trans folks to build "their own separate communities" (p. 227). Largely driven by the work of QTBIPOC, cash-poor and/or precariously employed, disabled, and non-binary peoples, queer cabaret happens in locations where 'other' queers live.

Organizing beyond the bounds of the gayborhood requires explicit attention to asserting the queerness of the space. This communication takes place most notably through promotional materials. These materials make explicit *whose* stories are celebrated and shared on stage. For example, one of the queer cabaret groups I observed advertised a particular show inviting queer folks to, "witness seasoned performers, new performers, shape-shifters, trouble-makers who are People of colour, Black, Indigenous, queer, genderqueer, trans, people of varying body sizes, people of all abilities, people who are playing with burlesque or re-invent it completely!" (Unapologetic Burlesque, from the ground which we

[29] I theorize the role of queer cabaret events that occur *within* the bounds of the 'gayborhood' in chapter six.

grow). Another advertisement indicates that the show features the stories of "LGBTQ Youth of Colour" (D.M.). Another still, encourages community members to come and participate in "the floating cabaret of queer, trans and two spirit people of color bliss, dreams, sweat, sweets & nightmares" (M.W.C). In each case, promotional materials are necessarily explicit about whose stories are to be celebrated on queer cabaret stages, particularly because they are not tethered to urban spaces that are known for their association with LGBTQ2+ peoples or the movement.

Whereas promotional materials communicate *whose* stories are being celebrated on queer cabaret stages, they also communicate messages about who is welcome to share in those stories through the articulation of a queer cabaret group's politics. For example, promotional material that indicates events are "all ages," "wheelchair accessible," and include ASL[30] interpretation communicate the commitment to centering often-marginalized LGBTQ2+ peoples. Thus, promotional materials signify who 'we' are as a community when celebrating 'our' stories and creating spaces for 'us'. As we saw in chapter four, not all LGBTQ2+ spaces are welcoming of POC, trans*, disabled, cash-poor and/or the precariously employed. Using promotional materials to communicate queer cabaret's explicit commitment to celebrating those stories and movement members that are disproportionately marginalized and/or excluded from

[30] American Sign Language

prominent LGBTQ2+ collectivity, is a direct attempt to organize storytelling spaces with the prefigurative politics of intersectionality, politics that attempted to address marginalization by moving specific stories from 'margin to centre' (hooks 2000).

In addition to promotional materials, the commitment to centering marginalized peoples is evident in how storytellers speak about who they envision in their audiences and who their stories are intended to reach. Manish, a storyteller who uses comedy to tell stories of his own experiences of queerness and trauma, states,

> It's the folks who…those who've been pushed out of the room, who were never allowed to be in the room in the first place and kind of re-imagine. Not re-imagining the people but re-imagining the room…for me in terms of priorities of who I am writing for, I prioritize queer and trans people of colour, I prioritize poor and working class folks…and I prioritize people with disabilities and chronic illnesses.

Manish's quote aptly articulates the relationship between space, storytelling, and the intersectional prefigurative politics of queer cabaret. For Manish, storytelling enabled him to prioritize not only his own stories about queer sexuality, racism, mental health, and trauma, but to reach out to others in the LGBTQ2+ community to mobilize and strengthen collectivity. Through queer cabaret, Manish aspires to build collectivity specifically with LGBTQ2+ folks who are disproportionately excluded and marginalized in wider society as well as in popular LGBTQ2+ contexts. Further, by "re-imagining the room," Manish goes beyond inclusion politics to *re-prioritize* who his stories are intended to reach. Doing so, he

demonstrates the connection between the intersectional politics of queer cabaret storytelling and the significance of physical space. Therefore, the creation of queer cabaret spaces provides opportunities for marginalized peoples to build collectivity through the shared experiences of marginalization. Building collectivity outside of prominent LGBTQ2+ locations requires queer cabaret organizers and storytellers to engage in overt forms of collective identity work. However, advertising and intention are one thing, creating storytelling contexts that are not only welcoming of marginalized peoples, but ensuring these spaces enable collectivity and solidarity building is quite another.

Queer Cabaret and Accessibility

Infusing storytelling processes with intersectional prefigurative politics requires social movement actors to demonstrate this priority, and queer cabaret storytellers do this through an explicit commitment to accessibility. This commitment to accessibility is a key mechanism for movement mobilization. My conversation with Red Mango, a storyteller and community organizer who cites racism as a key motivator for leaving popular drag spaces, illustrates how accessibility can mobilize storytellers to participate. Red Mango states,

> What I love about a lot of the performance spaces that I'm involved with is the commitment to accessibility. I feel that there are a lot of spaces within the queer community that do not make that commitment. Most of the village is not accessible.

For Red Mango, the commitment to accessibility distinguishes queer cabaret from the prominent LGBTQ2+ spaces found in the village. A commitment to accessibility is a political marker that connects queer cabaret to intersectional

politics that first, acknowledge that accessibility is needed in queer community spaces, and second, ensure that barriers to accessibility do not impede various LGBTQ2+ peoples from participating in collective storytelling.

Despite the formal commitment, accessibility can mean different things to different people. When probed further to explain what accessibility means, curators and storytellers have a range of answers. For some, accessibility is fundamentally about physical access. For example, Miss Fluffy Soufflé states,

> Uh, the biggest ones for me are like, can people get in the door and can people pee. Then beyond that, the dream would be that there's ASL interpretation at every one; that physically everyone can move around the space…if you can't pee, it's not accessible. Bottom line.

Accessibility is often framed in terms of physical access. Since many popular LGBTQ2+ spaces are inaccessible to those with mobility devices, it is not surprising to report that the vast majority of queer cabaret shows occur in spaces beyond the bounds of prominent LGBTQ2+ contexts. (Each queer cabaret show I attended during my fieldwork occurred in a venue that were wheelchair accessible). Further, curators go to great lengths to communicate that washrooms are open to all through signage, emcee announcements, and communication with venue staff. Attention to ensuring LGBTQ2+ folks with mobility devices can attend and gender non-binary folks can use the washroom feature prominently in how curators and storytellers speak about accessibly. Yet for others, accessibility extends far beyond these forms of physical access to include other necessary considerations.

The commitment to accessibility also involves explicit commitment to inverting hierarches. In this way, groups that are often marginalized in popular LGBTQ2+ spaces are not only included but given priority. For example, in some cases, an area near the front of the stage is reserved for "priority peoples" including those with visual impairments. In other cases, a "scent free" zone is cordoned off at the front of the room, in an attempt to ensure folks with chemical injuries can participate. Educational materials were also handed out at one particular show encouraging audience members to become more involved in adopting scent-free lifestyles as a commitment to queer accessibility. In cases where ASL is provided, deaf LGBTQ2+ folks are given priority seating in the front as well. Wherein ASL is unavailable, storytellers and organizers ensure that a screen be made available to project closed captioning/subtitles. Each of these measures is framed as an attempt to ensure the queer cabaret storytelling process is accessible to disproportionately-marginalized queers.

In many cases, accessibility measures also extend into the realm of socioeconomic status. Many "artivists" (to use Red Mango's terminology) who tell their stories on queer cabaret stages experience financial precariousness and have made a commitment to ensuring queer cabaret is financially accessible for audience members as well. In contrast to many drag performances wherein cover charges and tipping expectations are high, queer cabaret storytelling events typically offer a Pay What You Can (PWYC) model. For queer cabaret groups such as *Unapologetic Burlesque*, a queer cabaret style show that runs between 3-4

times per year, the commitment to accessibility is integral to the group's mandate as evidenced by their formal mission statement wherein they state, "…providing a sliding scale Pay What You Can showcase door fee and engaging in community fundraising initiatives to keep the showcase financially accessible as well as raise funds to provide performer and crew honorarium" (Unapologetic Burlesque). In other cases, community members are encouraged to 'pay it forward' and donate to ensure that a certain portion of the tickets are made available to community members at no cost. One particular promotion states,

> We hope to fill [the event space] with the energy of as many queer womyn, trans* folks and allies as possible, especially younger generations, newly queer-identified womyn and cash poor queer and trans* folks. To help make this happen we are offering a "pay it forward" program, where people have the option to purchase tickets for people who cannot otherwise afford to come. People simply purchase extra tickets at the box office, which will then be distributed to people in need who request them. (SS promo material)

Overall, the commitment to financial accessibility is an attempt to address the complex barriers that could potentially prohibit LGBTQ2+ folks from participation and made every effort to remove those barriers, to create a space to share stories or resistance. The commitment to accessibility distinguishes queer cabaret from popular drag storytelling spaces insofar as intersectional prefigurative politics effectively create increased opportunities for marginalized LGBTQ2+ peoples to participate in the storytelling process—to become part of the narrative of who 'we' are. Therefore, at the very outset, queer cabaret, positions itself as a form of storytelling that seeks to build collectivity by ensuring

even the most marginalized LGBTQ2+ folks have access to this process. Yet access is just the beginning. Much like the relationship between drag and safe spaces discussed in the previous chapter, queer cabaret storytellers also recognize the need for creating a sense of safety. Yet, what queer cabaret 'safe spaces' look like and how safety is communicated to audience members differs greatly from the messages of safety that many drag storytellers describe in gayborhood spaces.

Queer Cabaret and 'Safe Spaces'

In conjunction with accessibility, queer cabaret spaces also build upon a 'safe space' ideology. LGBTQ2+ 'safe spaces' politics have garnered a significant amount of attention lately. The use of trigger warnings, for example, has created significant debate amongst LGBTQ2+ peoples with some asserting the need for safe spaces to protect and heal from the myriad traumas that are inflicted upon members of the community. Others argue that 'trigger warnings' and safe spaces are part of the "neo-liberal agenda" that threatens the core of queer life (Halberstam 2014). In terms of storytelling spaces, as last chapter revealed, popular drag spaces are not necessarily 'safe' for all. As a corrective, queer cabaret prioritizes a commitment to community care through the creation of safe spaces.

Safety is intrinsically tied to accessibility in queer cabaret spaces. Ensuring marginalized LGBTQ2+ folks can access queer cabaret storytelling spaces is the beginning; ensuring that people feel comfortable in these spaces is also paramount. The creation of queer cabaret safe spaces allows many LGBTQ2+

folks to tell their personal stories on stages—stories that are often raw and vulnerable—as they know they will be supported in doing so. For those who tell their stories on queer cabaret stages, this commitment to safety is imperative. For some, safe spaces are a means of respecting the personhood of community members. For example, in articulating what the safety of queer cabaret spaces offer, Lady Boy Sparkle states, "[Y]ou don't feel threatened and you're not there to threaten anybody else so we can educate one another on topics that are controversial and that we can fight together. We're still trying to find ways to fight together." For Lady Boy Sparkle, the absence of threat is a means of sharing, creating discourse, and finding ways to create the solidarity needed to engage in collective LGBTQ2+ struggles.

Many LGBTQ2+ peoples fear for their safety. This fear is amplified when engaging in political protest. In these cases, being able to tell their stories and connect with others in the safety of queer cabaret storytelling spaces is integral to ensuring our complex and diverse stories are woven into the collective narrative building process. As Womynista states,

> [B]y creating space, a safe space, and letting people just come and speak about their experiences or share their poetry or music without being fearful or fearing retaliation. I think that's different from different forms of activism because rioting can be dangerous, particularly dangerous for people of colour for queer people. We wanted a space where we could perform and participate in social change without fearing repercussions, without fearing in retaliation or brutality.

As Womynista's statement demonstrates, the safety cultivated in queer cabaret contexts is a means of ensuring that narrative building projects create

opportunities for voices that may not otherwise be included, to become part of the collective. Safety enables marginalized voices to move onto the stage in ways that do not introduce further risk. In other words, queer cabaret storytelling facilitates collective narrative building in ways that avoid the pitfalls of other collective identity tactics that effectively prioritize the needs of those most privileged in the LGBTQ2+ movement.

Whereas some associate safety with neo-liberalism (Halberstam 2014), queer cabaret attempts to link safety with a commitment to communal care. For example, in my conversation with Venus Venom about what safety means in the context of queer cabaret storytelling, Venus Venom states, "Safe, means safe for *everyone*. You don't pick and choose who it's safe for." In other words, creating spaces that are accessible and afford storytellers a sense of safety is one way in which queer cabaret re-centers the storytelling process by ensuring *all* LGBTQ2+ peoples feel safe in order to build group collectivity.

In addition to discourses of safety as a means of ensuring communal care, practices of caretaking featured prominently in queer cabaret spaces. For example, it is not uncommon for designated active listeners to be made available at a show should anyone in the audience feel 'triggered' by any of the stories shared on stage. In my time observing queer cabaret, I saw performances that addressed issues such as sexual violence, the militarization of culture, and police brutality. Active listeners—community volunteers that are identifiable through an armband or other marker—are made available to debrief with audience members who may

want to discuss the content of the stories shared on stage. They are implemented to help diffuse any emotional trauma that may arise during a given event. While emotions play a central role in all social movements (Jasper 1998; 2011), active listeners demonstrate a commitment to collective sharing in pain and healing. In this way, active listeners are not only a means of committing to *collective* healing but their presence in queer cabaret spaces demonstrates the prefigurative politics of queer cabaret. In this way, the relationship between the storytelling event and the members of the audience becomes clear; storytelling is a communal process that depends on an ethic of communal care.

Communal care and safety are supported by a framework of 'rules' that guide behavior in queer cabaret contexts. These rules distinguish queer cabaret from other spaces wherein a lack of guidelines invites potential danger or trauma. Consider the distinction as Pandora Rockstar understands it:

> I went to [a show] a couple of weeks ago and all of the performers were white people and I was one of the only POC people in the crowd. And I don't know, I felt like there were no rules, you know. Nothing implemented. Like, when you go to the [queer cabaret] shows, they are accessible…Accessibility, active listeners, and then reserving seats for people who really need it…They talk a lot, they hand out fliers that talk about boundaries and consent. You don't really get to see all that in a mainstream place.

Here, the boundary is drawn between 'mainstream' spaces and queer cabaret. The rules that govern queer cabaret ensure that accessibility and communal care are placed at the forefront of storytelling events. These rules also govern how audience members are encouraged to respond to the stories and storytellers featured on stage. For example, in cases wherein ASL is not available, screens are

constructed close to the stage. Screens display closed captioning and at times provide insight into the storyteller's intentionality behind their story and their requests for how to approach the story as well as themselves following the event. For example, performative stories that are associated with sexual assault, provide trigger warnings. In some cases, wherein performers remove their clothing, the audience is reminded to ask before offering unsolicited hugs and refrain from taking photographs. These rules, are a clear indication of the prefigurative politics that shape queer cabaret, politics that seek to ensure consent is woven into the fabric of LGBTQ2+ organizing.

The rules that guide queer cabaret safe spaces are a means of re-centering the power dynamics of LGBTQ2+ storytelling. The establishment of rules signifies a corrective to the problems that occur in popular LGBTQ2+ and other social spaces. Not only does the re-centering that happens in queer cabaret spaces prioritize who is in these spaces and subsequently who can tell their stories and share in that collective process, but in doing so, queer cabaret creates opportunities for telling *very different stories* than those made popular in drag storytelling. In the section that follows I examine how storytellers use queer cabaret spaces to tell stories of who 'we' are as an LGBTQ2+ collective in ways that go beyond critiquing hegemonic gender and sexuality to also incorporate critiques of racism, classism, ableism, and normative body standards.

Expanding the narrative of who 'we' are

Unlike performative storytelling in prominent gayborhoods, queer cabaret is far more varied in form. Storytellers use an array of stylistic approaches to tell their tales of resistance and survival. Beyond that, queer cabaret is a space wherein storytellers can complicate prominent LGBTQ2+ narratives to build collectivity and expand the kinds of stories 'we' tell. Like the stories told in popular drag spaces, queer cabaret provides a space for LGBTQ2+ peoples to have one's self affirmed and build LGBTQ2+ collectivity through stories; however, unlike popular drag storytelling that builds a collective consciousness primarily around who 'we' are in resistance to hegemonic gender and sexuality, the stories told on queer cabaret stages weave critiques of racism, classism, ageism, and body normativity into fabric of who 'we' are and how 'we' define our politics.

Resilience and Intersectional Consciousness Raising

Through queer cabaret, storytellers use the stage to share their own stories of resilience and resistance to complex forms of oppression and have those stories affirmed by others. In some cases, the opportunity to share one's story is revolutionary.

In the case of BeeCee Clette for example, the stage allows them to work through their complicated feelings about their participation in survival sex work. For BeeCee Clette, this work and the challenges that accompany it fuel their drive

to express their struggle through performative storytelling. In response to my question about motivation, BeeCee Clette responds,

> I want to talk about my personal experience in sex work as a sort of a newcomer to the city um, as an Asian person, as a queer person…it's about telling those stories and just making those stories visible and just to have people be aware of them…I'm queer so I do these queer performances about sex work. I couldn't do that there [referring to mainstream LGBTQ2+ spaces], whereas places like [queer cabaret] for example, I feel like I was comfortable with doing it.

Motivated by bringing complex struggles and marginalized identities to the fore, BeeCee Clette's stories are an effort to draw connections between their Asian-ness, queerness and their struggles with sex work. Recalling BeeCee Clette's performance, one that evoked complex emotions of empowerment and sadness in myself as an audience member, I asked them to unpack the process that fueled that particular story. BeeCee Clette explains,

> It's a complicated issue… it seems like there is this mainstream discourse where sex workers are really proud of what they are doing and they seem to have this typical look and attitude and politics. The politics that basically say that we are sex workers and we are proud of it. And of course, there are so many other things that are not that right… so I wanted to talk about the perspectives that are not that, when people are actually not actively choosing to be a sex worker and that sometimes people are not proud of being that because of all these main things and I feel like the fact that people can be proud of it is a real privilege and that they can be out about it, while in my case I don't feel like I could be out about it…I wanted to talk about those things in that environment because in real life I can't really talk about it.

Building a story around the complex relationship between race, class, autonomy, and sex work within the context of a safe space can shape not only the political conversations associated with LGBTQ2+ storytelling, but the conception of who

'we' are and what 'our' needs are. The intersectional prefigurative politics that are woven into the contexts in which stories are told through queer cabaret, expands the collective narrative in ways that allow for more complex discussions of LGBTQ2+ experiences.

In a similar vein, Red Mango uses the stage to weave critiques of racism and classism into the collective LGBTQ2+ narrative. Set to an audio collage of contemporary pop and hip hop, internet memes, and voiceover, Red mango's performative dance tells a story that encourages the audience to interrogate prominent narratives of poor, black, women and discourses of 'ratchet women.' In one segment of the performance, the music is overlain with an instructional dance tutorial. As Red Mango moves across the stage, the audience becomes aware that the video is instructing them on the proper technique for twerking. They are urged to "spread your legs, open your feet, knees over your legs, if you want your hips to go forward you put your thumbs on the back of your hips and push" [field notes, not verbatim]. Just as Red Mango is ready to twerk, the music changes and Miley Cyrus' song cuts in with the lyrics "this is our house, these are our rules, we can't stop, we won't stop". At this point, Red Mango bows their head and sits down. For Red Mango, this performance enabled them to tell a story of critique particularly around popular narratives of racialized women and the appropriation of black culture. In discussing the intentionality behind this piece, Red Mango states,

> The main intention was to like explore the word Ratchet. I find that it's been in popular discourse lately…that word was meant to put

> down women of colour, women of size, low income, so just to like break that down and explore why people use the word Ratchet and what things are associated with that. If you Google 'ratchet', you get some twerking videos of people in the club where people take them without their consent. The other piece of music I used in that piece was the Miley Cyrus just to like play on the fact that she exploited black women in her music video exoticizing them at the MTV awards. I had Sweet Mary Brown, she went viral with this video she had explaining a fire that happened in her apartment building and then someone auto-tuned it and it became this meme that went around.

For Red Mango, the queer cabaret stage allowed them not only to share a story that critiques racism, classism, and cultural appropriation found in popular media spaces, but to connect that critique with intersectional consciousness raising. While the storytelling process allowed Red Mango to explore their own feelings about this, the audience at this particular show was also urged to investigate the implications of these popular discourses. In doing so, Red Mango firmly grounds critiques of racism and classism in queer cabaret storytelling.

While not all stories shared on queer cabaret stages are explicitly political, there are political implications. For example, Chase and Joy share the story of their own intimate relationship through dance. Ravyn Wingz and Sze-Yang similarly use dance to share the story of their enduring love. Other stories celebrate the LGBTQ2+ tradition of camp, like those found in Ladyboy Sparkle's rendition of Margarita and Mr. Pepper. Margarita is a comedic portrayal of hyper-femininity combined with a Lucille Ball-like goofiness, whereas Mr. Pepper is a hyperbolic depiction of a police officer who is prohibited to dance. Scorpio Rising's lip-sync rendition of *Bitch,* by Meredith Brooks, Venus Venom's

portrayal of a “sexy bee”, and numerous other stories also emerge in queer cabaret spaces. Yet, while many of these stories are fun and lighthearted, and seemingly less political than the stories told by BeeCee Clette and Red Mango discussed above, like popular drag spaces in the gayborhood, celebration and affirmation in LGBTQ2+ contexts are political acts. When groups are disallowed the opportunity to celebrate and have their stories affirmed in other social contexts, celebration is contestation.

Ultimately, in moving beyond the gayborhood, LGBTQ2+ storytelling processes centre those who have been marginalized in other prominent storytelling contexts. Further, in doing so, we expand not only whose stories become part of the movement narrative but the stories themselves weave critiques of racism, ableism, classism, and binary gender into the fabric of LGBTQ2+ consciousness raising projects. Therefore, by going beyond the gayborhood, storytelling processes expand the narrative of who ‘we’ are as LGBTQ2+ peoples. Further, organizing outside of the constraints of popular gayborhood storytelling spaces enables the development of an intersectional consciousness, one that is woven into the fabric of queer cabaret storytelling. Yet, queer cabaret is not without its disadvantages. By situating queer cabaret within the larger movement collectivity, some of the limitations become evident, specifically in terms of the relative insularity of these spaces and the potential for re-creating other internal hierarchies.

Expanding Narratives, Limited Scope

Storytelling beyond the gayborhood has radical potential. Not only does queer cabaret create intentional spaces that foreground those stories and storytellers that are marginalized in prominent LGBTQ2+ spaces, but in doing so queer cabaret is built upon a framework of intersectional prefigurative politics. Multi-issue consciousness raising is difficult, yet possible, for social movements (Stockdill 2001); however, queer cabaret's commitment to intersectional prefigurative politics has tremendous potential to expand the narrative of who 'we' are and bridge internal schisms. Yet, the movement work that occurs within queer cabaret spaces is not perfect. In fact, two notable limitations require addressing, specifically, the reliance on insular networks and the hierarchical organization of political priorities.

Whereas the likelihood of encountering a popular drag show is high should one find oneself in the village or at a gayborhood bar, one is far less likely to stumble upon a queer cabaret event. Because queer cabaret occurs most often beyond the gayborhood, promotion is heavily reliant on informal networks. In fact, queer cabaret was entirely off my radar in my initial round of research interviews. It was only after speaking with Chase, a storyteller that has given up participating in popular drag spaces relegating their storytelling to queer cabaret, that I became aware of queer cabaret events. My awareness of, and access to, these events was heavily reliant on my inclusion in online media networks. As someone who has never felt my safety threatened in prominent LGBTQ2+ spaces,

it is plausible I would never have sought out queer cabaret shows. This limitation extends beyond my personal experience to include those who come to larger cities to participate in LGBTQ2+ community spaces. Queer cabaret lacks the institutional framework that contemporary gayborhoods (larger cities) and LGBTQ2+ bars (mid-sized cities) use to attract newcomers or visitors to a given town. Therefore, queer cabaret is less likely to be directly connected to existing LGBTQ2+ spaces. Additionally, queer cabaret events occur on a less regular basis than many drag shows in popular gayborhoods. Whereas some queer cabaret events occur annually, the most frequent shows rarely occur more than four times per year. This lessens the likelihood that visitors to a city or LGBTQ2+ peoples with weak movement ties would happen upon queer cabaret.

The second limitation worth discussing is found in the constraints that shape accessibility of queer cabaret. While every effort is made to ensure that queer cabaret spaces are accessible for the most marginalized members of the LGBTQ2+ community, certainly not all needs can be met at all times. For example, while some cabaret events went to great lengths to create spaces wherein peoples with chemical injuries could attend, the reliance on other community members to abide by these requests is a constraint in creating a 'scent-free' zone. Additionally, despite the desire to include ASL translation in many queer cabaret spaces, the financial cost can be prohibitive. Recall Miss Fluffy Soufflé's earlier statement, "the biggest ones for me are like, can people get in the door and can people pee. Then beyond that, the dream would be that there's ASL interpretation

and that physically everyone can move around the space." These constraints result in the creation of a hierarchy of whose needs can be met.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking how marginalized LGBTQ2+ peoples respond to the unequal power relations that shape LGBTQ2+ storytelling in popular drag spaces. The findings indicate that storytellers respond by creating new spaces to tell their stories. Free spaces are integral to the development of a movement's collective consciousness (Gamson, W. 1996; Polletta 1999; Groch 2001); yet, the literature on free spaces pays remarkably little attention to the significance of physical location. As queer cabaret storytelling demonstrates, physical space is indeed political. Upon examination, the *how* and *where* of free spaces are key to understanding the collective narrative and consciousness raising project of queer cabaret. Moving beyond the bounds of prominent 'gayborhood' spaces, allows storytellers to re-imagine storytelling in ways that alter the politics of LGBTQ2+ collectivity. By unpacking how queer cabaret spaces are organized, the relationship between space and prefigurative politics becomes explicit. Foregrounding accessibility and creating parameters to ensure the safety of community members and storytellers enables the telling of stories that are far more complex than those told through popular drag. This not only expands the LGBTQ2+ narrative of who 'we' are and what 'our' needs are, but it weaves intersectional politics into our collective organizing. Stories that address racism, poverty, citizenship status, and sexual trauma, urge listeners to critique these

realities as they exist in LGBTQ2+ experiences. By sharing in the storytelling process, queer consciousness raising goes beyond critiquing hegemonic gender and sexuality and incorporates collective resistance to racism, ableism, ageism, normative body standards, and rigid gender binaries. While moving beyond the gayborhood can alleviate storytellers from the constraints of prominent storytelling spaces, 'moving beyond' introduces new challenges, particularly in terms of the reliance on informal networks and the relative infrequency of storytelling events. Furthermore, financial constraints also limit the accessibility of queer cabaret storytelling as in the case with lack of funds to secure ASL interpretation.

Ultimately, the insights garnered from this examination of queer cabaret attest to the significance of physical space in building LGBTQ2+ collectivity. By infusing queer cabaret spaces with intersectional prefigurative politics, storytellers complicate the narrative of who 'we' are and what 'our' needs are in ways that are profoundly insightful. Further, queer cabaret storytelling fosters the development of intersectional consciousness raising. However, I caution against reading queer cabaret as a panacea for the movement, as moving beyond the gayborhood introduces limitations to LGBTQ2+ collectivity building. In particular, the relative insularity of queer cabaret spaces that exist beyond the gayborhood limits the potential for mobilizing new members and weaving intersectional political priorities into other movement spaces, organizations, and groups. Thus, while movement free spaces like queer cabaret (and popular drag) have the potential to

build collectivity and develop critical consciousness, free spaces alone cannot affect wide-spread change. In the following chapter, I delve deeper into the significance of the *shared* collective spaces found at Pride wherein different LGBTQ2+ groups, with different political priorities, come together in an effort to build movement collectivity and jockey for space to advocate for specific political priorities.

Strategic Resistance and Claiming Pride Spaces

In 2014, queer cabaret group, *Unapologetic Burlesque* posted a 'letter to the community' on their website. In the letter they state, "We acknowledge that Pride festival is a deeply toxic environment for MANY of us for many different reasons…[yet] we still choose to be here" (Unapologetic Burlesque 2014). I begin this chapter with this particular excerpt because it is precisely decisions like this that I wish to understand in the context of social movement collectivity and fragmentation. The previous two chapters demonstrate the need for marginalized groups within the LGBTQ2+ movement to carve out distinct free spaces to tell their stories. They do so not only to build collectivity but to connect that collective to a specific LGBTQ2+ political consciousness. Drag and queer cabaret storytellers tell different stories in different spaces, and these stories fuel the development of distinct political ideologies. And, while there is relative consensus about 'our' political priorities within each distinct space, collective narratives and political priorities of drag and queer cabaret storytelling spaces differ greatly. How then can we come to understand the relationship between movement collectivity and political priorities when the political and geospatial boundaries around distinct movement collectives are blurred as groups come together to resist, celebrate, and tell their stories at shared[31] collective events like Pride.

[31] I use the language of "shared" collectives to describe Pride as an arena of collective LGBTQ2+ organizing, that is deeply symbolic of the movement itself, that involves people and organizations that vary greatly in terms of social location and political ideologies.

In this chapter, I pull back the analytical lens. Having examined the significance of popular drag and queer cabaret as symbolically and geographically distinct arenas of LGBTQ2+ storytelling, I now examine the motivations and political significance of storytelling in shared symbolic spaces of Pride. I am driven by the want to understand the political implications of participation within and beyond the movement itself, specifically, 1) What motivates peoples who have been marginalized within the LGBTQ2+ movement to participate in moments of collective organizing at Pride (rather than splinter off or maintain distinct movement contexts by not participating)? And, 2) what does storytelling in shared collective Pride spaces tell us about the relationship between storytelling and the engagement with outsiders/broader audiences?

My findings reveal that collective Pride spaces are sites of opportunity for activists to engage in what I have termed, *strategic resistance*. Strategic resistance is the process whereby social movement actors engage in shared movement spaces—wherein biographies, ideologies, and experiences vary greatly—to 1) claim space and deploy identities, 2) advocate for political priorities, and 3) engage outsiders. Social movement actors, in this case popular drag and queer cabaret storytellers, are motivated to engage in strategic resistance as a means of challenging the movement's existing hierarches and broadening the reach of the movement by engaging with 'outsiders'. In order to better grapple with the tensions within shared spaces like Pride and the implications for the LGBTQ2+ movement, I put Ghaziani's (2008) work on "infighting" into conversation with

the body of literature that theorizes collective identity deployment (Bernstein 1997; 2008) and audience engagement (Rupp and Taylor 2003).

Grappling with Political Priorities

In his book, *The Dividends of Dissent*, Ghaziani (2008) theorizes social movement "infighting" within the gay and lesbian movement (and later the 'LGBT' movement) in the United States. By tracing the political organizing that shaped four different gay and lesbian Marches on Washington (1979, 1987, 1993, 2000), Ghaziani (2008) demonstrates how organizations and movement leaders grapple with decisions about if, when, and why to march as well as who should speak and be centered. While the language of in*fighting* may evoke concerns about its potential 'damaging' or 'destructive' impact on social movement organizing, Ghaziani (2008) is clear in his position that infighting can be "generative" as it provides insight into what he calls, "*the state of the movement*" (p. 5, emphasis in original). Beyond that, infighting allows activists and analysts to gain insight into issues related to movement identity and strategy (Ghaziani 2008:8). Ghaziani's (2008) focus on the processes by which movement groups with divergent political priorities grapple over decision making informs my own examination of how and why drag and queer cabaret storytellers engage with Pride. However, Ghaziani's insights alone cannot adequately address the movement work drag and queer cabaret storytellers do in Pride spaces for two prominent reasons. First, his articulation of infighting disproportionately focuses on "issues rather than relationships" (see Fetner 2009:524). And second,

Ghaziani's work on infighting does not theorize the role of the audience in the infighting process. As such, I turn to the body of scholarship on collective identity to help address these gaps.

Collective Identity, Relationships, and Audience

Boundary work is the thread that weaves the expansive body of scholarship on collective identity together. Simply stated, collectives require boundaries to determine who 'we' are in relation to others. Scholars argue that any articulation of who 'we' are, must also address, what 'we' want, and how 'we' need to get it (see Taylor and Whittier 1992). To understand collective identity, I draw on Polletta and Jasper (2001) definition wherein collective identity is "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution" (p. 285). In other words, collective identity is about *relationships* as well as ideologies. In their definition, collective identity maintains its connection to a sense of 'we-ness' while not becoming conflated with shared political goals and/or ideological commitments (Polletta and Jasper 2001:299), which ultimately allows for analytic space to examine collectives that contain internal ideological schisms. In other words, their definition allows space for distinct ideologies within the same collective (see also Rupp and Taylor 1999). However, Polletta and Jasper (2001) are less explicit about their understanding of collective identity as a product or a process. Here I take up Fominaya's (2010) suggestion and adopt a focus on the processual aspects

of collectivities (rather than understand collective identities as a product of social movement organizing).

Focusing on the processual character of collective identity also allows for an understanding of the complex and at times contradictory role of identity within the LGBTQ2+ movement. While some associate identities with a sense of empowerment (see Bernstein 1997; 2008), others eschew identity labels entirely. Within the movement, queer theorists and activists have located identities as a site of oppression. Thus, deconstruction of rigid identities is central to the critical emancipation of genders and sexualities from the regulatory bounds of hegemonic rule. Conversely, those who seek to maintain the enduring value of identities see this deconstructionist logic as a threat to the collective mobilization of the movement (see Gamson 1995). As Gamson (1995) articulates, "An inclusive queerness threatens to turn identity to nonsense, messing with the idea that identities (man, woman, gay, straight) are fixed, natural, core phenomena, and therefore solid political ground" (p. 399), this potential is threatening to many within the movement. Gamson (1995) acknowledges the social movement potential in both sides of the debate on identity when he states, "Categories of collective identity are necessary for successful resistance to political gain", but the postmodern politic aimed at deconstructing the binaries that emerge out of identities is also valuable (p. 391). Gamson (1995) further states, "accommodating the complexity of queer activism and theory requires sociology to revisit the claim that social movements are engaged in simply constructing collective identities" (p.

403). Implicit in these queer critiques lies the understanding that identities are fundamentally static rather than processual. Returning to Fominaya's (2010) work and keeping collective identity in the realm of process rather than product is a means of tapping into the very potential Gamson (1995) identifies.

Bernstein (1997; 2008) also champions the need to interrogate how collective identities are used in movement work. Echoing Gamson (1995), Bernstein (1997) cautions against eradicating identities from the realm of social movement work and instead, she distinguishes collective identity from rigid stability. Specifically, Bernstein (1997; 2008) argues that social movement identities have three analytic dimensions insofar as they can be used as a means of 1) empowerment, 2) as an end goal, and 3) as a movement strategy. Thus, not all conceptions of collective identities can be reduced to rigid and constraining categorical boxes. Implicit in both Gamson (1995) and to a greater degree Bernstein's (1997; 2005; 2008) work is the idea that collective identities are not simply about those within the bounds of a given collective, but they are also a means of communicating messages to a given audience.

As a strategy, collective identities also serve as resources to recruit and mobilize social actors (Rupp and Taylor 2003; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Terriquez 2014; Vallocchi 2009). Rupp and Taylor's (2003), attention to audience in drag protest is instructive. Their work demonstrates the invaluable relationship between performer and audience wherein audience members are not only vital to how movement narratives are 'taken-up', but they are also necessary resources for

change. Rupp and Taylor (2003) argue that audience members can play a potentially transformational role in expanding movement ideologies, objectives, and collectives.

Whereas Ghaziani (2008) opens up a space to see the generative value of social movement infighting, he stops short of theorizing the relationship between infighting, interpersonal relations, and intersectional power relations. The body of scholarship on collective identity offers valuable tools in the way of boundary work as a means of not only nurturing relations between people, but in demarcating lines that can be crossed by potential allies and audiences. Rupp and Taylor's (2003) attention to the role of audience is also valuable; however, their work does not fully unpack the relationship between identities and intersecting power dynamics. Thus, I take all of these works together, specifically, the concepts of 'we-ness', audience, and infighting to inform the development of what I call strategic resistance.

Strategic Resistance and Pride

My analysis reveals that strategic resistance is a primary motivator for drag and queer cabaret storytellers to participate in Pride spaces. Strategic resistance is characterized by three prominent mechanisms of engagement: 1) claiming space and deploying identities, 2) advocating for political priorities, and 3) engaging outsiders. While popular drag and queer cabaret storytellers are equally motivated by strategic resistance, there are important distinctions in *how* they engage with the process and the implications of this engagement.

Claiming Space and Deploying Identities

When asked about the relationship between queer stories and Pride, many popular drag storytellers drew connections to the history of the movement. For example, some drag performers drew connections between their stories and Pride's early days. My conversation with Athena McQueen elucidates this trend, she states:

> It has a historical importance, like you know…I think it's an important part of our culture. I almost see it as a tradition to have drag everywhere…I think there is a historical importance but at the same time, it challenges the current times, I think that's what drag does…It's supposed to remind you where we've come from but also like, where we have left to go.

Athena's use of words like 'tradition' and 'historical' are juxtaposed by her attention to the contemporary significance of drag storytelling. While drag stories have a long tradition, Athena establishes the connection between the early days of Pride and the current political moment. In doing so, she weaves in contemporary drag storytelling into the fabric of queer spaces like Pride.

For others, telling drag stories at Pride is a means of ensuring explicitly political stories are told in symbolically queer spaces. As Rockin' Rolley explains,

> I think drag has been basically, across the board, historically a catalyst for a bunch of things politically. Like it's historically significant, like Stonewall. You know we'll start from there, I'll just say that...Pride every year is a political piece. You know so, it's very activist associated piece to show up and entertain and be a part of it. So yeah, I think it's a significant cultural expression that has pretty much run the test of time from historical days.

For Rockin' Rolley, telling stories through drag in the explicitly political "activist" space of Pride illuminates the connection between queer culture, drag

storytelling, and Pride spaces. Further, drag is culturally significant for Rockin' Rolley, based on its connection to queer historical roots, roots that must be kept alive. Linking the past to the present ensures the enduring inclusion of drag stories in the narrative of the movement. Further, telling drag stories in Pride spaces is a means of affecting social change. By linking drag storytelling with Stonewall, Rockin' Rolley positions drag at the nexus of political change. The rebellion and riot at Stonewall in 1969 is heralded by many as a key moment for gay liberation in the United States and by connecting drag to that history as well as to the notion of change, Rockin' Rolley positions drag stories within the bounds of the movement, while also citing the potential for progressive change via drag storytelling.

For some, harkening back to the historical spirit of Pride is a means of not only drawing boundaries around what Pride is supposed to represent, but in doing so, it presents a challenge to what and *who* Pride currently represents. Queer cabaret storytellers in the Unapologetic Burlesque collective address this in their statement, "…the increased corporatization, security and police presence during Pride not only forgets the initial spirit of liberation centered around Indigenous, people of colour, trans, genderqueer, sex worker, low-income folks but enacts further violence upon these people" (Unapologetic Burlesque, 2014). Written on behalf of the queer cabaret storytellers who decided to tell their stories at Pride, this statement attempts to address the seemingly contradictory and complex decision to participate. Here, their statement serves as a boundary making tool

insofar as within it, they deploy their identities to locate their bodies and their stories in the historical tradition of Pride, position themselves within Pride, while also criticizing the current problematic reality that Pride has become. In effect, they redraw the boundaries to claim space and align themselves, their storytelling, and political priorities with the historical sprit of Pride.

The decision to participate, to claim space at Pride, is not entered into lightly particularly for queer cabaret storytellers. In the statement below, the Unapologetic Burlesque collective reflects on their decision to participate at Pride and to bring their brand of queer cabaret into the gayborhood, a statement they open their on-stage performance with and I quote at length here:

> Pride comes at the expense to many of us; and comes at a disservice, disrespect and harm to the ground upon which we grow, live, work, play, love…*ALL THIS SAID – we still choose to be here*. We still choose to host this set, and give space to this small group of unapologetic, lion-hearted performers, storytellers, truth-tellers to shine their brightest. Being a part of Unapologetic Burlesque has been deeply meaningful and life-changing – to be a part of something that helps to create, build, and share work and art rooted in love, care, respect, consent, ongoing transformation. Unapologetic exists because *we so often looked around ourselves and saw no room or place for ourselves as working artists, as storytellers.* So we had to create those things for ourselves…All at once: because of our interactions and (lack) of communication with Pride, we were not able to organize this stage according to many values of accessibility and balance/fairness in our curation and organizing process that we prioritize in our other shows and our own self-care. *Still we know that for many of us it is important for us to be here; to carve a space for ourselves to exist, to be recognized, to get paid, to perform on bigger stages and in front of international audiences*. Still we know that much of how Pride has allocated TIME, SPACE, COMMUNICATION AND MONEY toward local, people of colour focused programming (including but not limited to Unapologetic Burlesque) has not been anywhere NEAR adequate…We are here, holding ourselves and each other,

> in the balance of these many contradictory things: struggle, anger, frustration, resilience, defiance, accomplishment, celebration. (Unapologetic Burlesque 2014, emphasis added)

This statement demonstrates the complex issues at stake in the decision to claim space at Pride. For many marginalized queer folks, Pride is not a welcoming or safe space for people to tell their stories. In addition to articulating the complexity of their decision to participate, this statement works in other important ways. First, the decision is driven by the need to "carve a space for ourselves to exist" in the movement more generally and in Pride more specifically. Including queer cabaret stories in Pride spaces is an act of boundary work; including these stories ensures that the stories are part of the narrative of the LGBTQ2+ collective. Second, by articulating their collective criticism of how Pride has allocated funding to QTBIPOC platforms and stories ("not been anywhere NEAR adequate"), Unapologetic Burlesque is not only claiming space, but simultaneously challenging the political priorities of contemporary Pride politics. I explore this in greater detail in the following section.

The examples above demonstrate the desire for marginalized LGBTQ2+ storytellers to claim space at Pride. By linking their own storytelling to the historical of the movement, storytellers are able to assert their right to space within Pride contexts in an effort to ensure queer stories are woven into the collective narrative of who 'we' are at moments of Pride. By focusing on the history and enduring legacy of drag as a key aspect of LGBTQ2+ movement, storytellers assert their right and responsibility to ensure that drag and queer

cabaret narratives remain firmly rooted in the collective narrative of the movement. In both cases, popular drag and queer cabaret storytellers claim their space in Pride; however, they do so by deploying their identities differently.

Whereas drag storytellers claim space by establishing a link between past and present as a means of asserting the need to have drag stories continue to be included in events like Pride, queer cabaret storytellers claim space by focusing on the inclusion not only of their stories, but of their specific biographical *identities*. Popular drag storytellers claim space and align their space with the tradition of drag storytelling. In this way, they assert the primacy of drag stories in their deployment of their identities *as* drag storytellers. Conversely, queer cabaret storytellers claim space and align with the tradition of prominence of QTBIPOC peoples in the movement. Reclaiming space at Pride is a meaningful act of boundary work not only for its ability to situate storytellers and their stories, but it also allows for analysis of what the inclusion of drag and queer cabaret storytelling at Pride is aspiring to do. Participation in Pride spaces is not solely about reclaiming space in the LGBTQ2+ collective narrative, but storytellers are also motivated by the desire to shift the political priorities of the movement.

Advocating for LGBTQ2+ Political Priorities

Both drag and queer cabaret storytellers describe their participation in Pride storytelling in terms of challenging the 'status quo'. The status quo for popular LGBTQ2+ spaces like Pride is rife with isms, including racism, sexism, ableism, and classism. Unlike popular drag and queer cabaret which are culturally

driven grassroots storytelling practices that are not clearly rooted in a particular organizational framework[32], Pride organizing and decision-making is largely shaped by leaders within LGBTQ2+ organizations. As American LGBT activist Urvashi Vaid (2012) argues, "Although the LGBT movement sits within a global, plural, and multiracial world, its leadership still remains predominately white, male, and economically privileged" (p. xii). It is important to note that in many cases, those who make decisions around Pride are also often those in positions of some privilege and power. Some of the storytellers I spoke with articulated how those in decision making roles within Pride organizing can recreate inequities within Pride spaces. For example, drag king Harley DR Davidson recalls, "I sat on the board of Hamilton Pride…I've sat in different parts of our community, wore different hats and I can say there's like the mature, comfortable, how do you put it, the men, the white, that group of men [pause] hate lesbians." Queer cabaret storytellers are also critical of Pride spaces, for example, storytellers with Unapologetic Burlesque articulate this "toxic environment" in their statement,

> We acknowledge that Pride festival is a deeply toxic environment for MANY of us for many different reasons. For those of us who are not white, cis, gay, male, able-bodied, thin and, yes, even straight, we do not feel safe, at home, or "proud" at the environment created during Pride.

[32] While certainly drag and queer storytelling that happens within organizational spaces (i.e. bars, libraries, cafés, etc.) is constrained by the organization of a given space, drag and queer cabaret are not constrained by allegiance to a specific organization with a specific mandate and leadership hierarchy.

Thus, while others have been critical of how the movement's leadership tends to prioritize the needs of privileged queers (for example see Armstrong 2002; Vaid 2012), these hierarchies also trickle down into specific organizational frameworks (see Ward 2008a; 2008b), and Pride organizations are not exempt.

Affirming the need for marginalized LGBTQ2+ stories at Pride is a means of pushing back against erasure and marginalization within the movement and advocating for political priorities. As performer Judy states, "queerness needs queering" and it is the role of radical queer storytellers to play. Judy continues, "I think it can get a little too precious sometimes…Queerness can plateau quite quickly as well. Like any group, you go through some kind of storming and norming and conforming and I want to keep trying to pull that back to the 'storming'". LGBTQ2+ storytellers are resisting the status quo of the movement, one that has been widely critiqued for its tendency to perpetuate homonormativity as well as the dominance of white, male, cisgender, and class, privilege bodies and political priorities. As such claiming space, is inextricable from advocating for 'alternative' political priorities. For example, the events that shaped Hamilton Pride in 2014 and 2015 demonstrate the political implications embedded in the erasure of QTBIPOC storytellers and how claiming space is intrinsically connected to advocating for political priorities.

In 2014, Pride organizing took on a 'grassroots' approach that was somewhat anomalous for this community. Typically, organizations like Pride Hamilton play a prominent role in organizing and co-sponsoring events

throughout the city. Working in conjunction with other local organizations and individuals within the community, Pride events culminate toward the end of June with a rally and storytelling events at a local park[33]. While smaller events are increasingly held throughout the month of June, the Pride weekend event is the most well-attended. In 2014, in part due to the fact that Toronto (a city less than an hour away) was hosting 'World Pride,' the Pride Hamilton organization did not take the lead in organizing the Pride weekend or any other Pride related events in Hamilton. However, that did not stop LGBTQ2+ peoples in Hamilton from coming together and sharing stories in the name of Pride. This work, largely driven by the labour of QTBIPOC, resulted in multiple PWYC storytelling events throughout the city[34]. The potential in this grassroots version of Pride was celebrated at an event in Hamilton featuring Queer and Trans* artists by prominent community organizer and queer cabaret storyteller, Poe Liberado. Liberado was among those in Hamilton who saw 2014 as an opportunity to build a grassroots version of Pride in Hamilton, one that was fundamentally community driven and resistant to constraints attached to corporate sponsorship and municipal regulation. For many in Hamilton, 2014 Pride was novel and uniquely intersectional in its programming (including queer cabaret storytelling, a

[33] During my time in the field, Pride weekend changed locations running at three different park areas, all of which were centrally located.
[34] These events included community pot-lucks, coffee houses, 'meet-ups', and queer cabaret and drag performances.

symposium that actively sought to draw and centre marginalized queer folks, and events held in accessible public and private spaces).

Yet, during the Pride flag raising event at city hall the following year, Pride committee organizers celebrated the "return" of Pride in Hamilton. For Pride Hamilton organizers (most of whom are not QTBIPOC), Pride did not happen in Hamilton in 2014. For Liberado and other QTBIPOC organizers and attendees who did organize in the name of Pride to celebrate, to resist, and to build community outside of traditional organization-led collectivity, the celebration of the "return" of Pride was not only a slight to the organizing of 2014, but evidence of the ongoing erasure QTBIPOC experiences. In response, Liberado took to social media to address and contest this erasure. Liberado states,

> Marlon Picken [Hamilton Pride committee member], was there a reason why the efforts of LGBTQ people of color and trans people were snubbed at the City Hall Flag Raising? Is there a reason why only White, cis-gender people were invited to speak, and thanked? Did you not know about the LGBTQ Symposium held on June 20 in celebration of Hamilton Pride hosted by Space Between? When you said Pride didn't happen last year, did you not hear about the events throughout Hamilton last year for LGBTQ with disabilities, LGBTQ newcomers, and so on? As the chair of the LGBTQ Advisory Committee of the City, I would hope you would consider us part of 'your' community. (Facebook, June 14, 2015)

Liberado's response not only illuminates the overarching process of LGBTQ2+ boundary work. As Pride continues to hold symbolic significance, having the 2014 Pride events, storytelling included, that were organized largely by QTBIPOC community members overlooked was a clear affront to the work of marginalized queers, work done in the name of Pride. In a follow-up interview

with Xtra[35], Liberado elaborates on their frustration, ze states, "Our Pride matters too…It seems only relevant when white cisgender people are hosting things and there is a party attached to it" (Quoted in Watson 2015). For Liberado and others like zir, failure to acknowledge the organizing and storytelling done by QTBIPOC as part of Pride is an act of boundary work that reaffirms the dominance of "white cisgender people" in Pride spaces.

Liberado's response illuminates two major points. First, the response is a clear example of strategic resistance. Liberado's public response to the erasure of 2014 Pride is an act of claiming space on behalf of marginalized queers. By deploying marginalized identities including "LGBTQ with disabilities, LGBTQ newcomers, and so on", Liberado seeks to problematize the boundary making made by the 2015 Hamilton Pride event, and event that and signifies a status quo operation of Hamilton Pride, one that centres "only White, cis-gender people". Further, in stating, "our pride matters too," Liberado challenges the status quo and advocates for more intersectional politics in Pride organizing. Lastly, Liberado is strategic about audience. The response to the 2015 Hamilton Pride flag raising event was posted on social media and other media sources. While the response itself was addressed to the chair of the LGBTQ Advisory Committee of the City

[35] Xtra is a queer Canadian publication, published by Pink Triangle Press. According to Xtra's website, the online publication draws an average of 225,000 readers per month.

and members of the Hamilton Pride organization, the response was further elaborated upon in a popular LGBTQ2+ magazine. Therefore, the public platform of social media allowed Liberado to engage with audiences within and beyond the movement.

Storytellers draw explicit connections between claiming space and advocating for political priorities. In this way, they challenge the movement's status quo. However, like Unapologetic Burlesque's statement demonstrates, storytellers are in-part drawn to the opportunity that Pride offers to "perform on bigger stages and in front of international audiences." In their research on drag, Rupp and Taylor (2003) argue that the ability to reach new audiences and ignite the process of consciousness raising through performance is key to expanding the movement's collective identity. In this way, reaching new audiences is part of what makes performance relevant to social change. Speaking with drag and queer cabaret storytellers, Pride draws new opportunities for procuring witnesses to claiming space and deploying identities, as well as their advocacy for LGBTQ2+ political priorities through storytelling.

Engaging Outsiders

As Harley DR Davidson states, "If I'm going to Pride, I get very nervous, it's outside—because it's not just the gay community, I think that's the biggest thing." Pride presents a unique opportunity to engage with 'outsiders', audiences that would otherwise not be a part of, or identify with, the LGBTQ2+ movement. For example, in 2017, the Toronto Pride festival weekend drew "over a million

people out to celebrate our incredible community" (Pride Toronto 2017:3). In smaller municipalities like Hamilton, Pride has most recently attracted a record high 3,000 people to the one-day event in Gage Park[36]. Additionally, Pride weekend events are often televised receiving increased media coverage which bolsters the potential audiences to reach beyond the immediate community. As a shared movement space, Pride is perhaps the most widely recognized reoccurring event associated with 'the movement'. Thus, the role of outsider audiences requires attention.

Outsiders play a complex role in Pride spaces. As such some storytellers are ambivalent about the role of outsiders. Red Mango, for example, is critical of *how* outsiders engage with LGBTQ2+ folks in Pride spaces. Recalling a performance during Pride in the village, Red Mango problematizes how outsiders permeate and engage in Pride spaces:

> During Pride especially, there is this thing that happens, and I experienced it when I was go-go dancing at Buddies for an event and there was this, they seemed like a straight group of women, and it was somebody's bachelorette, and they wanted to take pictures of us, kind of a *tokenizing, animal, petting zoo* type of thing and that happens a lot around Pride and it makes me feel *gross*… (emphasis added).

Red Mango's perspective demonstrates the complicated position outsiders occupy in Pride spaces, one that is embedded in complex power relations. For Red Mango, likening the interaction with the "straight group of women" to a "petting

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[36] These numbers are based on estimations. Since Pride weekend events are non-ticketed, there is no way to precisely determine exact numbers.

zoo" illustrates the power imbalance embedded in the relationship between the watcher and those being watched, a 'straight gaze' of sorts. By presenting themselves in ways that demonstrate their "straightness" in Pride spaces, the act of staring not only makes Red Mango feel "gross", but it serves as a boundary making tool, reaffirming the distinction between "us" and "them". Yet, while outsiders can reify problematic hierarchies, they can serve resources in strategic resistance.

The potential to engage with outsider audiences is particularly appealing to drag and queer cabaret storytellers as a means of strategic resistance. Specifically, outsiders serve as resources in two prominent ways: first, outsiders can potentially bolster the collective through allyship. Second, outsiders act as witnesses to intramovement inequality. Thus, engaging outsiders is a key facet of strategic resistance. I explore these distinctions below.

Outsiders and Allyship

Storytellers seek to challenge the status quo of Pride by claiming space to tell their stories, a process that brings stories and political priorities to the fore. Additionally, the role of the outsider audience factors into the decision to engage in strategic resistance. For queer cabaret storyteller Ladyboy Sparkle, Pride is a unique opportunity to bring their brand of critical drag to "mainstream" audiences:

> So the mainstream society comes during Pride to be entertained and that's when you want to grab them and go, hi I'm trans and you don't know that and I got fired at Shoppers Drug Mart because I'm trans and…they go home and go [pause] fuck.

For Ladyboy Sparkle, telling their story of struggle, one that is characterized trans* discrimination and precarious work, is an attempt to affect change in mainstream audiences. Storytelling can be emotionally resonant in ways that other forms of movement activism is not (Polletta 1998; Polletta et al. 2011). The ability to bring drag stories of struggle and LGBTQ2+ experiences to outsider audiences in emotionally resonant ways, is a means of mobilizing the storyteller's political priorities and potentially expanding the movement through allyship.

Pushing into the mainstream and engaging straight audience members is foundational for drag storytellers like Athena McQueen who states, "I think its [drag's] role is to challenge its audience". Challenging audiences is a popular theme for storytellers. For Judy, pushing beyond the immediate community is where radical potential lies. She states,

> I think it keeps people active and keeps people critical. Because yeah, if you're asking people questions with your performance, they have to come up with some kind of answer…I'm starting to try and do more physical work with my body and with video work so that I can take it to a larger audience as well and queer everybody else [laughs].

Judy's desire to 'queer everybody' through queer storytelling deserves pause. It is particularly interesting when thinking about what motivates storytellers to participate at Pride (particularly storytellers that do not often perform in prominent queer spaces within the 'gayborhood' like Judy). As Judy's quote demonstrates, queering outsiders is an attempt to redraw the boundaries around who is doing work on the part of the movement. By queering everybody, Judy is

seeking to impact outsiders with her critical stories steeped in political messages about the complexity of bodies, gender, and autonomy. Doing so has the potential to alter not only who aligns with the LGBTQ2+ movement, but who takes these messages and engages is allyship. In other words, claiming space, building queer collective, and challenging queer norms are part of what motivates storytellers like Judy to bring their stories to Pride spaces, but according to Judy, the ability to push those critical queer perspectives beyond the movement by engaging with outsiders is integral to process of critical "storming the norms".

Engaging outsiders is also a means of communicating alternative 'possibilities'. As a member of a three-person dance collective that has performed in queer cabaret spaces, possibility is foundational to performative storytelling for Sze-Yang. For example, Sze-Yang describes the impetus behind a specific performance:

> It's also possible to create really beautiful fun alternative worlds and characters and parts of you as well, that create celebration and affirmation, both of them are affirming in different ways. The hard stuff, the good stuff, the resilient stuff, so that possibility is put forth. I think for me, I didn't grow up seeing a lot of East Asian people or queer people or queer east Asian people in media so it's very hard sometimes, it was very hard as a young person imagining, it just didn't seem that, like oh can I even dance? That was really far-fetched and out of my world for a long time so I think that putting ourselves and our stories onstage is like, oh you can do that.

For Sze-Yang the possibility is found in the potential to connect within and beyond the immediate LGBTQ2+ community in hopes of provide new images and depictions of queerness that will resonate with outsider audiences. Similarly, Red

Mango sees possibility in reaching outsider audiences as a means of creating social change. Red Mango describes this relationship,

> The biggest part of that is sharing our stories. So, talking about how hard [it] was for us being queer, being trans, being differently abled, so I think sharing our stories often debunks stereotypes and myths. It humanizes people that you may not necessarily talk to otherwise. It creates the room for more understanding, I feel like. And I feel like we do that when we create space for dialogue to happen and for people to walk away with a different mindset than they may have coming into that space.

The potential to affect change in others as a result of storytelling was central to the hopeful tone with which Rupp and Taylor (2003) ended their book. The idea being, that if we can change outsider audience members and affect some sort of connection through the 'humanization' of intimate queer stories, there is potential in expanding the collective identity of the LGBTQ2+ movement.

Reaching beyond the movement and engaging with outsiders is a prominent motivator for participating in strategic resistance. Having queer stories resonate with outsiders is integral to creating change and pushing the critical queer consciousness beyond the bounds of an LGBTQ2+ collective movement to ignite allyship. Stories have the potential to challenge outsiders to not only rethink the social order rooted in hegemonic gender and sexuality, but they can encourage outsiders to interrogate intersecting forms of oppression and domination. In short, outsider audiences at Pride audiences can be resources for storytellers insofar as stories can resonate with outsiders in ways that incite allyship. However, outsiders can serve another purpose to affect change within the movement.

Outsiders as Witnesses

Pride draws significant crowds of non-LGBTQ2+ peoples to queer spaces. Pride also attracts significant media attention. In some ways, Pride events are times when the eyes of the world are upon 'us' in ways that they are not at other moments and events throughout the year. Because of this, Pride is an opportunity to present messages about the movement to outsiders, yet it is also a time when outsiders witness the internal dynamics of LGBTQ2+ collectives.

The decision to remove a contentious drag storyteller from participating at Pride demonstrates how outsiders as witnesses can shape the internal political priorities of the movement. Over the years, there has been great debate about the role of provocation in drag. Drag performers like Toronto's Donnarama have come under fire from those in the LGBTQ2+ community that criticize her storytelling for its "racist" and problematic narratives. One performance in particular wherein Donnarama lip syncs the song *Firework* by Katy Perry, wearing a "burka" and "a set of bombs attached to her abdomen" led activist, Rahim Thawker to question, "Are we fags really ok with this? I don't think this would be in the least acceptable in any other context. Interesting how white gay hegemony allows for so much more racism than mainstream communities" (Thawker 2012). Others, have also been critiqued for racist depictions on stage.

In one particular example, Daytona Bitch, a popular Toronto drag queen who regularly performed in the village was scheduled to perform on behalf of Pride Toronto in 2013. In the weeks leading up to Pride, Daytona Bitch invited

significant criticism following her participation in a "Caribbean Heat" show at the popular Crews & Tangos bar. Daytona Bitch's performance was heavily criticized by members of the LGBTQ2+ community for her decision to perform in blackface. She defended her decision, refuting the argument that her performance was akin to the racist history of minstrel shows. In her defense, she stated, "The people I asked at Crews & Tangos thought it was hilarious that I was dressed as a big fat black woman" (quoted in Houston 2013). In other words, her show was meant to be funny, to push boundaries; therefore, audiences should not take her performance too seriously or view it as an example of racist behaviour. Those concerned about the message Pride Toronto would be sending to audiences and members of the LGBTQ2+ community, were vocal in their opposition. In the end, Pride Toronto opted to server ties with Daytona Bitch as "Bitch's recent performance was 'not at all well received by the LGBT community'" (in Houston 2013). Arguably, the decision to sever ties was motivated by the strategic resistance within the community that put pressure on Pride Toronto to remove Daytona Bitch. Drawing on the resource of outsider witnesses, movement collectives urged Pride Toronto to remove Daytona Bitch from the official roster to ensure that the Pride continues to create a narrative of celebrating 'diversity' and present that message to outsiders.

The potential for procuring witnesses at Pride is key to strategic resistance. As my discussion with Miss Fluffy Soufflé reveals, the role of outsider witnesses is most prominent in Pride spaces. Miss Fluffy Soufflé recalls the tension within

LGBTQ2+ collectives regarding performers like Donnarama and Daytona Bitch, "Very occasionally, things will blow up like Daytona Bitch doing blackface and there's a huge thing about it and maybe she loses some gigs but is she still working? Yea, 100%. Donnaramma has gotten a lot of shit, is she still working? Maybe not as much, but yeah." As this discussion demonstrates, stories (and storytellers) that have come under fire from other community members for their problematic politics continue to find spaces to tell their stories; however, the existence of outsiders who act as witnesses can pressure the movement in politically significant moments like Pride to take stances on political issues such as racism within the movement. The use of outsider audiences to affect change within the movement continues to be a powerful resource for strategic resistance in Pride spaces.

The procurement of witnesses was central to the strategic resistance that occurred in 2016 during the Toronto Pride parade. On Sunday July 3 honoured group, Black Lives Matter (BLM) – Toronto, a group that includes queer cabaret storytellers, led the Pride parade through the streets of Toronto and directly into a sit-in. Bringing the parade to a halt in protest over the anti-equity practices of Pride Toronto, the sit-in lasted approximately thirty minutes at which time Toronto Pride's Executive Director, Mathieu Chantelois signed his commitment to honouring BLM's nine demands[37] that sought to hold Toronto Pride

[37] While the demands were read aloud at the sit-in, BLM-TO later posted the following online outlining their demands: "Black Lives Matter – Toronto, along

accountable for current exclusionary practices and to ensure a commitment to future inclusion of the most marginalized members of the LGBTQ2+ community. Having the sit-in at this moment in the Pride events was in part motivated by the role of outsiders as witnesses. Fighting for intersectional justice within the movement is an ongoing battle. This particular action was an opportunity for BLM-TO to tell their stories of queerness and marginalization within the movement to Pride Toronto under the witness of an outsider audience. Much like the push back against Daytona Bitch in the example above, here, BLM-TO drew on the resource of outsiders as witnesses to affect political change within the movement.

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with various community groups, including BQY and Blackness Yes have the following demands: 1) Commit to BQY's (Black Queer Youth) continued space (including stage/tents), funding and logistical support. 2) Self-determination for all community spaces, allowing community full control over hiring, content, and structure of their stages. 3) Full and adequate funding for community stages, including logistical, technical, and personnel support. 4) Double funding for Blockorama + ASL interpretation & headliner funding. 5) Reinstate and make a commitment to increase community stages/spaces (including the reinstatement of the South Asian stage). 6) A commitment to increase representation amongst Pride Toronto staffing/hiring, prioritizing Black trans women, Black queer people, Indigenous folk, and others from vulnerable communities. 7) A commitment to more Black, deaf & hearing ASL interpreters for the Festival. 8) Removal of police floats/booths in all Pride marches/parades/community spaces. 9) A public townhall, organized in conjunction with groups from marginalized communities, including, but not limited to, Black Lives Matter – Toronto, Blackness Yes, and BQY to be held six months from today. Pride Toronto will present and update and action plan on the aforementioned demands."

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have grappled with questions about what motivates drag and queer cabaret storytellers to bring their stories to shared Pride spaces. I have also interrogated the political implications of this work in terms of collective boundary making and consciousness raising. In doing so, I find that participation has implications for the movement both within and beyond Pride spaces.

In a movement that centers the stories, bodies, and political priorities of the most privileged LGBTQ2+ peoples (Armstrong 2002; Vaid 2012) popular drag and queer cabaret storytellers reside along the margins. As such, there are risks to participating in shared Pride spaces. Risks fueled by domination and power inequities can limit movement participation (Morris and Braine 2001). While popular drag storytellers are marginalized in the movement, they tend to associate the gayborhood spaces wherein Pride events occur with safety. For many queer cabaret storytellers, gayborhood spaces are anything but 'safe'. Whereas queer cabaret is founded on intersectional prefigurative politics, Pride spaces are not. Thus, both groups are vulnerable in their participation; however, there is significant nuance in the range and scope of this vulnerability. Despite the risks, drag and queer cabaret storytellers are motivated to participate by their desire to engage in strategic resistance, a process characterized by 1) claiming space and deploying identities, 2) advocating for political priorities, and 3) engaging outsider audiences.

Both drag and queer cabaret storytellers prioritize the process of claiming space. They do so by evoking narratives of Pride as a symbolic event associated with the historical roots of LGBTQ2+ movement organizing. Doing so enables drag and queer cabaret storytellers to situate their stories within the bounds of the contemporary movement. Yet, drag and queer cabaret storytellers deploy their identities differently in the process of claiming space. Specifically, popular drag storytellers deploy their identities as drag performers, whereas queer cabaret storytellers deploy their identities as peoples located at the intersections of race, class, age, ability, gender, and sexuality. In both cases, we see evidence of Bernstein's (1997; 2008) argument that identity deployment in social movements can be strategic. In this case, drag and queer cabaret identity deployment enables the articulation of specific political priorities.

Advocating for political priorities is integral to strategic resistance. Movement actors use Pride to jockey for opportunities to shape the political priorities of the movement. As chapter four and five demonstrated, popular drag and queer cabaret storytelling seeks to build movement collectivity, however, they do so in politically nuanced ways. Whereas popular drag storytelling seeks to challenge hegemonic gender and sexuality, queer cabaret interrogates an array of intersecting power dynamics that shape the lives of queer folks. In other words, disparate groups engage in different kinds of consciousness raising projects. I argue that storytellers are, in part, motivated to claim space and share these nuanced versions of queer politics on stages in shared LGBTQ2+ Pride spaces.

Similar to Ghaziani's (2008) understanding of "infighting", groups within the movement fight for the opportunity to determine the primacy of specific movement issues. These battles are fueled by divergent political priorities. Ghaziani's (2008) analysis is particularly fruitful for theorizing how intramovement contests over political issues shaped the Marches on Washington. However, as I have shown, divergent political issues are fundamentally related to people, identities, and intersecting power relations. In doing so, I draw on Ghaziani's insights but push them further by demonstrating the wider issues and intragroup relations that fuel intramovement contests over political priorities. I also push his ideas further by demonstrating the role of outsider audiences in informing strategic resistance.

The last mechanism of strategic resistance is found in the motivational pull of outsiders that large-scale Pride events attract. Here I see value in revisiting the insights offered by Rupp and Taylor (2003) in their germinal book on drag. While they do not use the language of "allyship," and instead tout the potential for drag to expand the "collective identity," Rupp and Taylor (2003) see potential in the tendency for audiences to reflect on their preconceived (and normative) notions of gender and sexuality after viewing drag storytelling. I too see evidence of this potential. In fact, many storytellers are motivated by this promise of affecting others in ways that nurture progressive change, or in Judy's words, in ways that "queer everyone". Therefore, by engaging with outsiders (many of whom are 'straight') in Pride spaces, storytellers seek to plant seeds that can nurture allyship

beyond the bounds of the movement collective. Yet, outsider audiences can also serve as a resource for other forms of change.

Like all social movement action, storytelling is strategic in its relationship to a given audience (Polletta 1998; Swerts 2015). These strategies are informed by the desire to make stories resonate with audiences. In short, decisions are made to ensure the messages are taken up by outsiders. However, little has been said on the role of outsiders in shaping internal movement dynamics. The analysis I present above shows how outsiders can serve as political resources to groups within Pride spaces. Outsiders as witnesses can invite a kind of political reflexivity with the movement. Having the eyes of the world are upon you can be a potential resource for intramovement collectives to push for political change within the movement. In other words, reaching the audience is not the only goal. Rather, the existence of an outsider audience can assist movement groups in their advocacy for shaping political priorities.

Overall, by analyzing the motivations and political implications of storytelling in shared Pride spaces, I present the concept of strategic resistance as a means of understanding why marginalized groups are motivated to participate in shared movement spaces wherein competing ideologies and inequities abound. Despite the risks some storytellers take by way of their participation in spaces that are unwelcoming at times and unsafe at others, drag and queer cabaret storytellers are compelled to participate in Pride in an effort to lay claim to movement space in order to ensure their stories and their selves are part of the overall movement

narrative. Further, the stories they tell in Pride spaces are intended to challenge the movement's status quo, one embedded in myriad hierarchies. Mainstream LGBTQ2+ spaces (and the movement leadership) have been widely critiqued for prioritizing the most privileged of queers. Drag and queer cabaret stories seek to challenge this in distinct ways. Lastly, by examining the relationship between storytellers and the audiences of which Pride draws, I attest to the role of outsiders in fueling strategic resistance. As such, I find that outsiders can be valuable resources for affecting change both externally and internally. Overall, strategic resistance shapes not only who 'we' are and what 'our' needs are, but how 'we' struggle to define our political priorities to ourselves and others.

Conclusion

Social movements are fundamentally about change; some groups organize to resist change, others to affect change. Social movements can also tell us a great deal about social inequality. In the case of the LGBTQ2+ movement, people come together to fight in the name of the movement and work collaboratively to challenge sites of oppression. Social movement research has provided numerous tools to help understand how, why, when, and where groups come together to fight for change. Most prominently, the body of scholarship on collective identity has emerged in hopes of understanding the fundamental 'we-ness' that shapes political action led by groups like those found in the LGBTQ2+ movement. Additionally, social movement concepts like storytelling and free spaces have demonstrated the link between *how* and *where* groups come together to build collectivity and engage in consciousness raising. Concepts like infighting have also been generative for understanding tensions surrounding competing political priorities within movements. And while these concepts are instructive, they have inadequately addressed complex issues of hierarchy and more specifically the role of intersecting power relations in shaping these processes. This dissertation sought to address this gap.

I began this dissertation by asking, how do intersecting power relations inform the social movement processes of collectivity, consciousness raising, and the articulation of political priorities? I situated this question in the work of intersectionality scholars that see all social relations as embedded in intersecting

power relations of race, class, gender, age, sexuality, and ability. Therefore, it is no surprise that I find intersecting power relations *do* inform our social movement processes. Rather, it is *how* social movement actors engage with intersecting power relations that is the larger contribution of my research. In short, failure to address intersecting power relations informs social movement processes in ways that contradictorily build *and* undermine internal movement solidarity. Failure to address intersecting power relations in movement processes facilitates the development of internal movement hierarchies. Further, it is those who are most marginalized in the movement that not only take on the work of challenging these hierarches but have the most to lose by doing so. Conversely, attending to the myriad ways intersecting power relations shape our movement processes is a means of creating new opportunities to expand the movement's narrative of who 'we' are and better identify the sources of our collective struggle.

Social movement engagement takes various forms. I have made the argument in this dissertation that drag and queer cabaret are particularly fruitful sites of resistance as they provide insight into processes by which movement actors engage with 'others' within and beyond the LGBTQ2+ movement. Drag and queer cabaret communities occupy marginalized positions within the movement (albeit they are differently positioned in important ways). Thus, drag and queer cabaret signify opportunities for insight into how movement power relations shape the ways we resist. Using drag and queer cabaret as the case through which to understand movement processes, I support my broader argument

about the need to address *how* intersecting power relations shape our movement processes by showing exactly how power relations work to inform three major areas of social movement scholarship, namely storytelling, spaces, and intramovement struggles.

I also draw on the concept of social movement 'free spaces'. Drag and queer cabaret storytelling often occurs in social movement free spaces. Free spaces signify realms of social movement activity that allow actors to convene and develop a critical collective consciousness free from the power inequities found in other social spaces (Gamson, W. 1996). While drag and queer cabaret represent movement free spaces, my findings show that these particular 'free spaces' are not free from intersecting power relations. As such, I offer my theory of *intersectional prefigurative politics* to help explain how groups actively engage with intersecting power relations to inform the kinds of stories we tell as well as who gets to tell them.

Lastly, my research extends the concept of infighting by addressing the vital role of audiences in infighting processes. Pulling from insights offered in Ghaziani's (2008) work on infighting and Rupp and Taylor's (2003) attention to the role of audience in performative movement work, I proffer my theory of *strategic resistance.* Strategic resistance is the process whereby social movement actors engage in shared movement spaces—wherein biographies, ideologies, and experiences vary greatly—to 1) claim space and deploy identities, 2) advocate for political priorities, and 3) engage outsiders. I unpack these contributions further in

the following section wherein I elaborate on the key findings of this dissertation, specifically as they relate to storytelling, spaces, and struggles.

Storytelling

Stories play an integral role in shaping social movement action (Benford 2002; Davis 2002; Tilly 2002; Polletta 1998; 2002; 2010; Sium and Ritskes 2013). The scholarship on social movement storytelling demonstrates the ability for storytelling to not only explain movement action (Polletta 2010) and inform social movement strategies (Swerts 2015), but storytelling can provide insight into the overall collective narrative of a movement (Polletta 1998; Polletta et al. 2011). Storytelling goes beyond what stories we tell about our experiences and our struggles to include analytic attention to who tells stories, how, when, and where they are told. While the latter indicates that context is of analytic importance, storytelling models fall short of incorporating attention to *intersecting* power relations. The findings I present in chapters four and five attest to the need to attend to intersectional power relations in storytelling research.

By positioning drag and queer cabaret as processes of storytelling that are intended to mobilize collectivity and develop critical consciousness, I find that storytelling processes are not only embedded in intersecting power relations, but more importantly, how movement actors address this reality matters. Simply stated, when intersecting power relations are not addressed, storytelling processes can create and sustain hierarchies within the movement specifically as they relate

to whose experiences and politics are prioritized in storytelling spaces. In this way, collectivity projects undermine movement cohesion.

Chapter four demonstrates how LGBTQ2+ peoples use popular drag as a form of personal empowerment and collectivity building. Similarly, in chapter five I also show how LGBTQ2+ peoples use queer cabaret as a form of personal empowerment and collectivity building. In both cases, LGBTQ2+ movement actors use storytelling to develop a sense of collectivity or 'we-ness'. Further, that collectivity becomes rooted in the LGBTQ2+ movement. In the case of drag, the connection between storytelling and 'gayborhood' (Ghazani 2014) spaces facilitates that link. In the case of queer cabaret, storytellers and organizers go beyond the gayborhood to curate spaces that centre the stories and storytelling of QTBIPOC, people with disabilities, queer youth, and others who are disproportionality marginalized in movement and other social spaces. Both forms of storytelling are used to empower and build collectivity; however, the processes in each space vary greatly in ways that shape whose stories are told and how these stories work to create a specific collective consciousness.

In the case of drag, collectivity is mobilized and strengthened through celebration and critique of hegemonic gender and sexuality. Storytellers come together, in part, in response to the rigidity of gender and sexuality found in heteronormativity. Drag is also a means of challenging *homonormativity* (Duggan 2002). Drag is a space for effeminate men, masculine women, and gender rebels to tell their stories of gender and sexual non-conformity and be celebrated for

doing so. Being celebrated in drag spaces is a means of drawing boundaries around who 'we' are. Drag is about celebration; yet drag is also about critique.

In celebrating who 'we' are, drag storytelling is also a process of consciousness raising. The consciousness raising that happens in popular drag spaces works to establish a connection between who 'we' are as a collective and the politics that (should) guide our work, namely the critical resistance of gender and sexual oppression. Rigid and binary constructs of gender and sexuality are interrogated, dismantled, and critiqued on popular drag stages. Thus, popular drag storytelling is a means of drawing a boundary around an LGBTQ2+ collective using narratives of who 'we' are, while celebrating those along the margins of hetero and homonormativity. It is also a vehicle for resisting gender and sexual oppression and challenging the sources of our shared struggle. In the case of popular drag, the boundary work that establishes who we are is directly related to our resistance to hegemonic gender and sexuality. Yet, to leave the analysis there would be to inadequately address the ways that intersecting power relations inform this process.

Intersecting power relations operate in drag spaces in ways that open up criticism of some axes of oppression, gender and sexuality for instance, while leaving others intact. For example, the spatial and cultural boundary work within drag spaces that work to build collectivity also effectively marginalize and exclude many of 'us' specifically those with fat bodies, working-class and cash-poor folks, peoples with disabilities, people of colour, and queer youth. In other

words, the boundary work process in drag storytelling creates hierarchies that limit whose bodies are celebrated and included in the narrative of who 'we' are. Furthermore, the consciousness raising project that foregrounds attention to hegemonic gender and sexuality as sites of oppression, fails to adequately address how gender and sexual oppression work in relation to other 'isms' including but not limited to racism, classism, ageism, and ableism. Thus, the boundary work that delimits who 'we' are via the consciousness raising project of drag effectively limits not only who tells 'our' stories but how we come to understand the source of our struggles.

In the case of queer cabaret, the stories 'we' tell are far broader in form and content. Queer cabaret storytellers use the stage to grapple with complex issues including sex work, violence, militarization, pain, trauma, and love. Further, they do so through various storytelling forms including spoken word, dance, burlesque, drag, and song. Unlike popular drag spaces, the queer cabaret spaces I studied sought to centre the stories and storytelling of QTBIPOC, folks with disabilities, non-binary folks, those who are cash-poor, and youth. This process of re-centering works to build a collectivity that is affirming for peoples who are disproportionately marginalized in queer spaces.

As LGBTQ2+ activist Urvashi Vaid (2012) and others have demonstrated, often times LGBTQ2+ spaces are synonymous with whiteness (see also Logie and Rwigema 2014; Ward 2008c). Prominent movement spaces are also prohibitive to other marginalized LGBTQ2+ peoples. By re-centering queer cabaret storytelling

and ensuring these spaces are accessible, queer cabaret expands the narrative of who 'we' are. Beyond that, re-centering who 'we' are happens in relation to the articulation of what our struggle entails. Expanding the narrative of who we are enables storytellers to go beyond critiquing hegemonic gender and sexuality to incorporate critiques of other intersecting forms of oppression including racism, classism, ableism, audism, and colonialism. Having these critiques celebrated and affirmed through storytelling processes facilitates the development of a collective consciousness rooted in intersectional politics. That said, the very opportunities that come with queer cabaret storytelling that exists beyond the 'gayborhood' are limited by queer cabaret's spatial marginalization. Spatial marginalization not only renders queer cabaret relatively insular as it is cut off from prominent LGBTQ2+ spaces and venues, but this spatial marginalization limits potential audiences and the expansion of intersectional political consciousness raising.

Storytelling scholarship disproportionately focuses on the *strategies* behind telling stories in particular ways, spaces, and times. While scholars have long recognized that like all social processes, storytelling is situated in larger social relations of power (Davis 2002; Polletta 1998; 2002; 2010; Polletta et al. 2011), the work I have done here, sheds light on the relationship between strategies and *ideologies*. In this way, decisions about *how*, *who*, and *where* we tell our collective LGBTQ2+ stories are not only strategic but they are deeply tied to our political priorities. By demonstrating how intersecting power relations shape the social moment process of storytelling, I advocate for more attention to

the ways political priorities and collective ideologies inform how we use storytelling strategically.

Spaces

Social movement spaces are also shaped by intersecting power relations. While storytelling scholars note that context is key to shaping not only what stories are told but who gets to tell them (Polletta 1998; Swerts 2015), I advocate for more attention to the politics of space in social movement processes. While attention has been given to the significance of 'free spaces' less attention has been given to how these free spaces are informed by intersecting power relations. Evans and Boyte (1986) state, "free spaces, are the environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue" (p. 17). Free spaces are democratic spaces "where people can discover "who they are" and to what they aspire on their own terms" (Evans and Boyte 1986:68). Further they are spaces wherein social movement actors can mobilize and build collectivity "shielded from social control by agents of the policies or cultural codes being challenged" (Gamson, W. 1996:28). In this way, free spaces are presumed to be 'free' from the hegemonic rule of non-free spaces. Yet, as I demonstrated in both chapter four and five, the free spaces wherein drag and queer cabaret storytelling happens are informed by intersecting power relations.

As demonstrated in chapter four, when intersecting power relations are not considered in the formation of popular drag storytelling spaces, the process re-

inscribes unequal hierarches in these spaces. For example, by not addressing how physical spaces can limit which LGBTQ2+ peoples can access these spaces, these free spaces prioritize certain stories over others. In the case of popular drag, gayborhood spaces create barriers for folks with disabilities, who are cash-poor, who are deaf, who are non-white, and who are under the age of majority. In response, I demonstrate how queer cabaret storytellers curate spaces which are built upon intersectional prefigurative politics.

I put the literature on prefiguration and free spaces (Polletta 1999) in conversation with the scholarship on intersectionality to demonstrate the potential of *intersectional prefigurative politics*. In chapter five, I theorize how queer cabaret storytellers seek to build alternative free spaces by going beyond the gayborhood to address the exclusionary and marginalizing aspects of popular drag. Social movement actors do this by creating new rules for organizing and reevaluating what 'free' and 'safe' mean for differently situated queer peoples. In doing so, queer cabaret signifies an attempt to flatten the hierarchies that emerge in popular LGBTQ2+ movement spaces. Intersectional prefigurative politics are an attempt to not only expand the narrative of who 'we' are as LGBTQ2+ folks, but also to use queer cabaret storytelling as an intersectional consciousness raising process. In other words, by creating spaces that centre the stories of marginalized queer folks, not only does queer cabaret expand the bounds of popular narratives, but it develops a collectivity and incites critiques of oppression rooted not only in hegemonic gender and sexuality, but multiple axes of oppression. However, for

movements to prosper they must go beyond organizing in autonomous free spaces. They must at some point engage with others within and beyond the movement. As such, I examine the motivations and implications of drag and queer cabaret storytelling in shared spaces of Pride. Doing so informs the development of *strategic resistance*.

Struggles

Struggles over political priorities matter and these struggles are shaped by intersecting power relations. Chapter six provides insight into how collectives along the margins of the movement jockey for space to articulate their place and their political priorities to others within and beyond the movement. In this chapter, I push Ghaziani's (2008) work on infighting further to address the role of relational aspects of 'infighting' as well as the significance of internal and external audiences. In doing so I offer my theory of *strategic resistance* to help explain the motivations and implications of the process whereby marginalized groups engage in storytelling in Pride spaces.

Strategic resistance is a process whereby marginalized groups 1) claim space and deploy identities, 2) advocate for political priorities, and 3) engage outsiders. While popular drag and queer cabaret storytellers are equally motivated by strategic resistance, there are important distinctions in *how* they engage with the process and the implications of this engagement. In the case of poplar drag, storytellers claim space by deploying their identities as drag performers. Conversely, queer cabaret storytellers deploy their identities as marginalized

queer peoples who have always and continue to play a significant role in the movement despite intramovement marginalization.

Drag and queer cabaret storytellers both use Pride spaces to advocate for their own political priorities. In the case of drag, this advocacy is driven by the need to continue to ensure stories that critique hegemonic gender and sexuality as well as homonormativity remain part of the Pride narrative. Conversely, queer cabaret seeks to bring more varied stories and intersectional politics to Pride spaces. In this way, they infuse Pride spaces with stories that resist hetero and homonormativity, while also challenging racism, ageism, classism, ableism, sexism, audism, and colonialism within and beyond the movement. Participation in Pride spaces is an act of resistance to erasure within the movement and a means of affirming space within the overall narrative of the LGBTQ2+ movement that is presented to audiences.

Pride spaces are not 'free' or 'safe' spaces in the way drag and queer cabaret can be; participation comes with risk. In a movement that centers the stories, bodies, and political priorities of the most privileged LGBTQ2+ peoples (Armstrong 2002; Vaid 2012), popular drag and queer cabaret storytellers reside along the margins. Despite the various risks that come with participating in Pride spaces—contexts that many argue fail to prioritize their access, safety, and overall experiences—the heightened presence of outsider audiences is a valuable resource, one that outweighs the risk for some. As such, Pride spaces are valuable opportunities to advocate for specific political priorities. In other words, the

increased presence of wider outsider audiences is a key motivator to participation in Pride and enacting strategic resistance.

By attending to the role of outsiders, my work pushes Ghaziani's conception of infighting in a novel direction. Specifically, I find that outsiders serve as resources to storytellers in two ways: as potential *allies* and as *witnesses*. Participation in Pride ensures drag and queer cabaret processes bring stories and political priorities to the fore. The potential for these stories to resonate with outsiders is integral to creating change and pushing the critical queer consciousness beyond the bounds of an LGBTQ2+ collective movement to ignite allyship and extend the collective identity of the movement (see Rupp and Taylor 2003). However, outsiders serve another purpose as well. With the eyes of the world upon 'us' in ways that they are not at other moments and events throughout the year, Pride is also an opportunity to use outsiders as witnesses in an attempt to address hierarchies *within* the movement. Procuring witnesses acts as leverage for asserting specific political priorities and forcing those in positions of power within the movement to address issues of inequality amongst us.

Limitations of this study

There are four limitations of the study I have presented here that require addressing. First, I see potential limitations in not including attention to time in the analysis. I began the project speaking with and observing drag kings in particular between 2009-2010. What I found in these spaces and through these conversations deeply informed the trajectory of this dissertation. Following this

initial stage, I re-entered the field in 2013 seeking new answers. This second stage was disproportionately focused on queer cabaret; however, I also continued to interview and observe in popular drag spaces while branching out to include queens as well as kings in an effort to ensure what I found in 2009-2010 remained relevant. And while, the newer data demonstrated consistency with the first round, this is a rather long span of time to collect data for a project that does not analyse time as a contributing factor in the culture of drag and queer cabaret storytelling.

Second, my focus on specific urban spaces in Ontario could be interpreted as a potential limitation of this study. While I make no claims of generalizability, I do seek to uncover how intersecting power relations inform specific processes of the LGBTQ2+ movement. I suspect that these processes would have nuanced differences based on the cultural context. In other words, not only would intersecting power relations manifest themselves differently in different cultural contexts, but the way people engage with (or fail to engage with) these relations may look differently as well. For example, while urban LGBTQ2+ storytellers tend to have access to LGBTQ2+ venues and/or gayborhoods, LGBTQ2+ peoples in rural areas likely have vastly different relationships to spaces. Further, the cultural context of urban spaces across the country would also inform the way intersecting power relations manifest themselves. For example, Montréal is markedly different from Vancouver or St. John's. As such, while intersecting power relations will continue to inform LGBTQ2+ storytelling, the ways in which people address them may vary in other urban spaces throughout Canada to

produce distinct nuanced insights into the overall relationship. Third, while I draw greatly on Rupp and Taylor's (2003) work that addresses the relationship between performance and audience, I did not directly interview audience members throughout the research process. While I provide data on the intention of performers to build collectivity through connecting with audiences and my observational data attests to the existence of collectivity in drag and queer cabaret spaces, I do not include any audience perspectives.

Lastly, social relationships are constantly changing. As such, we as researchers can never fully capture a given phenomenon. However, significant events have occurred in LGBTQ2+ spaces that have ignited widespread conversations about racism in the LGBTQ2+ movement since conducting my interviews. Three specific events in particular deserve mention. First, in 2016 a shooting took place at the *Pulse* nightclub in Orlando, Florida wherein forty-nine people were killed and 53 more were injured[38]. The shooting happened on a night targeting Latinx members of the community. Second, in 2016 BlackLivesMatter-Toronto staged a sit-in protest during the Pride parade wherein protesters called on Pride Toronto to address its failure to meet the needs of racialized queer folks. Lastly, the recent arrest of a serial killer in Toronto's Church Street Village has sparked significant public attention. The killer has pleaded guilty to murdering eight men, all with ties to the LGBTQ2+ community (most of whom were people

[38] See Appendix H

of colour[39]). Each of these cases have fueled public and intramovement discourse on race, racism, and violence inflicted on racialized members of the community in ways that were not happening while I was 'in the field.' How intramovement collectivity processes have dealt with issues of racism following these events remains to be seen.

New questions that arise

While I have answered the questions that drove this dissertation, as is often the case, new answers spark new questions. In this case, some of the limitations of this study can inform future directions of inquiry. In particular, I suspect much insight could be gained from looking at movement cultures throughout the country and beyond. How does drag and queer cabaret storytelling in other geographical spaces shed light on the relationship between creative protest, collectivity, political priorities and intersecting power relations? I also see great potential in understanding how intersecting power relations shape the collectivity building processes of other social movements. For example, how do intersecting power relations shape the protest practices of the environmental movement or the labour movement?

Whereas my research did not speak to audience members in a formal capacity, doing so could help provide insight into understanding the relationship between storytelling and audiences. In other words, how do audience members

[39] See Appendix H

take up these messages offered by drag and queer cabaret? Does witnessing the drag and queer cabaret storytelling at Pride impact how outsiders come to understand the movement and its political priorities?

Lastly, I believe the recent events of violence inflicted upon racialized LGBTQ2+ peoples in conjunction with intramovement protests calling on our SMOs to address racism within the movement are paths researchers should pursue. Specifically, future research should ask questions about how organizations have responded to these events? In what ways are SMOs and other movement groups dealing with racism and other "isms" that undermine movement collectivity? These are just a few of the possible avenues for future directions.

Where to go from here

Overall, not only do intersecting power relations shape the processes by which we forge collectivity in the LGBTQ2+ movement, but failure to address this reality can fuel movement fragmentation. As such I see great benefit in advocating for more attention to intersecting movement politics. Specifically, I advocate for more attention to intersecting power relations in the way we use theoretical tools to study social movements as well as in our movement organizing.

Specifically, I advocate for the LGBTQ2+ movement in particular and movements generally to adopt intersectional politics. Failing to address the ways intersecting power relations organize our spaces and our storytelling processes reaffirms and sustains hierarchy. Conversely, when intersectional politics are

incorporated into the mix, not only are marginalized queers centered to ensure emplacement in the movement narrative, but intersectional politics also expand the conception of who we are as well as better identify the complex sources of our struggles. Naming these sources is an important step to challenging them.

While I anticipate reluctance on the part of some who question how intersectional politics can translate into manageable strategies and goals. I find Oliver and Johnston's (2000) work instructive, specifically their distinction between ideology from framing. In this way, there may be strategic value to limiting the framing of a specific movement campaign; however, if that frame is informed by intersectional politics, the likelihood of recreating exclusionary and problematic hierarchies is lessened. Further, not only do intersectional ideological politics avoid some of the pitfalls of fragmentation, they offer up new opportunities for building solidarity within and across movements.

Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated the powerful role of drag and queer cabaret storytelling to build, mobilize, and strengthen collectivity. Yet, I have also unearthed the myriad ways that intersecting power relations fuel and sustain movement fragmentation. I have theorized the role of intersectional prefigurative politics in not only addressing the problems that arise, but unsettling the ways intersecting power relations work to oppress and marginalize. In doing so, we not only expand the narrative of who 'we' are, but we create opportunities to develop political priorities that meet the needs of the collective. However, enacting intersectional prefigurative politics is difficult to do in movement spaces

that already exist and are infused with complex hierarchies. In this case, *strategic resistance* is an effective means of flattening hierarchies and creating new opportunities for intramovement solidarity, allyship, and cross-movement collaboration. Simply stated, it is time for 'our' movement to adopt approaches that work toward justice for all of us.

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Appendices

A - Letter of Information/Consent

A Study of Performance Communities and Social Movements

Principal Investigator:
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What is the purpose of the study?

My name is Julie Gouweloos and I am a PhD candidate in Sociology at McMaster University. My interests are in gender, sexualities, performance cultures, and social movements. Through my current research project, I hope to learn more about why people participate in on-stage burlesque and/or drag style performance as well as the meanings audience members attribute to these performances.

What will happen during the study?

You are invited to participate in a one-on-one interview (lasting approximately 30-90 minutes) wherein we would meet at a time and location that is agreeable to both you and myself. With your permission, the interview will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. I will also be taking handwritten notes during the interview. As a participant, you can expect the interview style to be relatively informal. I am interested in learning about your experiences and motivations for participation in performance communities **[as a performer/as a producer]**. Questions will focus on the meaning you attribute to these specific performances and to these performance spaces. For example, why do you perform? What are you trying to convey to your audience through performance? What is the significance of this particular performance community to you?

Are there any risks to doing this study?

It is not likely that there will be any harms or discomforts associated with this research project to you the participant. However, interview have the potential to cause participants to feel vulnerable. There is also a possibility that participants may feel embarrassed or concerned about how their story will be represented in future publications. In order to minimize this potential for discomfort, I will go to great lengths to protect your privacy (I outline these steps in the following section). Furthermore, because this research project seeks to understand the experiences of members of oppressed groups, there is a possibility that

participants may feel concerned that taking part may somehow further exploit them. **Should you feel uncomfortable at any point throughout the duration of the interview, please know that you have the right to choose not to answer any of the questions I ask you. You also have the right to withdraw yourself from the study at any point without penalty.**

Who will know what I said or did in the study?

If you choose to participate in this research, your participation will be treated as confidential. Therefore, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) to ensure that your privacy is maintained. Furthermore, any "hard-copy" information (e.g. signed forms and handwritten notes) taken during the interview process will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Any "soft-copy" information (e.g. computer files or audio recording) will be kept on my personal computer in a password protected file. That said, in my previous experiences, many performers prefer to have their stage names use in publications that result from the interview. If you prefer to use your stage name rather than a pseudonym, please let me know.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?

Your participation in this study is **entirely voluntary**. If you decide to be part of the study, you can stop the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study or up until six weeks after the interview**.** If you decide to withdraw, there will be **no consequences to you**. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to; however, you are still welcome to participate in the study.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

The primary benefit of participating in this study is to the academic literature on social movements and performance communities. Further, future publications based on the findings from this study will be aimed at both academic and non-academic audiences in an effort to expose the research findings to a larger audience. Therefore, there is an opportunity for your story/work/art to reach an audience that may otherwise be difficult to reach.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

I expect to have this study completed by approximately August 2014. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at: gouwelj@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Julie Gouweloos, of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until December 2015.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of participant (printed): _____

Date: _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.
___ Yes.
___ No.

2. I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to this email address:
_____

Or to this mailing address:

_____
_____
_____

___ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

3. I would like to provide a photograph for publication purposes,
___ Yes.
___ No.

B - Semi-Structured Interview Guide

General Performance

1. Can you tell me about your drag/performance name?
2. Please tell me about how you got involved/first started performing.
3. Has your work changed since you started? If so, how?
4. Can you tell me about some of the positive experiences you've had?
5. Have you had any difficult experiences? If so, can you tell me about them?
6. Why do you perform?
7. Can you tell me about one of your performances and the process you went through to create it?

Performance and Audience

1. What are your trying to convey through your performance?
2. Can you describe the relationship you have with the audience while you are on-stage?
3. What role does the audience play in these performances?
4. Who do you think your performance resonates with?
5. Are there people or groups who you do think your performance would **not** appeal to?

Performance and Identity

1. How is performance related to your own personal identities?
2. Would you say that performing [drag/queerlesque/etc.] has changed how you feel about your gender, sexuality, or other identity categories? * If so, how?
3. Has performance taught you anything about yourself?

Space

1. Why do you perform at [insert] particular venue?
2. Are there spaces wherein you feel more comfortable performing?
3. Are there spaces wherein you feel less comfortable?
4. QC - Your shows advertise inclusivity and centering traditionally marginalized groups, can you tell me a bit more about how you work toward this in your shows?
5. QC - What are the barriers and/or challenges to creating inclusive spaces?
6. QC - How does this performance differ from traditional forms of performance that are associated with queer spaces (e.g. traditional drag)?

Ideology and Change

1. Has performing changed your perspective on LGBTQ2+ politics?
2. Have you learned anything about LGBTQ2+ community through your participation?
3. What is the biggest issue facing LGBTQ2+ folks?
4. What is the role of (creative performance) in social change?

5. Do you see your work as fostering social change? *If so, how?

Performer / Organizer

1. Can you tell me a bit about the process of creating and/or organizing an event?
    i. Where do you advertise? Why?
2. What is the process like wherein you make these decisions?
3. Who do you envision as your target audience?
4. Who do you think this event does **not** appeal to? Why?

Wrap-up

1. Is there anything that we have not discussed yet that you think would be useful to discuss in relation to this study?

C - Recruitment Event Poster

D - Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Julie Gouweloos and I am a doctoral student in the Sociology Department at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. I am emailing you today in hopes of recruiting you to participate in my dissertation study on performance communities and social movements. Simply stated, my research seeks to understand the relationship between individuals who self-identify as members of socially marginalized groups and social movement formation. I also seek to understand the role performance plays in social change.

Based on your participation **[as a performer/as a producer]**, I feel that you would be a good fit for this research project. I am currently looking for volunteers to participate in a one-on-one interview (lasting approximately 30-90 minutes) wherein we would meet at time and a location that is convenient to both you and myself (online interviews are an option based on geographic location). I am interested in learning about your experiences and motivations for participating in these performance communities **[as a performer/as a producer]**. For example, I may ask you questions about what led you to begin performing, what your performance means to you, and what you hope the audience takes from your performance.

Unfortunately, there will be no monetary compensation for agreeing to participate; however, I hope that the experience will be an enjoyable one!

If you are interested in participating or learning more about this study, please contact me via email at gouwelj@mcmaster.ca. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Julie Gouweloos

E - Self-Identification Demographics Form

The purpose of this form is to obtain demographic information about the participants in this study. While, I appreciate many people choose not to identify using categorical labels, for others, identity labels are integral to their sense of self and group belonging. If you do not feel comfortable filling out the categories below, you may choose to leave the space blank; however, your participation is greatly appreciated.

Stage name or preferred pseudonym:

Age:

Nationality(ies):

Gender Identity:

Sexual Identity:

Racial Identity:

Ethnicity:

City of Residence:

Highest Completed Education Level:

Preferred Gender Pronoun:

Estimated Household Income (e.g. less than $10,000; 20,000-30,000):

Occupation:

Any other identity category(ies) you wish to include:

Political Affiliation:

F - Participant Feedback Response

Thank you so much for your interest as well as your questions. There is no easy way to respond to your questions as I have grappled for years now with the value of this research, how to account for complex power imbalances inherent in a "research project" of any sort, as well as how to conduct research in a way that is just and fruitful to everyone involved. I think the best way to speak to your questions is to tell you about how this research began and where I hope it will go. This project emerged out of two main sources:

1) I have long been a fan of queer performance. As a self-identified queer woman, performance spaces have been integral to the way I have come to know my own community; however, I have found there are queer community spaces that perpetuate various forms of social hierarchies (including, but not limited to, race, class, gender, sexualities, age, and ability) and others that seek to challenge those hierarchies. This project seeks to analyze how queer spaces that actively challenge social hierarchies can create a model for other forms of activism.

2) As a university student, I have found myself wanting for research that speaks to the power of queer activist work that does not directly seek to engage "the state" as a means of creating meaningful change (i.e. queer performance) and instead looks toward community building and cultural change.

My hope is that this project will provide insight into how to do activism in a way that is inclusive (rather than exclusive) and from the ground up (rather than solely relying on engagement with those in power). I see queer performance as a model for how to do this (please note, when I say "queer", I specifically mean queer activism that is founded on a logic of intersectionality rather than solely on LGBTQ identity politics).

In terms of privileges I hold, there are many. Most notably, I am a cisgender white woman who is currently affiliated with an academic institution. In all honesty, and understandably, these identities have created a bit of a barrier to doing this research as most of the queer performance spaces that enact intersectional politics are QPOC spaces. I have spent a great deal of time speaking with community members and fellow students, as well as reflecting on how I can account for these power imbalances. Thus far, there is no easy answer; however, I am always looking for suggestions.

In response to your question about how participants are credited, each participant is given the option to use their name/stage name or a pseudonym in any publications. While most participants have opted to use their stage name, some have opted for a fake name to afford them some anonymity. Based on the approach I take to research (which is informed by an array of feminist theories), I ensure there is a great amount of context provided when using quotes from participants in the writing.

I hope this helps to provide a bit more background into the project and I hope you remain interested in the possibility of an interview. I would be happy to answer further questions should they arise.

Thank you!

G - Interview Participant Data

Queer Cabaret

Name	Age	Gender ID	Pronoun	Sexual ID	Racial ID	Ethnic ID	Other ID
Vena Kava	25	Genderqueer	They	Queer	POC mixed	Mixed South Asian	chronic pain, youth
Manish	32	Male, Cisgender	He	Queer	Asian	American, South Asian Indian	disabled
Sze-Yang	30	yin yang	No pref.	Queer		Taiwanese, Chinese	
Chase	23	Transman, Genderqueer Butch Trans		Queer	Asian		
Womynista	21		She		Black	Jamaican Canadian	
BeeCee Clette		Genderqueer/Transgender	They	Queer			
Judy					white		
Juba	43	Male	He	Queer/ Bisexual	Black, Mixed Blood	African American	crip, gimp, partner, parent, sex worker, emcee, faggot, atheist, vers, nigga, slut, polyamorist, heathen, pervert
Ladyboy Sparkle	28	Genderqueer (gender fluid, gender bending)	They/He	Pan-sexual	White/ Light skinned	Latin American, Canadian Citizen, Venezuelan Nationality	cross-dresser, transfeminine (I am trans identified buy my gender expression is often feminine)
Miss Fluffy Soufflé	38	Transdude	Him/His	Queer	White		Fat, chubby, plump, bootylicious
Pandora Rockstar	28	Female	She/ Her/ They	Queer	Brown	South Asian, Indian	
Papillion Lafayette	33	Femme	She/ Her	Queer	African Descent	Ghanaian, Trinidadian, Afro-diasporic, Canadian	
Ravyn Wings	30	2S, trans m&f	He/ She	Queer		African, Mohawk, Pequot Indian	Black, cismale
Red Mango	26	Genderqueer/Gender neutral	They/ Them	Queer	Black	Trinidadian, Black	
soul-e-dairy-tea	25	Female	She	Bisexual	Black African	Ghanaian Canadian	
Tobi	20	Female/ Androgyny	She/ Her	Lesbian	Black	Nigerian born Canadian	
Venus Venom	38	Queer "lean towards female"	She	Queer	Minority, Person of Colour	Chinese Columbian	Disabled, sex worker (ex), psychiatric survivor, ex youth in care

Drag							
Name	**Age**	**Gender ID**	**Pronoun**	**Sexual ID**	**Racial ID**	**Ethnic ID**	**Other ID**
Andy	24	Woman	She	Lesbian	white		
Boston	28	Woman/Tomboy	She	Lesbian	white		
Brando Johnson	34	Woman, Butch		Butch	white		
Buck Wylde	34	Male (in drag)	He		white		
Drag King Flare	36	Genderqueer/ no label		Queer	white	Irish	
Harley DR Davidson	43	Male (in drag)	He		white		
Jasper Cox	36			Lesbian, Dyke, butch, Old school butch	white		
Johnny Flash	40			"try-sexual"	white	Newfound-lander	
Johnny P. Rocket	36	Masculine, Butch		Gay, Butch	white		
Justin Rockhard	26	Transman	He	In straight relationship	white		
Randy Rescue	30	Masculine, Butch		Gay, Butch	white		
Robin Derring	70	Male	He	Gay	white	French, Scottish, Canadian	
Rockin' Rolley	43	Androgynous, Trans, Butch		Butch	white	Polish	
Sapphyre Poison	23	Genderqueer	Her/Him	Gay	"Caucasian"		
Troy Boy	28	Genderqueer	He/Him	Queer	"Caucasian"		
Athena McQueen	27	Female/Trans	She	Queer	"Caucasian"		
Jade Labrett	22	Female (persona)	She/Ma'am	Gay	white	Scottish, Irish, French, Native	
Victoria Parks	40	Male (female in persona)	She (in drag)	Gay	white		

H - Victims of Racialized Violence in LGBTQ2+ Communities

Names of those Killed in the 2016 Shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida

Stanley Almodovar III, 23 years old
Amanda L. Alvear, 25 years old
Oscar A. Aracena Montero, 26 years old
Rodolfo Ayala Ayala, 33 years old
Antonio Davon Brown, 29 years old
Darryl Roman Burt II, 29 years old
Angel Candelario-Padro, 28 years old
Juan Chavez Martinez, 25 years old
Luis Daniel Conde, 39 years old
Cory James Connell, 21 years old
Tevin Eugene Crosby, 25 years old
Deonka Deidra Drayton, 32 years old
Simón Adrian Carrillo Fernández, 31 years old
Leroy Valentin Fernandez, 25 years old
Mercedez Marisol Flores, 26 years old
Peter Ommy Gonzalez Cruz, 22 years old
Juan Ramon Guerrero, 22 years old
Paul Terrell Henry, 41 years old
Frank Hernandez, 27 years old
Miguel Angel Honorato, 30 years old
Javier Jorge Reyes, 40 years old
Jason Benjamin Josaphat, 19 years old
Eddie Jamoldroy Justice, 30 years old
Anthony Luis Laureano Disla, 25 years old
Christopher Andrew Leinonen, 32 years old
Alejandro Barrios Martinez, 21 years old
Brenda Marquez McCool, 49 years old
Gilberto R. Silva Menendez, 25 years old
Kimberly Jean Morris, 37 years old
Akyra Monet Murray, 18 years old
Luis Omar Ocasio Capo, 20 years old
Geraldo A. Ortiz Jimenez, 25 years old
Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera, 36 years old
Joel Rayon Paniagua, 32 years old
Jean Carlos Mendez Perez, 35 years old
Enrique L. Rios, Jr., 25 years old
Jean Carlos Nieves Rodríguez, 27 years old
Xavier Emmanuel Serrano-Rosado, 35 years old
Christopher Joseph Sanfeliz, 24 years old
Yilmary Rodríguez Solivan, 24 years old

Edward Sotomayor Jr., 34 years old
Shane Evan Tomlinson, 33 years old
Martin Benitez Torres, 33 years old
Jonathan A. Camuy Vega, 24 years old
Juan Pablo Rivera Velázquez, 37 years old
Luis Sergio Vielma, 22 years old
Franky Jimmy DeJesus Velázquez, 50 years old
Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon, 37 years old
Jerald Arthur Wright, 31 years old

Names of Men Killed in Toronto's Church Street 'Gay Village'

Skandaraj Navaratnam, 40 years old
Abdulbasir Faizi, 44 years old
Majeed Kayhan, 58 years old
Soroush Mahmudi, 50 years old
Kirushna Kumar Kanagaratnam, 37 years old
Dean Lisowick, 47 years old
Selim Esen, 44 years old
Andrew Kinsman, 49 years old