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“Que(e)rying Religious Activism: Culture, Identity, and the Politics of Family in Unitarian Universalist Churches”

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ABSTRACT

Despite the longstanding debate about religion's role in social movements, conservative religious opposition to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) social movement in the United States has limited sociological research in this area to questions of individual identity or the oppositional strategies used by religious and LGBTQ groups to sway public opinion and policy decisions. This dissertation addresses the less well-understood dynamics of mainstream religious group participation in LGBTQ social movement. Through frameworks of social movement theory, organizational culture, and queer theory, it explores the organizational elements shaping congregants' practices in two Unitarian Universalist (UU) churches considered "Welcoming Congregations". Analysis of data generated from participant observations, in-depth interviews, and church and denominational texts highlight how structures of church governance, materiality, and history intersected with embedded discourses of gender and sexuality to promote "closeting" and "covering" repertoires of discourse and action on behalf of marriage equality. Findings underscore the value of continued research on the specific ways in which specific elements of organizational culture can shape local group discourses and practices at varying depths, degrees, and dimensions of organizational embeddedness.

“Que(e)rying Religious Activism: Culture, Identity, and the Politics of Family in Unitarian
Universalist Churches”

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Dissertation

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INTRODUCTION

Que(e)rying Religious Activism: Culture, Identity, and the Politics of Family in Unitarian Universalist Churches

On a bright Sunday morning in June, I visited Hope Church to attend its annual “Pride Service”. Now a regular part of Hope’s summer worship calendar, the LGBTQ Pride Service is also considered routine practice for all UU congregations that are designated as “Welcoming and Affirming”. The following excerpt depicts the interaction that took place after Joann, Hope’s minister, invited congregants to stand and share their personal stories and feelings with the congregation during that morning’s collective offering of “Joys and Sorrows”:

Taking the microphone from Joann’s hand, the first speaker, a white haired man, turned to face the congregation and share “some updates” for which he felt joyful. He described his son’s new job and then said his daughter’s husband was back in good health. Smiling, he handed the microphone back to Joann. Congregants waited for the next volunteer. In the back of the room, a man with equally white hair, then stood and said into the mic “I just wanted to share my joy and thanks.” He felt “thankful” his son found a job out of state and joyful “for the birth of a new grandson”. He then requested prayers for his “sister-in-law’s healing after her recent surgery”. The third speaker, a silver-haired woman with glasses and a faint tremor, stood up next to wait for the mic. She announced she was joyful that she and her husband just celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. As congregants applauded the achievement, the last speaker stood, cautiously holding the pew in front of her. With focused concentration, she said, “My name is Abby, and my joy is that this is a Welcoming Congregation” (*Field notes Hope Church*).

I chose to introduce my dissertation with this excerpt because it offers a “magnified moment” of Hope’s practices as a “Welcoming Congregation”. “Magnified moments,” according to Arlie Russell Hochschild, are “episodes of heightened importance, either epiphanies, moments of intense glee or unusual insight, or moments in which things go intensely but meaningfully wrong” (2003:16). Either way, she explained, “the moment stands out as metaphorically rich, [or] unusually elaborate,” with respect to a research topic or question.

While on the surface, the excerpt of field notes that I recorded may seem to depict a

rather mundane moment, a fairly typical interaction that occurred during a routine worship practice at a small UU church in the Northeast United States. However, as I watched this moment unfold, I realized that it actually revealed a situation that was much more complex. This moment became magnified because of how the silence in the sanctuary outmatched the Pride that morning. It was magnified because of the questions it raised about the complex relations of power and discourse that surfaced through those interactions.

Why, for instance, on a day of celebrating the lives and honoring the struggles of LGBTQ people, did only one congregant mention Hope's Welcoming Congregation, or anything related to LGBTQ social justice for that matter? How, in the height of statewide political contest over same-sex marriage rights, was it possible to hear so many hetero-normative stories of family "joy", without so much as a whisper about LGBTQ Pride being the theme of the service or the day? This moment, in other words, is magnified for what it captures about the interwoven mechanisms of organizational life that shape UU participation in LGBTQ social movement, which is the topic of my dissertation research.

At the heart of my dissertation research is the question of organized religion and its relation and significance to social movements. This question, once central to the early development of sociological thought and practice, still stands as a topic of considerable interest both within and beyond the academy. Whether as an agent and catalyst of social change or as a source of conservative opposition and social stability, the history of religious group participation in social movements is long and complex (Smith 1996; Wood 1999). In the United States, this history of religious advocacy for social change spans more than two hundred years, and encompasses a wide range of social justice efforts (Quinley 1974; Slessarev-Jamir 2004; Smith 1996; St John 2001). From the large-scale movements of Women's Suffrage and Civil Rights to

local-level grassroots and community organizing, “the stuff of religion has helped constitute the very substance of these social movements’ grievances, identities, organizations, and strategies” (Smith 1996:9; see also Bumbaugh 2000, Raines 1977, Slessarev-Jamir 2004).

Yet, for all that we know about religion as a catalyst of change, religious collective action for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) social justice have remained largely unexplored.¹ Dominant Christian opposition to non-normative gender and sexuality has limited our understanding of religious groups’ practices when advocating for sexuality and gender justice. Scholarship on religion and sexuality largely falls instead within two loosely defined themes: namely, the ways that individuals reconcile their (seemingly discordant) LGBTQ and religious identities (Thumma 1991; Wilcox 2003; Yip 1997); and congregational attitudes to changing contexts of sexuality and gender (e.g. Cadge 2004; Moone 2005a, 2005b).

Many of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by religious groups advocating for LGBTQ social justice must be found from research in related areas, including studies on churches’ local participation in community actions (e.g. Wood 1999), broader cultural analyses of Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) groups, Black Church anti-racist activism since the Civil Rights Movement (e.g. Barnes 2004; Gilkes 1985), modern Wicca and feminist movement (Taylor and Whittier 1992), and the civic participation of Quaker, United Church of Christ, Episcopal, and United Methodist congregations (e.g. Wood 1999; Wuthnow and Evans 2002). The purpose of my dissertation research was to address this persistent gap in research by contributing sociological insights to the question of religious group participation in LGBTQ social justice from a meso-level analytic framework of organizational culture.

Across the United States, Unitarian Universalist (UU) churches are widely seen as archetypal when it comes to religious advocacy of LGBTQ social justice. Their liberal

¹ For notable exceptions, see Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Slessarev-Jamir 2004; St John 2001.

theological principles, commitment to religious freedom, and venerable history of liberal religious activism in the United States, serve to underscore the value of exploring the dynamics of UU advocacy for LGBTQ social justice (Lee 1992, 1995; Miller 1976). The history of UU advocacy for sexual diversity can be traced back to 1969, when UU minister James Stoll became the first openly gay ordained minister in any major religious group in the United States. (Oppenheimer 1996). In 1989, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and its then-named Office of Gay and Lesbian Concerns developed the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program, a progressive religious action that stood out against a backdrop of increasing public discourse around the HIV/AIDS epidemic and renewed conservative religious opposition to LGBT social movement (D’Emilio 1998).

The purpose of developing the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program, according to Keith Kron, former director of what is now named the Office of LGBTQ Ministries, was to help UU congregations “become intentionally welcoming” to bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people. The first iteration of the ‘Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program’ developed in response to the recommendations made by the UUA’s 1987 Common Vision Planning Committee after it conducted research on the feelings and experiences of LGBT congregants in their UU congregations (Alexander 1990:1). Two years later, the first UU congregation became certified as a ‘Welcoming Congregation’.

Likewise, official UUA texts described the purpose of the program, stating:

We know that religious spaces haven’t always been welcoming places for all people, especially when it comes to gender and sexuality. We are out to change that...For twenty-five years we have worked hard to make sure lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are full members of our faith communities (UUA 2016).

Today, UU congregations are widely known for being religious sanctuaries for LGBTQ

congregants, with more than sixty percent (almost seven hundred) designated as “Welcoming Congregations” by 2012.

However, UU congregations, unlike most mainstream denominations in the United States, operate with a high degree of organizational autonomy, a result of the religion’s adherence to “congregational polity”, or congregational self-governance. Consequently, the extent of participation in programs and collective actions proposed by the UUA can vary greatly across UU congregations. My primary interest in conducting this research was to try to account for this range and variation of UU participation in LGBTQ social justice by conducting a comparative, meso-level analysis of local UU church meanings and practices of the UUA’s social justice initiatives.

A Welcoming and Affirming Culture? Framing (and) the Research Question

For decades, the framing approach has been a dominant model used by scholars interested in cultural dimensions of social movement (Hart 1996). Drawn from Goffman’s (1974) analysis of cultural frames used by media advertisers, Snow and Benford adapted the model to better address the collective and social change dimensions of cultural framing practices in social movements. Movement groups, from this perspective, often engage in strategic framing efforts to capture the movement’s meaning and significance with words, phrases, and symbols that can appeal to target audiences and broader population (1988; see also Snow et al. 1986).

Scholarship in this area emphasizes the centrality of groups’ framing strategies to their ability to mobilize support and/or participation from broader cultural audiences (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 1986). It draws on multiple indices to gauge the potential outcomes of groups’ strategic meaning making practices, including how a frame aligns with established

symbols and nomenclature circulating in popular culture and the frame's visibility across different social groups and contexts. These and other measures serve as indices of "frame resonance" (Benford 2000).

From this perspective, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that the "Welcoming and Affirming Congregation" frame resonated throughout the UU religious movement. The "Welcoming and Affirming Congregation" designation has considerable and ongoing symbolic power (Hallett 1999). Church and denominational leaders routinely reference it as evidence of UU's liberal theologies, values, and principles, and to promote the UUA's commitment to social justice and collective actions for social change. As the UUA claims, "Our broader (and deeper) understanding of justice is reflected in the fact that over half of our congregations are now officially Welcoming (to the bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender community) Congregations" (Leslie 2009). The expansion of the Welcoming Congregation label as an indicator of UU's commitment to social justice in general also suggests an impressive degree of resonance with the UUA' frame.

This frame also seems to hold tremendous appeal at the organizational level. Resonance with the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation frame was evident at Hope and Hillside, with "Welcoming" language and images found in both churches' newsletters and Orders of Service, as well as on the banners, flags, and signs hung to publicize various church and community events. In both churches, most members' nametags were adorned with small rainbow flag stickers, signifying their participation in the program. Both churches' websites also displayed "Welcoming Congregation" symbols, such as rainbow flags and "Welcoming and Affirming Congregation" banners on their homepages. Online visitors could also access the churches' "Welcoming Congregation Resolutions" and "Commitments to Action", as well as additional

information on the Program and web links to the UUA's Office of GLBTQ Ministries.

In a manner consistent with the UU structure of congregational polity, it is up to each individual church to determine if its congregation has done sufficient work to meet program requirements and earn the Welcoming designation. Yet, what I discovered by looking deeper at the churches' Welcoming Congregation practices was that the resonance of the Welcoming Congregation *frame* alone was not necessarily indicative of a successful mobilization strategy. For instance, when I began this project, it had been two years since Hope's Welcoming Congregation committee dissolved and three since the dissolution of Hillside's most recent GLBT Task Force. In fact, there was scant evidence of any ongoing LGBTQ social justice participation by congregants, other than some participation in church and regional LGBTQ Pride Day events.

This project thus developed as a way to account for the congregational stagnancy that I saw in these two UU congregations, despite a galvanizing backdrop of political and social movement with regard to the issue of marriage equality in the United States. The purpose of my research was to go beyond an analysis of frame resonance to more fully examine how UU groups locally interpret and practice the goals, strategies, and actions encompassed by the frame. Its ultimate goal was to decipher the elements of the church that structured members' individual and collective practices in relation to LGBTQ social justice at the level of the church organization. It therefore asks: how do these groups "practice" welcoming? What factors help to account for the differences found in Hope and Hillside's collection action strategies, despite their commitments to the same social movement initiative? The discussions and analyses that unfold through this dissertation attempt to address these questions.

To highlight the local impact of the church organization on congregants' collective action

practices, I focus my discussions primarily on two UU initiatives, tracing their implementation and embeddedness at the local church level. The first, which I mentioned above, is the “Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program”, designed in 1989 to promote LGBTQ social justice within UU congregations and the broader community. The second, called “Standing on the Side of Love”, emerged several years later as the primary UU initiative for engaging in marriage equality advocacy. Its founding organization, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), is a central apparatus for UU social justice work in the United States and abroad. In many ways, the former of these two initiatives encompasses the latter, and the level of attention paid to each through this dissertation reflects this. My interest in exploring the UU discourses, strategies, and actions that manifested across UUA and congregational contexts also led me to consider other UUA programs, which I introduce in later chapters.

“How Do We Practice Welcome?”

The Program’s discourses and practices are codified through the its official text, *The Welcoming Congregation*. This text formally outlines the processes by which UU congregations can become “Welcoming and Affirming” and maintain this designation over time (.

Some specific points are worth noting here. First, according to the guidelines offered in the text, Welcoming and Affirming Congregations should engage in several ongoing practices, such as supporting an active group of members for developing initiatives and supporting congregational participation in LGBTQ social justice practices (see Appendix D). For instance, a Welcoming Congregation “affirms and celebrates gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues and history during the church year” through events such as the Pride Day Service mentioned above (see Appendix C). Other requirements include ongoing practices of outreach, or spreading the word

of advocacy and support to local GLBTQ communities, and *inreach*, or educating existing members about LGBTQ social justice and fostering inclusion and diversity within the “total life of the congregation” (Alexander 1990).

We practice welcome in our congregations by:

- Promoting inclusivity and using inclusive language
- Creating welcoming spaces, including gender neutral bathrooms
- Saying our welcome out loud and in print and online
- Building our welcoming skills as congregational leaders and greeters
- Deepening our understanding of identities that differ from our own
- Offering sexuality education for the entire lifespan
- Preventing discrimination in the process of hiring a minister
- Engaging in justice ministry in our communities and the wider world
- Regularly engaging in Welcoming Congregation programming and ministry

This dissertation illustrates some of the most salient factors shaping how two UU congregations, both deemed “Welcoming and Affirming” decades ago, developed distinct repertoires of LGBTQ social justice discourse and action. Through a lens informed by critical, poststructuralist, and social constructionist theories, it demonstrates the salience of organizational culture by discussing the locally mediated discourses, strategies, and actions from which members practice their Welcoming Congregations.

Understanding the significance of the discrepancies between the resonance of the Program’s frame and the congregations’ divergent practices of LGBTQ social justice requires a perspective that goes beyond what the cultural framing perspective can singularly offer. This project goes beneath the surface of symbolic frames to consider how these congregations actually went about the work of interpreting, negotiating, and adopting the broader UU social movement frames advanced and illuminate the organizational factors that shaped their

corresponding strategies of action. The purpose is to add nuance to existing empirical research and theorizing on cultural resonance and the centrality of organizational culture in shaping local congregational interpretation and actions in response to broader LGBTQ social justice initiatives.

Review of Existing Literature

Cultural Analysis and Social Movements

Scholarship in cultural sociology shows signs of a recently renewed spirit, drawing considerable attention from sociologists interested in pursuing new theoretical frameworks for studying group life and practice. Also notable is the ongoing development of culturally relevant research methodologies; innovative approaches to examining cultural phenomena at varying levels and dimensions of social organization. This resurgence of attention paid to cultural analysis in the last thirty years has generated a dense and sophisticated body of sociological research that pushes the boundaries of previous cultural sociological research.

Culture-based research has also provided valuable insights to research on social movements. Cultural analysis of social movement groups attests to the significance of storytelling strategies (e.g. Polletta 2006), the strategic use of affect and group sentiment (e.g. Polletta, Jasper, and Goodwin 2001), and the “role of meaning and ideology” in shaping SMOs strategies and practices (Taylor and Whittier 1992:123).

Today, however, there is increasingly widespread agreement among social movement researchers that neither a singularly “cultural” or structural framework for social movement research could adequately explain why some movements are successful and others less so. They also recognize that approaches rooted exclusively in cultural or structural factors also cannot adequately capture the experiences, grievances, goals, strategies, tactics, or actions of social

movement groups or participants (Johnston and Klandermans 2013; McCammon 2013).

Cultural approaches to social movement research have also evolved over time, becoming increasingly nuanced and integrated with structural analyses, as new approaches to cultural analyses make room for addressing discourse, power relations, and other social movement structures that blur the lines previously used to demarcate the domains of structural and cultural analysis. Recent contributions to research in this area range from the macro-level studies of “cultural opportunity structure” (Frank and McEneaney 1999); to meso-level studies on group culture (e.g. Fine 2013) and church culture (Barnes 2004; Patillo-McCoy 1998; Wood 1999); to the structuring of SMO participants’ micro-interactions (Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004).

However, when it comes to LGBTQ social movement, cultural research falls largely within two broader themes: first, research on the formation and strategic uses of identities within and by SMOs (e.g. Bernstein 1997, 2002; Crawley and Broad 2004; Taylor and Whittier 1992); and second, the framing strategies used by LGBTQ social movement groups within broader contexts of political opportunity (e.g. Jenness 1995; Valocchi 1999) and in response to the strategic framing efforts of oppositional religious and political groups (Hull 2001; Miceli 2005).

In light of the limited capacity cultural framing approaches to address other pertinent cultural dimensions of social movements, cultural researchers now tend to apply the framing perspective in conjunction with other theories that can address more structural aspects of social movements. The last decade of social movement research shows an increase in scholarship using these integrated approaches. Scholarship on discursive factors in social movements provides one example of a steady shift toward more comprehensive approaches to social movement analysis (e.g. Ferree 2009). The use of “discursive opportunity structures”, for instance, integrate elements of the cultural framing and political opportunity structure approaches

to examine how “cultural elements in the broader environment facilitate and constrain successful social movement framing” (McCammon 2013).

These and similar approaches can help researchers untangle the local structures through which social movement frames inspire collective action practices.² Importantly, however, the ways in which discourse and social relations shape movement dynamics at the meso-level of social organization have remained sidelined in many of these considerations. Despite renewed attention by cultural sociologists on meso-level factors shaping social life, such as “group culture” (Fine 2013) or “meso-structure” (Maines 1982), existing research on organizational culture still largely reflects the dominant approaches taken by scholars in the fields of organizational science and management studies. It is my contention, however, that organizational culture research stands to benefit from the nuances that comparative, multidimensional, and multi-layered sociological studies can offer. This project offers one such example to this reinvigorated field of research.³

Theoretical Groundings and Frameworks

“Welcome is a spiritual practice. It takes constant doing and stretching for our welcome to grow” (UUA 2016).

My approach to organizational culture falls in line with Robert Wuthnow’s (2011:5) assertion that “legitimate sociological inquiry focuses less on how discourse is constructed than on what the investigator can infer from it about social processes.” That is, rather than viewing culture as an implicit feature of group life that is evident in and through individual members’

² Chapter Two addresses this approach to social movement research in more detail through my discussion and analysis of organizational culture and the structures embedded therein.

³ Given the formal organizational character of UU churches and, the terms ‘church culture’ and ‘organizational culture’ are used interchangeably. The concept “congregational culture” refers more to the informal and non-hierarchically structured set of meanings and practices that specifically relate to the church’s congregation.

beliefs and perspectives, church cultures are simultaneously shaped through the interactions that are ongoing in the church (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Hallett 2003). For this reason, I draw in part on Swidler's (1986) conception of culture not as an end product, but rather as "a 'tool kit' or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action" (1986:277). To this, my research project adds a critical analytic lens to also consider formal organizations' hierarchical structures of social relations and discourses as enactments of "power/knowledge" (Foucault 1978) that can normatively impact groups' participation in collective actions.

The Question of Organizational Culture

My research adopts an "organizational culture" approach in a similar attempt to blend cultural and structural analyses of LGBTQ social movement dynamics in two UU congregations. While contemporary examples of "organizational culture" research extend across multiple academic and professional fields, their roots are most firmly situated in the fields of organizational science and management studies. Research in these areas largely follows a neo-positivist paradigm, consisting primarily of quantitative studies drawn from empirically available indices of organizational life (Martin 2002).

The concept of "culture" from this realist perspective most often appears as a variable, rather than a metaphor, of organizational life (ibid.). Organizational scholars, for instance, often address "culture" through an index of strength, whereby a "strong culture" indicates success, and is measureable through empirical outcomes such as profits, turnover rates, employee satisfaction surveys, and so on. This dominant conception of "organizational culture" has been widely applied, shaping the rhetoric used in numerous professional and organizational texts, including

workplace literature, sports columns and guidebooks for organizational leaders (Martin 2002).

The impact of sociology's "cultural turn" expanded to the domain of organizational research in the 1980's, inciting what Martin (2002) and others in the field deemed the "paradigm proliferation debates". Since then, organizational scholars have debated a host of questions pertaining to cultural analysis, including the ontological quality and meaning of culture, as well as the depth and scope of cultural analysis needed for organization research (ibid; Ouchi and Wilchins 1985).

Today, there are even more variations in researchers' approaches to organizational culture. Social constructionists interested in the dynamics of organizational life, for instance, focus on "the diverse ways organizations invoke local culture" (Holstein and Gubrium 1999:8). Still a much smaller portion of organizational culture literature, this framework attends to the configurations of language, meanings, values, attitudes, and relations that constitute "the stuff of culture" in groups. Organizational culture, from these works, can be observed from the everyday practices of formal and informal interactions and organizational rituals, as well as the formal and informal narratives that circulate within groups and their members.

Scholarship drawn from critical, postmodern, and post-structural frameworks highlights the cultural significance of structures that lie beneath the surface of observable norms and social relations. Concepts such as "going concerns" (Holstein and Gubrium 2000), "symbolic power" (Hallett 2003), "discursive configurations" (Ferree 2009), and "local relevancies" (Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004) serve to address how groups' local cultures more than just members' shared meanings, discourses, and practices; they also underscore the intersecting relations of power through which these elements of culture are locally organized as more or less valuable, legitimate, or available.

No doubt, scholarship in this area now includes countless insights and frameworks that apply across a wide range of organizational contexts. Importantly, however, much of this existing research is based on organizations that differ in marked ways from the churches presented below. Attributes that are unique to religious organizations are likely missed in studies that examine professional and other industry-driven organizations, as well as health or clinical settings, the workplace, or other places of business. After all, as Coontz's (2005:274) work reminds us, religious discourse on same-sex marriage, "rests on personal faith and can't be settled by comparing social science evidence, pro or con" (Coontz 2005:274). Indeed, the capacity of religious repertoires to catalyze social movement participation, research shows, comes in part from the emotional pull that religious repertoires can add to groups' interpretations of social grievances (Tarrow 2010; Williams 2004).

In this light, my research offers added insight into the value of addressing organizational culture as multi-layered and multi-dimensional. Rather than considering the "strength" of group culture or exploring culture as internalized by members and accessible in members' beliefs and attitudes. Indeed, a primary theme that emerged from this research were the salient factors that, while considered "cultural", were not always immediately evident through my observations or members' experience of everyday church practice. This, as my data chapters demonstrate, highlights the need to consider not only congregants' interpretations and practices of LGBTQ social justice, but also the deeper organizational structures they reflect.

I thus borrow Ouchi and Wilkins's (1985:458) definition of "organizational culture" as "the normative bases and shared understandings that, through subtle and complex expression, regulate social life in organizations." This framework helps to address questions about *how* certain organizationally specific factors may shape group practices. It also opens up new lines of

inquiry about how churches adapt broader LGBTQ social movement goals and strategies to resonate with pre-existing organizational discourses and practices, helping to make clear why some social justice repertoires become dominant while others are dismissed or ignored.

To this end, I focus on the discourses and structures of organizational culture in terms of their “organizational embeddedness,” which Holstein and Gubrium (1995:899) use as an index for considering the extent to which “localized configurations of...meaning are mediated by particular perspectives or positions in a setting.” As an analytic tool, embeddedness helps to distinguish between the patterns of meaning and expression that are well-established, or deeply situated within organizational realities (Holstein and Gubrium 2000) from those that emerge through specific situations or external developments such as LGBTQ-based practices of mobilization and collective action.

The methodologies employed by this research can ultimately benefit organizational strategies of structural change by recognizing the variable and shifting salience of gender and sexuality as structures shaping Hope and Hillside members’ experiences and actions. Que(e)rying research can recognize and attend to the various dimensions of church culture (e.g. interactional, epistemological, discursive, performative, affective, relational, instrumental, discursive, symbolic, and so on) through which the normative structures of gender and sexuality take shape and, in turn, regulate social group practices.

What Is So Queer About This Study? On Closets and Covers

Rooted in the logic of queer theory this project also situates sexuality and gender-based social justice as central sites for examining the salience of embedded discourses of sexuality and gender as factors shaping congregants’ shared interpretations and practices pertaining to gender

and sexuality-based issues of social concern or political contest. For over two decades, the ideas of ‘queer’ and ‘queering’ have inspired an impressive and insightful (although contested) body of scholarship by scholars devoted to challenging the dominant hetero-patriarchal gender order and the structures and discourses that normalize it. The fundamental tenets of queer theory can be traced back to the postmodern criticisms of realism, the poststructuralist emphasis on the productive quality of power, and the de-essentializing efforts of social constructionist theories (Foucault 1978; Seidman 1999; Valocchi 2005). Queer theories aim to subvert the binary categorizations of gender and sexuality, as well as the identities that affix these categorizations onto bodies by deconstructing the discourses and relations of power in which they are organized.

In one sense my use of the term ‘queer’ or ‘queering’ falls in line with the broader usages seen in and beyond the academy. Queering disrupts the normative gender and sexual order via subversive practices of embodiment, cultural protest, and knowledge production (Browne and Nash 2010; Kong, Mahoney, and Plummer 2001). However, analytically, queering also carries an inverse meaning; it also denotes the discourses and practices of “Othering” that normalize the dominant order within particular cultural contexts⁴. This may even include the mobilizing and collective action practices of groups in the name of gender and sexual social justice.

This project imagines a more situationally grounded model for queer theory; one of *que(e)rying* UU church culture and activism. It narrows the analyze gaze of gender and sexuality used previously by queer scholars to only examine the structures of gender and sexuality that became most salient during specific congregational discourses and practices of “Welcoming”, as well as efforts to mobilize congregational support and participation in practices of “Standing on the Side of Love”. I use “the closet” and “the covers” as major conceptual tools to represent

⁴ For the purpose of this project, I define ‘Othering’ as exclusionary discourses and practices that reflect and reinforce dominant ideas about whose bodies, identities, and experiences “count” as fully human and whose do not.

these structures in my analyses of these two UUA programs below.

On Closets and Covers

Sedgwick's (1990) work on "closet epistemologies" has been the primary conceptual tool used by queer scholars to examine previously dominant modes of self-understanding and expression for LGBTQ-identified people. As an epistemological framework, the closet normalizes heterosexual identities by silencing non-normative expressions through a binary framework of secrecy, on one hand, and disclosure, or "outing", on the other (Sedgwick 1990).

The concept of "covering" also referenced throughout this dissertation helps to capture more contemporary repertoires used in dominant culture for interpreting LGBTQ bodies and identities. Kenji Yoshimo (2007) describes 'the cover' as a set of cultural norms and expectations that are prevalent to LGBTQ people's experiences and interactions. While still tied to the same essentialist frameworks of identity, covering involves strategies of "impression management" (Goffman 1959), or the strategic attempt to manipulate others' perceptions of us. presentation of some attributes of the self and concealment of others, in ways that better reflect the current conditions of LGBTQ social life and the discourses, practices, policies, and attitudes of dominant U.S. culture. Drawn from Goffman's (1972) work on stigma and the "passing" and "covering" practices that socially stigmatized people undergo, Yoshimo (2007) analyzes covering by reflecting on strategies LGBTQ people use to highlight certain attributes while downplaying others in order to be interpreted within the confines of 'normalcy' in a given context.

Covering practices are thus directly linked to queer scholars' conceptualization of "The Normal Gay". As an identity category, "the normal gay" refers to the imagined sexual political

subject derived from dominant social constructions of gender, race, class, (dis)ability, monogamy, and citizenship. In the arena of social movements, this identity also serves as an ideological basis for “Queer Liberalism” (Stein 2013), an assimilationist political stance that privileges the experiences and interests of middle class, young, able-bodied, monogamous, white, English speaking (typically male) citizens.

As I hope to demonstrate throughout this project, the concepts of “closeting” and “covering” also help to illuminate significant cultural realities for individual and groups at the organizational level. That is, to the extent that church practices reflect embedded discourses and epistemologies of “the closet” or “the cover”, their organizational cultures can be described as “closeting” and “covering”. An organization’s culture can be described as “closeting” in two respects. First, closeting cultures normalize cisgender heterosexuality by silencing those bodies, subjectivities, expressions, and discourses that subvert the dominant gender and sexual order. When it comes to collective actions, however, church cultures can also be closeting to the extent that they generate a kind of collective inertia in response to the perceived risks associated with subversive sexual politics.

As a crucial update to “closeting” culture, “covering” cultures now may more accurately reflect the current conditions of sexuality and gender in some groups and formal organizations. Covering practices shape organizational culture by leaving out the non-normative aspects of bodies, practices, and intimacies that conflict with groups’ sense of normalcy and may cause collective tension or discomfort. In turn, these practices are shaped via the organization based on the normative structures of discourse, identity, morality, and values embedded therein. Organizational practices can also be covering to extent that its public identity or official resolutions on church practice also serve to conceal aspects of the organization that contradict,

undermine, or simply do not reflect that complete picture of organizational life.

Below, I hope to demonstrate, through this work, some of the ways that Hope's culture included discourses and practices of the closet, while Hillside's sexual and gender structures, in contrast, promoted discourses and practices of the cover. To this end, I highlight linkages between closeting and covering cultures and congregants' understandings of bodies, identities, expressions, intimacies, and family (Seidman 1995; Valocchi 2005). I also trace how covering and closeting practices that mediated between the UUA's social justice initiatives and the actions taken by Hope and Hillside at the organizational level.

Description of the Project

The distinct strategies of LGBTQ-based collective action that manifested in two UU churches provided a rich platform for a comparative, situational analysis of "organizationally grounded interpretive practice" across three contexts: the UUA/UUSC, Hope Church, and Hillside Church. To this end, I designed my research project to address the following questions: how can the adoption and implementation of the UUA's LGBTQ social justice initiatives be best understood at Hope and Hillside? Which aspects of local UU church life were most salient in shaping congregants' collective understandings and practices with respect to this social justice arena? What were the primary mechanisms through which broader LGBTQ social movement goals, strategies, and tactics took shape within these two congregations?

To assess Hope and Hillside's current situations of LGBTQ social justice, my project builds on previous research on organizational culture, expanding the analytic potency of this framework by considering any and all elements of organizational life that are situationally relevant to my research. By integrating the major frameworks of social constructionism and

organizational culture with insights from social movement scholars, this project shows how cultural resonance is mediated by numerous factors of the local church at the level of organizational culture: namely, churches' micro-mobilization contexts (structures of discourse, history, materiality), structures of identity and representation, and structures of belonging, social relations, and shared values. The impact of these facets of organizational culture, my work contends, is further mediated by the local church's normative structures of gender and sexuality.

From LeGreco and Tracy's (2009) method of discourse tracing, my analysis traces these social movement discourses and practices across three organizational contexts: the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), the central hub for denominational affairs; Hope Church, a small, formerly Universalist congregation with an interim minister and limited available resources; and Hillside Church, a large church that played an integral part in the community's history of social justice and the social lives of its many members.

Drawing on Clarke's (2014) model of situational analysis, I considered any and all elements that comprised the given *situation* of LGBTQ social justice participation in each church. Analysis of the situations within Hope and Hillside revealed several factors of organizational culture that were salient in mediating how the UU initiatives took shape in each congregation. These include structures of governance and mobilization, materiality, church history, individual and collective identity, and modes of belonging and values. Together, these and other dimensions of organizational culture at Hope and Hillside shaped not only the degree to which the Welcoming Congregation Program and the "Standing on the Side of Love" initiative resonated with potential participants, but also how, and to what end?

This dissertation presents in-depth analysis of data that highlight the most salient elements shaping congregants' interpretations and practices of LGBTQ social justice. It

emphasizes the structures of governance and mobilization, church histories, and materiality at Hope and Hillside as dimensions of organizational culture that encompass the specific factors I address. Together, these factors constitute the congregations' "micro-mobilization contexts". Importantly, some of these factors of organizational culture were deeply embedded, relatively fixed in their impact on congregants' collective action practices. These should be distinguished from the elements of organizational culture that were situational in their salience as factors shaping the congregations' Welcoming practices. While I do some distinguishing work throughout this dissertation, engaging in this extensive discussion to any degree of analytic significance was beyond the scope of this project. It would be a potentially valuable project, though, to address the distinctions between embedded and superficial, or latent and active elements of organizational culture in future research.

This paper also addresses the local discourses and strategies through which members narratively deployed ideas about gender, sex, and sexuality, to garner support and mobilize congregants to act. Analyzing the narratives found in participants' stories, church worship services, formal meetings, and church texts revealed patterns in the epistemologies and discourses embedded in the churches, shaping their local constructions of "LGBTQ social justice". As matters of "interpretive practice", these constructions, in turn, shaped the congregations' social justice strategies in ways based on how they intersected with other key elements of the churches' "micro-mobilization contexts".

The salience of sexual and gender normativity on congregational participation in LGBTQ-based actions was visible across every level of organizational culture at Hope and Hillside. I refer to these structures of meaning and action as "closeting" and "covering" in order to account for their normative impacts, not only on the dominant repertoires of sexuality and

gender justice circulating in each church, but also on the collective actions these two epistemologies of sexuality and gender make possible. While configured in locally specific ways, I suggest below that they nonetheless both privileged individualizing repertoires of LGBTQ social justice, placing tremendous emphasis on LGBTQ bodies, expressions, identities, interests, and relationships as primary agents of mobilization.

Furthermore, the salience of Hope's and Hillside's closeting and covering discourses and strategies of action showed significant variation at the intersections of other embedded and situational elements. In the chapters that follow, I present patterns in the structures of gender and sexuality at these intersections, showing linkages between these elements and the congregations' collective action discourses, strategies, and practice.

Broader Contexts of Mobilization

The two social actions that I address in this study, the "Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program" and "Standing on the Side of Love", emerged at two distinct points in U.S. social movement history with respect to gender and sexuality. Since the 1960's, the landscape of what I refer to throughout this project as "LGBTQ social movement" has been saturated with discourses of the individual political subject. Assimilation-based gay and lesbian SMOs have worked to frame individual sexual identities as analogous to racial and ethnic identities through essentialist, "gay is good" and "born this way" repertoires. Adopting frames used by Civil Rights activists helped liberal SMOs defend against dominant constructions of same-sex attraction as a matter of 'choice' and promote a political platform of gay and lesbian social justice as a matter of 'individual rights' (D'Emilio 1998).

More radical groups to emerge since the 1970's such as Gay Liberation and Queer Nation

sought instead to challenge sexual and gender injustice by exposing the systems that used sex, gender, and sexuality identities as bases for determining humans' access to full citizenship and self-determination. Many of these groups drew on frames such as "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it" in their efforts to re-claim, reject, and/or otherwise queer hegemonic sexual and gender systems and the institutions, economies, and relations of power they supported. Due in part to the 1980's resurgence of conservative political and economic hierarchies and concurrent HIV/AIDS crisis, LGBTQ political in the late 1980's and early 1990's was dominated by liberal SMO discourse seeking policy and administrative reform, with their more radical and diverse counterparts pushed into the queer margins (D'Emilio 1998; Seidman 2005). This cursory description provides some initial context for examining the UUA's implementation of the "Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program".

In contrast, the UUA/UUSC initiative called "Standing on the Side of Love" emerged against a backdrop of increasingly visible public discourse on gender and sexuality. After decades of individual-centered discourses and strategies of collective action, dominant repertoires of gender and sexual justice have recently shifted to reflect an LGBTQ political culture that is saturated with movement for marriage equality. With the U.S. Supreme Court's recent rulings on the Don't Ask Don't Tell Repeal Act (2010) and the partial and then total repeal (in 2013 and 2015, respectively) of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) came a torrent of public discourse, along with changes in policy and public opinion regarding LGBTQ social justice, same-sex marriage, and family (diversity) values.

To be sure, the proliferation of gender and sexuality discourses was also apparent in other social arenas, including state and federal efforts to address problems of hate crimes and anti-gay and transphobic violence in schools; popular media discourses on homophobia in sports and

domestic and sexual violence against women; and increasingly visibility and normalization of transgender bodies in popular media. Nonetheless, today, the national landscape of LGBTQ social justice reflects even more recent developments. In 2015, for instance, the Supreme Court declared same-sex marriage legal in all fifty states, allowing married same-sex couples to “enjoy the same legal rights and benefits as married heterosexual couples nationwide and...be recognized on official documents such as birth and death certificates” (Liptak 2015).

The recent swell of collective action strategies and tactics recently employed by marriage equality proponents signifies a broader shift in the discourses of LGBTQ collective action. With the same goals of assimilation through inclusion and reform, dominant discourses of “Queer Liberalism” decenter the individual political subject, drawing more on universalizing repertoires of family and love, as defined through narratives of commitment and responsible citizenship.

Unitarian Universalism: Welcoming (and Affirming)?

The UU denomination is situated in a unique position with respect to denominational and church-based collective action for LGBTQ social justice (Bumbaugh 2000; Lee 1992; Oppenheimer 1996). Its commitment to religious freedom, or freedom of conscience; its historic record of participation in progressive social actions; and its reputation as culturally liberal and “welcoming and affirming” to LGBTQ congregants all make UU churches useful sites for exploring how religious groups grapple with non-normative genders and sexualities, as well as the bodies, expressions, identities, and intimacies they encompass.

The UUA is widely known as being “a leader in promoting sexual justice” (Haffner 2012:42). It drafted its “General Resolution on the Homosexual” in 1970 and developed its Office of Gay Affairs, in 1973. Interestingly, this Office has since undergone several name

changes since its inception, a point to which I return in Chapter Three. Today, the Office of LGBTQ Ministries is dedicated to ensuring ongoing denominational participation in broader LGBTQ social justice efforts. It is also responsible for developing strategies of action at the congregational level.

The social justice interests pursued by the leaders of LGBTQ Ministries overlap with those of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC). The UUSC’s “Standing on the Side of Love” initiative, described below in more detail, is a prime example of this overlap. Like most UUA initiatives, the UUSC’s “Standing on the Side of Love”, is rooted in the denomination’s Seven Principles (Appendix A) and Six Sources of Unitarian Universalism (Appendix B). Yet, unlike the “Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program”, which is drawn from the First Principle, “Standing on the Side of Love” invokes the Second. In a section titled “Reflection on the Second Principle”, the UUA’s website reads:

Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations points us toward something beyond inherent worth and dignity. It points us to the larger community. It gets at collective responsibility. It reminds us that treating people as human beings is not simply something we do one-on-one, but something that has systemic implications and can inform our entire cultural way of being... Justice, equity, and compassion are all part of the same package. Just as the second Principle overlaps with the first, so it is related to the seventh Principle—the interdependent web of all existence (UUA Website).

The “Standing on the Side of Love” initiative is more of a social movement frame and denominational slogan for UU public witness than a cultural change program. In this sense, it differs from the Welcoming Congregation Program’s workshop-based structure and use of personal experience narratives as a mode of consciousness raising. The denominational frame “Standing on the Side of Love” instead represents a mobilization of universal affect and values. Accordingly, it relies heavily on normalizing narratives of love and family to mobilize congregants to act on behalf of marriage equality.

The Office, according to its website, is broadly inspired:

...by the vision that someday we will be able to put ourselves out of business and that oppression against people of all ages, abilities, colors, and economic classes who are marginalized on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity—whether the oppression be overt or subtle—will be a thing of the past.⁵

To this end, the Office created several texts aimed at promoting sexuality and gender diversity in UU congregations and collective participation in LGBTQ social actions outside the church.

These include two iterations of the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program and a follow-up program called “Living the Welcoming Congregation”. My main focus in this project was on the first, since that was the version used by both congregations during their Welcoming certification process.

However, two additional UUA initiatives are also worth noting here. The first, “Uncategorical Thinking,” is a program developed to help congregations through the ministerial search process. Its purpose, according to program texts, is to foster increased gender and sexual diversity in UU churches by helping congregants “lessen their biases around people with different identities, to help them find the person who’d be the best minister for them”.⁶ In 2003, the Office also created “Crossing Paths: Where Transgender and Religion Meet”. This program encouraged congregations to recognize cisgender privilege and evaluate their own participation in gender-normative and transphobic systems. It was comprised of several brief workshops as well as supplemental reflections and essays that congregations were encouraged to use as resources for facilitating discussion.

Importantly, these supplemental programs have had significantly less impact in UU

⁵ UUA, LGBTQ Ministries Webpage (<http://www.uua.org/directory/staff/multiculturalgrowth/lgbtq-ministries>)

⁶ While examining the outcome of this denominational strategy is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that, according to the UUA’s 2009 Ministerial Survey, “only one minister of transgender experience has served a congregation as a parish minister.”

churches than the Welcoming Congregation Program. Of all of the people that I spoke with in the two congregations, none had any knowledge of these supplemental programs or their purposes. Even the current Director of LGBTQ Ministers, while discussing the circulation of *Crossing Paths* across the denomination, lamented, “My boss didn’t know this existed. My counterpart in Boston didn’t know it existed. Most of our congregations don’t know it exists!”

Methodology

As mentioned above, I imagined ‘que(e)rying’ as a research methodology that applies ethnographic and discourse tracing methods within the methodological umbrella of situational analysis. I focused this approach through a lens of queer theory to generate the critical, discourse-centered methodology that informed this entire project, from design, data collection and analysis to (re)presentation and the production of texts that address the interests of the academe as well as the groups under investigation.

My primary approach to linking empirical data with theory in this project comes from Clarke’s (2005) model of “situational analysis”, which I describe more fully in the following chapter. Rooted in the grounded, or inductive, theory-building approach of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), situational analysis expands the focus of analysis beyond basic processes of human interactions in a given setting to consider any and all possible elements- human or non-human- that contribute to a group’s current “situation” regarding a specific “social arena” (Clarke 2005), or dimension of social life.⁷ From this expansive focus, situational analysis then applies methods of conceptual mapping for the purpose of theorizing the interrelations and impacts of the central elements shaping the situation under study.

⁷ I borrow Fine’s (2013:160) of a “group” as “an aggregation of persons that is characterized by shared place, common identity, collective culture, and social relations”.

This methodological model helped to illuminate patterns in the discourses and practices of LGBTQ social justice that could be distinguished at denominational and local church contexts. Tracing the discourses used by congregants to construct their “Welcoming and Affirming” congregation revealed key linkages between organizational culture and the congregants’ repertoires of LGBTQ social justice discourse and Specifically, organizational structures of governance, history, materiality, identity, belonging and social relations comprised the most central elements shaping congregational practices of LGBTQ social justice.

However, my analysis also revealed variability in the salience of these structures when intersecting with the churches’ “closeting” and “covering” structures of sexuality and gender. This variability, I contend, demonstrated the potential importance of attending to different dimensions of organizational embeddedness in my research.

Cases in the Study

I focused my research on three “social worlds”: first, the headquarters of UU operations and social justice, known as the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), respectively; second, Hillside Church, a large UU congregation in the Northeast United States; and third, Hope Church, a small UU congregation, similarly located.⁸ This section provides a general overview of Unitarian Universalism and the UUA, highlighting several key features that are relevant to subsequent discussions of social movement strategies and church culture. Then, it briefly introduces the two churches included in this investigation. The first is Hope Church, a small church on the outskirts of a mid-sized city with an unsettled ministry. The second is Hillside Church, a much larger congregation in the

⁸ My decision to study these two UU churches in particular was based on both feasibility (two other churches did not respond to initial letters of interest) and the distinct characteristics of the churches’ structures and composition.

more landscaped outskirts of a comparably sized and recession-hit industrial city. Both residents of the same state, Hillside and Hope congregants have experienced the prolonged legislative contests over same-sex marriage rights and bore witness to other statewide policy issues and changes via similar media and social action opportunities.

It is also worth mentioning an important difference in the roots that upheld these churches' theological structures. Hillside's theological structures have their roots in Unitarianism and its history of social and community activism.⁹ Hope's theological roots are in the Universalist church tradition and its history of peace and acceptance. While the cultural impacts of these roots are no doubt a relevant component of organizational practices, an in-depth examination of their direct impacts as elements of organizational culture- at least beyond the level of speculation- was beyond the scope of this project. As a result, these aspects of church history are mentioned only sporadically throughout this dissertation.

Unitarian Universalism and the UUA

As a “religious movement”, Unitarian Universalism is relatively new, facilitated by the 1961 merger of the Unitarian and Universalist denominations¹⁰. Its theological roots thus lie in the Unitarian challenge to the Christian doctrine of the trinity and the Universalist rejection of Calvinist doctrines of predestination in favor of “universal” salvation (Bumbaugh 2000). While still influenced by these Christian offshoots, “Christianity’s stature in Unitarian Universalism has diminished” over the last fifty years (Kirk 2007:31).

In the absence of concrete theological doctrine, the “Seven Basic Principles” (see Appendix A) and “Six Sources of Unitarian Universalism” (Appendix B) are the primary

⁹ More detailed discussions of each church are presented in Chapter One.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the 1961 merger of Unitarianism and Universalism occurred in the United States and does not reflect the trajectory other iterations of these denominations existing in Europe or elsewhere.

mechanisms codifying UU's shared commitments, values, and perspectives. These texts, the UUA affirms, "were affirmed democratically, and are part of who we are (Unitarian Universalist Association). Contemporary UU worship practices thus often reflect a mixed bag of beliefs, including Buddhist, Wiccan, Atheist, and Secular Humanist, among others (Lee 1995). Congregations' worship practices are also shaped by the beliefs of their current ministers and the legacies of their Universalist or Unitarian histories.

The Seven Basic Principles are also central to the denomination's strategies for civic participation and religious social action (e.g. Bumbaugh 2000; Oppenheimer 1996). Describing the religion as "not a theological religion, but an ethical religion", UUA leaders regularly draw on the Principles to frame UU involvement in social justice work as a "prophetic imperative" (Gilbert 2000) and provide theological footing to their calls for collective action.

The organization charged with the responsibility of translating these principles into practices and providing churches the resources with which to do the same is the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) of Congregations. Upon the 1961 merger of Unitarian and Universalist faith traditions, UU leaders created the UUA for the purpose of developing and administering denominational and congregational practices related to "regular worship, learning and personal growth, shared connection and care, social justice action and service, celebration of life's transitions, and much more" (UUA 2016).

Although called the headquarters of a "religious movement" by UU leaders, the UUA has faced a number of significant challenges when it comes to overall UU participation and growth in the United States. A growing sense of uneasiness over this issue is evident across the religion, as leaders lament the loss of "over twelve thousand adult members, a decline of more than seven

percent in real numbers” between 1970 and 2000 (Sewell 2006).¹¹ Indeed, questions about how congregations can attract new members, have greater presence in their communities, and become a larger force of social justice have been central to UU leaders since the turn of the century.

Many UU leaders emphasize the tensions that lay at the crossroads of religious freedom and church participation. They note, as Mendelsohn (1997:2) did, that while “any form of pressure to join a church is alien to our beliefs...there are thousands of potential Unitarian Universalists who are not in our congregations because they do not yet know that such a religious community exists.” These ideas are supported in sociological scholarship on religious involvement and church participation, which underscores the importance of strict religious doctrine to church membership (Iannaccone 1994), as well as a strong sense of belonging based on shared beliefs and/or common experiences of culture or structural inequality (Gilkes 1985; Wilcox 2003).

In contrast, as several scholars note, for UU’s, “only one dogma finds universal agreement: ‘anti-creedalism’” (Kirk 2007:31; See also: Bellah 1998). The central tenet of Unitarian Universalism is religious freedom, or “freedom of conscience”, a platform that ultimately belies the practice of religious witness, or proselytizing. Instead, the commitments to social justice and service for the betterment of the “human community” (Mendelsohn 1997) are the ties that bind UU’s together.¹²

UU leaders have also implicated other aspects of Unitarian Universalism in the decline of UU membership and social presence in the United States (e.g. Bumbaugh 2000; Gilbert 2000,

¹¹ Relatedly, Sewell (2006) notes that the decline in membership, when measured against U.S. population growth between 1970 and 2000, is actually closer to forty-four percent.

¹² In this sense, the UU church culture may align more with secular non-profit or service organizations than religious ones. However, UU leaders do draw on both religious and organizational elements in their efforts to mobilize congregants’ participation in social justice practices, making it difficult to quick comparisons of UU churches to other formal organizations.

Sewell 2006). For instance, Marilyn Sewell, former UU minister, linked UU decline to what she saw as many of the religious movement's "cultural challenges", which included:

(1) the radical cult of the individual, (2) a reluctance to set boundaries on inappropriate or destructive behavior, (3) a fear of the body, (4) a discomfort with authority, (5) the lack of a strong covenantal relationship of congregants with one another and congregants with minister, (6) a gross underfunding and understaffing of churches and fellowships, as well as...our seminaries (Sewell 2006).

Sewell's insights no doubt bring up new ways of thinking about the challenges facing Unitarian Universalism today. By addressing UU issues as "cultural challenges", she broadens the framework for interpretation and action to three levels of social organization, described here:

The first is the simplest, and that is the level of the local church. We will want to develop churches that are healthy and that are mission-driven. We will want to train lay leaders. Second is at the level of the institutions that feed our churches- the mothership, the Unitarian Universalist Association, which we should continue to strengthen and support...and our seminaries... The third level...is the most difficult- that of the cultural paradigm. We must take a long hard look at what is holding us back from growth and holding us back from being a potent voice in the public discourse (2006:26).

For Sewell, these levels represent the areas in most pressing need of cultural change work by UU's religious and lay leaders. Importantly, the data presented below challenge the notion that the local church level is the simplest, and suggest that, at least in terms of LGBTQ social justice, the level of "cultural paradigm" can itself be addressed as a local factor of church culture.

This project can contribute to the goals of UU leaders to effect cultural change in UU churches by providing avenues for examining and addressing matters of cultural paradigm at the local church level through the lens of "organizational culture". It can help bring to the surface many of the embedded elements structured within and structuring the churches' organizational cultures. To this end, I next present a brief discussion of the local churches considered in this study.

Churches in the Study

“Our churches and fellowships belong to the people, and it is the people who will ultimately decide the direction and strength of these institutions.”
(*Sewell 2006:27*).

Some attributes of Hope Church and its congregation can help to illuminate the cultural analyses below. Data collected from Hope’s congregational survey illustrate its composition as overwhelmingly white (99% identify ‘white’ as their primary racial/ethnic background); middle or professional class, and college-educated (over 90% of members have earned a B.A. or higher).¹³ At this time, 90% of Hope members were over the age of forty. Also, while about a third (35%) of the congregants identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual in 2007, none identified as transgender or queer.

Hope Church is also located in a city that is home largely to middle class, working class, and poor residents. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2007 Community Survey, the median household income of residents is slightly under fifty thousand dollars, a figure that has no doubt dropped in light of current economic trends.¹⁴ This figure is low, compared to both the 2007 median income of households in all of the state (\$53,448) and that of the United States as a whole (\$50,740). In contrast, approximately four-fifths of the congregation of Hope have a total household income of over \$50,000.

Leading a congregation more than eight times the size of Hope’s, Hillside’s ministry consists of multiple permanent and temporary ministers. Throughout the course of my research the church’s size only increased, as did its weekly offering of regular church services and programs. Like Hope, Hillside’s congregation is almost entirely white and educated (over 90%

¹³ This demographic composition is not uncommon for UU churches nationwide, with few exceptions where congregations are instead composed of educated, middle or professional class people of color.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau – American Community Survey – Salt City, Metropolitan Statistical Area.
<http://www.factfinder.census.gov>

have earned at least a bachelor's degree), with a median age of just under sixty.¹⁵ Hillside congregants are also in general economically advantaged; two-thirds of the congregation earns a household income of over \$60,000. This again is significant, compared to the median income of \$50,000 in the vicinity. Also, as previously mentioned, both congregations were designated 'Welcoming and Affirming' Congregations; Hillside in 1993 and Hope in 1998. Each church also had a group specifically designated for organizing the church's Welcoming practices including collective participation in other LGBTQ social justice projects within the church and the larger community.

Central to organizational culture, the element of organizational history was also salient factors shaping the current situations of religious LGBTQ activism at Hope and Hillside, which is a major theme I discuss through this dissertation. Interestingly, both congregations had experienced significant changes to their organizations cultures in the past five years. These moments in Hope's and Hillside's organizational histories offered data showcasing the explicit negotiations taking place over church culture and the various discourses, identities, relations, and values and practices embedded therein. These transitional periods, which Swidler (1986) called periods of "unsettled lives", were rich with analytic potential, bringing otherwise implicit and underlying beliefs, values, and ideologies to the surface.

Despite these similarities, Hope's and Hillside's Welcoming Congregations took shape within distinct contexts of micro-mobilization, shaped by an uneasy blend of old and new structures of governance and mobilization; church history, and materiality.¹⁶ Of these, congregational governance was perhaps the most salient element shaping the congregations' mobilizing strategies and practices. This is likely true across all UU congregations, whereby

¹⁵ Hillside Church, September 2003 Congregational Survey (response rate just over 50% of congregation)

¹⁶ I address these factors again in Chapter Two, as foundational components of the "micro-mobilization contexts" for each congregation

decisions about governance made within the congregation can lead to significant variations in organizational practice pertaining to any issue or problem. As UUA leaders explain:

Liberal religious communities with an emphasis on participation may assume that all decisions should be made by consensus. Still other congregations, eager to be relieved of leadership demands, may be anxious to hand over almost all the authority to a board or minister. Often, congregations learn the full consequences of choosing a particular form of governance only later, when they appear amidst conflict (UUA 2005).

Whereas at Hope, for instance, official actions taken by the church reflect the congregation (as a group) and must be approved by consensus, Hillside's structure of "policy governance" situates the church's ministry as a relatively autonomous voice and primary catalyst for collection actions made on behalf of the ministry only (or social justice group). The implications of these differences in governance are discussed in more depth, below.

Outline of Data Chapters

My dissertation explored the situationally and organizationally embedded elements of each church for the purpose of analyzing the linkages between organizational culture and congregants' strategies of social and collective action. The first data chapter thus focuses on mapping the central elements that comprised the situations of Hope's and Hillside's "Welcoming Congregations". My analysis of Welcoming at Hope and Hillside revealed several situational elements that I organized into two categories of organizational culture: first, the churches' "micro-mobilization contexts" (Staggenborg 2002), which consisted of the churches' structures of governance and mobilization, church history, and materiality; and second, the structures of gender and sexuality shaping Hope's and Hillside's social movement culture and the discourses of inequality, identity, inclusion, acceptance, and diversity embedded therein.

Together, these elements shaped Hope and Hillside's Welcoming Congregations by

configuring the repertoires and practices of sexuality and gender justice available in each church with regard to the UUA's Welcoming program. At times, I highlight the salience of these factors by distinguishing between their *degree*, *depth*, and *dimension* of organizational embeddedness. These properties, I suggest, are valuable tools for subsequent analyses of cultural resonance at the organizational level.

The findings presented Chapter Three fall loosely into themes of identity structures and identifying practices, especially those pertaining to LGBTQ social justice. To the previous discussion of the congregations' contextual and situational elements, I add identity, embedded within Hope and Hillside in ways that shaped congregants' understandings of the "LGBTQ Political Subject" and the experiences and political interests thereof. Specifically, the normative discourses of sexuality and gender embedded in these churches continually shaped congregants' narratives of the "LGBTQ political subject", a core component of the repertoires they used to discuss gender and sexuality-based oppressions. Together, these factors impacted both congregations' strategies for responding publically to the issue of marriage equality. I consider these and other themes of identity in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four considers the organizational and collective response with respect to the UUA's "Standing on the Side of Love" initiative. It is inspired by the idea that social movement frames that highlight emotions, attitudes, and values may resonate differently with potential groups of constituents, depending on the group's dominant modes of belonging. Findings presented in this chapter complement Holstein and Gubrium's (2000) emphasis on the importance of considering "the structure of organizational relations" as a salient feature of organizationally grounded interpretive practice. The findings I present in this chapter illustrate linkages between the churches' covenantal and contractual structures of social relations and the

relational discourses of “family” and “community” that reflect them. Together, these helped shape the contours of each congregation’s systems of affect and values, linking them to members’ shared experiences and to repertoires of belonging within the group. This chapter also discusses the UUA’s strategic mobilization of “love” and family values frames in order to foreground affective and value dimensions of cultural resonance within each church and their impacts on social actions for marriage equality.

My purpose in doing this research project was to contribute some insights into how embedded and situational structures shaped LGBTQ social movement culture in two congregations. To be sure, some may argue that the substantive focus of my research is too narrow to generate findings of use to broader questions of religious involvement in relation to LGBTQ advocacy. After all, UU’s represent one of the smallest segments of the total U.S. population, in terms of membership in mainstream U.S. religious groups and denominations.

To this, I would respond by explaining that this study is not meant to be representational of any broader trends in religious organizational culture. My hope is that this work will show some of the ways in which church culture can impact members’ experiences of church life, but also provide some of the tools needed for effectively embracing collective goals and strategies for change when challenged to do so.

CHAPTER 1

Que(e)rying Methodology to Study Church-Based Activism:

This chapter describes my own ‘situated methodology’, and explains how it took shape over the course of the research project. Aside from contributing to scholarship in the areas of religion and sexual politics, one of the goals of my research was to conduct a project that could be used to advance local collective action efforts in the churches I studied. To this end, I developed que(e)rying as a model of “situational analytic research” that can produce locally relevant insights with both academic and practical implications.

This chapter begins by providing a brief sketch of the conceptual infrastructure of que(e)rying, emphasizing key points of connection between constructivist, poststructuralist, and feminist approaches and my specific research strategies. I then describe in more detail the evolution of various aspects of my project, beginning somewhat artificially with the research questions and design, followed by methods of creating and analyzing data, and then to the generation and dissemination of findings.

On Que(e)rying Methodologies

Recently, conversations about queering in the social sciences have expanded from thinking and writing about it as a significant theoretical lens to now also considering queering in an empirical sense. Queer theory’s ability to drive particular methodologies is evident inasmuch as discussions of ‘queer’ and ‘queering’ in the academe have focused primarily on questions of what queer *does*, rather than what it *is* (e.g. Valocchi, 2005). The recent work by Browne and Nash (2010:15), for instance, resists defining what ‘queer’ means altogether. Rather, they provide this twofold description of “queering methodologies”: first, it entails the task of queering

existing social science methodologies by drawing on them in counter-hegemonic ways. As a social practice, queering challenges the legitimacy of dominant cultural claims to knowledge that are based on essentialist discourses of sex, sexuality, and gender ‘difference’ (Valocchi 2005). It re-centers sexual and gender knowledge from a normative perspective to a perspective ‘of the margins’.

Not surprisingly, then, scholarship in this area is becoming increasingly focused on addressing the methodological implications of ‘queer’ and ‘queering’. Methodology drives the entire process of knowledge production; that is, from the ontological and epistemological positions of the research, to the production of ‘data’, to the (partial) truths generated through systematic analysis and strategic (re)presentation (Browne and Nash 2010). In general, *queering* projects aim to unearth and systematically re-appropriate society’s dominant assumptions, beliefs, and ideologies through queer ways of knowing. As a goal of sociological inquiry, queering can thus inform strategies for both research methods *and* social action.

Queer research thus generally encompasses qualitative research methodologies that privilege participants’ voices over presupposed categories and the embodied experiences of participants at the intersections of gender and sexual power groups that can be ascertained by direct observation (Browne and Nash, 2010). This growing body of scholarship raises numerous methodological questions pertaining to the intersectional impacts of queer marginalizations (Goldman 1996; Kong et al. 2001; Taylor, 2010); the ‘erotics of knowledge production’ (Rooke 2010), the shifting complexities of marking ‘the field’ of research (Jackman, 2010; Rooke 2010), and the challenge inherent in queer research that is designed using the very identity categories it hopes to destabilize (Kong et al., 2001; Rooke, 2010). Critical engagements such as these are important offshoots of social constructivist, feminist, and queer theorizing that have laid the

foundation for developing meaningful, praxis-based methodologies with social relevance. Que(e)rying, I contend, offers one such methodology.

Que(e)rying, *as a critical methodology*, can encompass a variety of situationally relevant methods for generating data that emphasize the interplay of structural and cultural elements of a given situation. It is based on a constructivist and poststructuralist view that, to make sense of things, people draw from their own experiences as well as the discourses available to them in a given context. It integrates locally relevant methods of data collection and queer theory's focus on power/knowledge and discourse with elements of feminist praxis, including holistic reflexivity, intersectionality, and the pursuit of social change.

This methodology is partly ethnographic in that it focuses on participants' everyday interpretations and experiences within broader contexts of shared meanings, discourses, symbols, languages, and practices; elements that constitute 'the stuff' of ethnographic research (e.g. Denzin, 1997; Lincoln, 1995). Yet it also challenges the realist position that "legitimate sociological inquiry focuses less on how discourse is constructed than on what the investigator can infer from it about social processes" (Wuthnow 2011:5). Que(e)rying aims to unearth the practices by which the local "regimes of sexual knowledge/power" (Foucault 1978) produce sexual and gender discourses and hierarchies. Its emphasis on the interpretive and dialogic aspects of meaning making and the processes by which groups organize discourses, symbols, languages, and practices is akin to what Denzin (1997) calls 'interpretive ethnography'. Que(e)rying is also inspired in part by the feminist insights and commitments of Institutional Ethnography (IE) and standpoint theorizing (e.g. Collins 1990; Smith 1990). Institutional ethnography is a focused model of research that situates people's understandings with bounded institutional settings and generates "maps or diagrams of the dynamic of macrosocial powers and

processes that shapes their/our lives" (Smith 1996:55). This methodology has supported a wide array of critical meso-level analyses of institutionalized practice that attend to the *situated-ness* among both participants and researchers.

A key factor linking institutional ethnography to que(e)rying is its ability to address "texts as coordinators of people's activities" (Bisaillon and Rankin 2013), an attribute that "distinguishes institutional ethnography from much anthropological or sociological ethnography" (ibid.). Based on Smith's standpoint politic, institutional ethnography begins with and privileges the situated knowing of oppressed or disadvantaged people for the purpose of "revealing aspects of the social world that are invisible from other social locations" (Bisaillon and Rankin 2013). Que(e)rying also adopts this perspective, but expands the analytic gaze beyond individuals to include the situated-ness of both people *and* discourses within bounded systems.

Finally, Que(e)rying can be particularly useful when applied to organizational contexts such as churches, where "the field" is defined by membership rather than sexual and gender identities, *and where situational analysis is focused within a bounded, meso-level context*. Through a culture-as-practice lens (e.g. Swidler 1986), que(e)rying the meaning and salience of cultural factors in an organization entails seeing how they come to life through discursive practices. This methodology thus also calls for critical analysis of discourse including "dynamic narrative analysis" (Dauite 2014) an approach that sees the active usage of narratives as integral to critical analyses of social life within specific "activity-meaning systems".

The central point of reflexivity, that "all knowing is subjective; that...knowing, is an experience that is had by someone" (Hufford 1999;294), calls researchers to critically reflect upon and make transparent our own positions in relation to the production of knowledge. As a

“methodological tool” (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2007, p.496), holistic reflexivity is an ongoing practice of critical introspection and grappling with the mutually constitutive quality of researcher/researched relations, subjectivities, and understandings through every stage of the research process. It is an ongoing process of recognizing and attending to researchers’ “situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988), both in relation to the lives of those we study (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2007) and within broader matrices of power and oppression (Collins, 2000) and

Reflexive research practices “work the hyphens” (Fine 1994) between self and other, critically interrogating the ways in which the assumptions, practices, and knowledge claims that accompany social scientific research can position as “Other” the experiences and perspectives of those subject-ed to research. However, as feminist and other critical scholars acknowledge, reflexive research does not automatically prevent researchers from exploiting participants, reinforcing normative arrangements, or further marginalizing oppressed groups. As Lincoln (1995:285) pointedly notes:

It is not a far leap to comprehend that the lives to which we have access account in no small part for the prestige we enjoy in the worlds we create and sustain via our research...For the somewhat dark side of research hides the fact that most of our research is written for ourselves and our own consumption, and it earns us the dignity, respect, prestige, and economic power in our own worlds that those about whom we write frequently do not have.

To address this central issue, feminist methodology contributes critical, action-oriented, and applied research strategies that can be readily adopted by queer studies researchers. Similarly, que(e)rying should both spring from and contribute to the communities being studied in ways that bridge queer sociological research and social justice goals.

Research Design

One of the greatest strengths of qualitative methodology is the flexibility it offers

researchers with respect to research design, data collection, and analysis. The pursuit of research problems is seen as ongoing in qualitative methodologies, emerging analytically alongside the production and analysis of the research ‘data’ and ‘findings’. From the beginning, my project resembled the process Rubin and Rubin (2012) called “continuous redesign”. Originally I intended to examine the dynamics of LGBTQ political mobilization in these UU churches, focusing on two churches in the northeast United States. I wanted to understand how local congregations interpreted and practiced Unitarian Universalism as a “religious movement” and LGBTQ social justice.

However, from my initial forays in the field, it became evident that LGBTQ social movement was less relevant to the realities of these two churches than I had assumed. Taking a step back, I surveyed the national landscape for evidence that this development reflected a broader trend away from LGBTQ activism in UU churches. I found that while involvement in LGBTQ social movement does vary tremendously across congregations, the lack of participation within the two churches I found did in fact reflect a broader decline in UU political involvement in this arena nationwide. According to the Religious Institute’s (2009) “UU Minister Survey”:

Despite high numbers of congregations (78%) having gone through the welcoming process, a majority (59%) do not have a current welcoming/rainbow task force. Sixty-eight percent went through the welcoming process more than five years ago; only 25% have renewed their welcoming commitment. In fact, only four in 10 congregations have an existing welcoming committee/rainbow task force.

Denominational leaders also declared from survey data that “outreach for BGLT members is low. Fifty-four percent of ministers reported that they do not advertise in gay community publications or organizations for new members.” Intrigued by this phenomenon, my project turned to examine the factors that were preventing these two congregations from being more active in mobilizing around LGBTQ social movement goals.

From exploratory interviews and some open coding and analysis, I recognized fairly early on that I could not capture all of these factors through the realist lens of traditional grounded theory or its focus on basic social processes (Clarke 2005). I thus adjusted my research strategies according to the logic and procedures of “situational analysis”. Situational analysis is a model of grounded theorizing and thematic analysis that “pushes grounded theory around the postmodern turn” (Clarke 2005). Like its grounded theory predecessor, a situational analytic approach is rooted in grounded, inductive strategies of theory building. Going beyond the basic social processes that typically concern grounded theorists, situational analysis also allowed me to attend to the social meanings, structures, and phenomena that constituted the “situation of inquiry” (Clarke 2005) which, for this project, was the “situation” of church-based LGBTQ social movement at Hope and Hillside.

I generated conceptual maps in order to lay out all the possible elements that produced the situation of LGBTQ-based social movement within and by each church; considering churches as distinct “social worlds” and sex, gender, and sexuality-based social justice as the “arena”, or thematic area or question in reference to which each situation took shape. During this early stage, I also created “positional maps” in order to “lay out the major positions taken, and not taken, in the data vis-à-vis particular axes of variation and difference” (2012:398). Positional maps are helpful for que(e)rying since they allow for rich meso-level interpretations of the “social organizational, institutional, and discursive dimensions” of LGBTQ-based social movement.

My goal was to understand more closely the factors that shaped how congregants collectively constructed sexuality and gender-based inequalities as meaningful social problems and the extent to which the churches’ already-embedded discourses, social relations, and

practices. To this end, I found the social constructionist framework of “interpretive practice” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000) to be a particularly useful tool for helping to narrow the trajectory of my research. Focusing on the meso-level factors that mediated between broader LGBTQ social movement culture and congregants’ participation in church-based collective action efforts, I generated the following sub-questions:

- * What are the explanatory resources that churches draw on to address inequalities based on sex, gender, and sexuality *and the identities and relations they structure?*
- * To what extent is mobilization impacted by the social locations and experiences of current (and active) members of the church?
- * What are the conditions in which normative discourses, beliefs, and ideologies became more or less salient as factors shaping *the social construction of LGBTQ social movement?*

Sampling and Recruitment Strategies

Situational analysis provides key strategies for *theoretical sampling*, whereby the choice of data sources makes sense with and/or contributes a fuller perspective to the developing analysis of the situation (Clarke 2005). Adopting this more flexible sampling and recruitment strategy made it possible to capture the multiplicity of organizational cultural dimensions shaping social life. Thus my procedure for sampling, while beginning as a form of convenience sampling, soon shifted in a more purposeful direction, as the parameters of the situation became more clearly defined through my initial analysis. I theoretically sampled participants and church and denominational texts based on my assessment of the most salient and locally meaningful elements that emerged from situational mapping and other initial strategies of inductive analysis.

Drawn from the inductive logic of grounded theorizing, situational analysis also accommodates multiple perspectives held by group members by attending to their “situatedness” within their churches’ relations of power, as well as in relation to the issues constituting their

particular situations. My goal was to address the churches' current involvement in LGBTQ activism from participants situated in as many different perspectives as possible. Pursuing participants who held a range of perspectives helped me ascertain the broadest parameters of the situations, as Hope and Hillside members described them. It also helped me ascertain the relative embeddedness of the discourses members drew from or saw as significant, as well as those that were buried, silenced, or marginalized within these groups.

Sampling and Recruitment

As mentioned in the Introduction, the two churches included in this study shared some noteworthy characteristics. Both congregations were overwhelmingly white, middle-class, college-educated, and older (with a median age at or above fifty-five). None of the congregants in either church identifies as transgender or queer. Both churches were also connected in similar ways to the UUA and other denominational practices, such as the General Assembly and the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program.

To honor the complexities of human experience, my goal was to understand as many different perspectives as possible. I thus included in my “n” forty participants from a range of positions both within and beyond the church, including individual church members and former members, past and present UU church ministers, people situated in various positions within the UUA. The following table illustrates the positions of the people I interviewed:

Social World	<i>n</i>	Position	<i>n</i>
Hope Church	18	Active Member	16
		Inactive Member	1
		Minister	1*
Hillside Church	20	Active Member	14
		Inactive Member	1
		Former Member	1

		Minister	3
		Former Minister	1
UUA	2	Director, Office of LGBT Ministries **	2
			Total n = 40

* I conducted two separate interviews with Hope's minister.

**Known as the "Office of BGLT Affairs" under Keith Kron's direction and then to its current title under the direction of Delphin Bautista.

To highlight the heterogeneity of perspectives that can exist *within* the positions listed above, I also sampled participants theoretically based on their situated-ness both within the church and within broader systems of inequality. Table 1.1 comparatively illustrates the demographic breakdown of each congregation by categories "gender" and "sexual orientation"

Gender (sic)	HOPE	HILLSIDE
Male	38%	38%
Female	62%	62%
Transgender	0	N/A*
*There were no transgender options available in Hillside's		
Sexual Orientation		
Bisexual	9.70%	3%
Heterosexual	68.00%	94%
Gay	9.70%	3%
Lesbian	10.70%	
Other	1.90%	
*Only option is "Gay or Lesbian". No "other" option is listed		

With the notable exception of sexuality, nationwide, UU congregants have historically been people located in positions of societal privilege. Across categories of gender and sexuality, a significant majority of congregants are white, educated, middle-class, and able-bodied (UUA).

In line with que(e)rying and feminist methodologies, I wanted to privilege the perspectives of those with subjugated or marginalized “standpoints” (Fine 1994, Haraway 1988, Smith 1990). Thus, while participants’ social locations roughly approximated that of their respective congregations and of the denomination in terms of age, sex, gender and class, my sample disproportionately represents people on the basis of sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, and other axes of social difference.

To be sure, out of eighteen participants from Hope, six (30%) identified as LGB; a similar proportion to that of the congregation. Yet this was not intentional and does not presume any basis for generalization. Of my twenty participants from Hillside, six (30%) identified as Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual (LGB), which is a far greater percentage than that (5%) of the total congregation as of 2004¹⁷. Also, two of the sixteen active members I interviewed from Hope (12.5%) and only one of the fourteen I interviewed from Hillside (7%) were people of color, again much higher proportions than those represented in each congregation.

As the table above shows, I also interviewed the former and current directors of the UUA’s Office of LGBTQ Ministries and two former Hillside members. My goal was to include a range and variation of participant perspectives, to help underscore baseline commonalities in church discourse and reveal possible factors that are too deeply embedded in church culture to be made explicit by fully involved members.

Data Collection Methods

As mentioned previously, the data for this project came a wide range of sources, including congregants’ informal meetings and conversations, in-depth interview narratives,

¹⁷ The most recent breakdown of Hillside’s demographic makeup comes from the congregational survey that accompanied Hillside’s ministerial search in 2004.

formal church services and meetings, and official church and denominational publications. Together, these texts offer an important glimpse into the local organizational structures of discourses, epistemologies, values, attitudes, and norms from which Hope and Hillside congregants interpreted, communicated, and mobilized strategies of collective action.

Also, with interest in the discursive impacts of cultural change, I theoretically sampled weekly church newsletters and Sunday Orders of Service from each church, starting from the year 2004. As a basis for analysis, I also selected ten newsletters from each church published between 2001 and 2002, a period of relative organizational stability for both churches. I also compiled data via weekly church sermons, and formal and informal communications (emails, posters, etc.) that circulated in the church. More broadly, I gathered texts from UU handbooks, UUA websites and publicity materials, as well as other literature associated with the two UU social justice initiatives featured in this study.

To this end, I focus on the UUA's discourses and practices of "Welcoming" and the UUSC's strategic use of normalizing repertoires of universal love, kinship "family values", and self-reliance in the pursuit of mobilizing congregants to act collectively for marriage equality. Their purpose is to highlight the significance of narratives as a way to re-imagine the LGBTQ political subject as *in relation to* others. My analysis also focuses on embedded church discourses, as found in worship books Orders of Service, sermons, weekly newsletters, church websites and other texts that more directly reflect the organization. In these, I explored the relations, policy and governance issues, social opportunities and expectations, and local opportunities; in other words, the *practice* of embedded church discourse.

As part of their ministerial searches, congregations completed a survey that was used to gauge the congregation's beliefs, values, and attitudes about the church's culture future direction,

and the attributes they looked for in a minister. These surveys provide useful aggregate congregational data regarding the *significances* attribute(d) locally to different elements of church culture. They also provide noteworthy qualitative responses (addressed below) that shed some light on the interpretive repertoire from which gender, race, and sexuality, class, and other categories of difference are constructed as relevant ‘factors’ of the church’s current situation.

I found the insights and procedures of “discourse tracing” (LeGreco and Tracy 2009) to be a useful method for collecting meso-level discourses and generating grounded, comparative analyses across multiple levels of interaction. Discourse tracing, as outlined by LeGreco and Tracy (2009) provides an essential resource for que(e)rying. This method offers a systematic, transparent model for critically examining church-based discourses by illuminating the local organization of “interpretative repertoires” they make possible.

This discourse-centered method of data collection and analysis demonstrates the central role that churches can play in mediating between macro-, meso-, and micro-level political discourses. By ‘micro discourses’ LeGreco and Tracy (2009:1519) refer here to the ‘local uses of text and language within a specific context’; ‘meso discourses’ denote discourses that ‘attempt to coordinate [discursive] practices across several local sites; and ‘macro discourses’ denote ‘the broader social narratives and systems of enduring thought’. I adopt discourse tracing as a method of data collection and analysis to unearth key linkages between these levels of social life and to highlight the meso discourses operating across organizational contexts.

Que(e)rying Discursive Practices through Participant Observation

Que(e)rying can produce data that attest to the contingent, negotiated, and fluid nature of discourses, as well as the processes by which they are continually recreated within the dialogic

context of group life (Lichterman 1998). At both Hope and Hillside churches, participant observations provided the means for naturalist inquiry, for experiencing the mechanisms of church-based interaction and the ordinariness of routine, weekly practice; what it means to ‘do church’. Witnessing firsthand the ways that churches collectively negotiated values and scripts through informal conversations and other narrative practices, I gained a greater understanding of micro-mobilization as a dynamic and interpretive narrative practice and form of discursive labor.

Participant observation also allows us to see first-hand many interactional intricacies that occur in congregations, including the ways they react to or make use of implicit meanings, beliefs, and values embedded in the church. In the context of social movements, ‘implicit meanings’, Lichterman (1998:402) notes, are ‘the meanings that activists tend to take for granted as they are innovating explicit ideologies, identities, and rituals...implicit meanings enable and constrain what activists can do together, or even imagine doing together’. Data from participant observing can illuminate both the explicit and implicit aspects of group or organizational culture by unearthing the discourses that give activism meaning ‘*as it is happening* in everyday life’ (Lichterman, 1998:410).

I participant observed at five primary (geographic) sites over a period of eighteen months. Observations were sampled theoretically from weekly church services as well as several smaller group meetings at each church, formal and informal meetings, social justice task force meetings, weekly youth and adult discussion groups, and event planning meetings. I also participant observed in each church before and during their respective community’s LGBT Pride Day events, which included attending planning and organizational meetings at each church, marching with the congregants in the Pride Day Parades, and *tabling* with Hope congregants during the day-long Pride Day festival that is held downtown at the end of the parade route.

In-depth Interviews

As mentioned above, que(e)rying requires an in-depth understanding of the research problem from the point of view of participants. There are now several approaches to interviewing that are geared toward reaching this level of understanding, including Holstein and Gubrium's (2003) 'active interviewing'. Active interviewing is an approach that considers how the dynamics of the interviewer/interviewee relationship within the context of the interview setting actively shape participants' subjectivities, as well as their narratives and the meanings and significations therein. In similar fashion, que(e)rying calls for researchers to be, among other things, 'increasingly open and sensitive to how sexuality, among a broad range of identities, is anchored in fleeting ways within the discursive contours of interviewing' (Kong et al. 2001:96). Of critical importance, here, are the contextual and interactional dynamics of the interview setting – the relations of power within which the interview itself is embedded - and the relationships that we co-create with our participants (Grace et al. 2004).

By only loosely structuring my interviewing guide and defining the parameters of the interviews, I was able to see more clearly the assumptions, meanings, and values enacted through participants' social justice narratives in relation to the current culture of the church and context(s) of the interviews. For instance, during my research, I had reflexively considered how my participants presented their sexual and gender identities and subjectivities would be shaped by their presumptions of my sexual and gender identities and subjectivities, among other things.

Situational Analysis and Narrative Practices

My analytic approach to que(e)rying church culture was integrative, emergent, and

embedded, drawing on multiple traditions of critical discourse analyses (e.g. Wetherell and Patton 1988), situational analysis (Clarke 2005), and dynamic narrative inquiry (e.g. Daiute 2014). This mix of analytic strategies is geared toward generating a “thick analysis” (Clarke 2005) of the elements shaping LGBTQ social justice practices at Hope and Hillside.

Having produced a data set that was both textually rich and multi-dimensional, my goal was to determine the church-specific factors that were most salient in producing locally embedded discourses of social inequalities and strategies for individual and collective action. Of particular relevance to me was the deployment of embedded, or pre-existing discourses within the church; how members grounded broader UUA social movement frames, such as “the Welcoming Congregation” and “Standing on the Side of Love”.

My findings below are drawn from the methods and procedures of ‘discourse tracing’ (LeGreco and Tracy 2009) and situational analysis (Clarke 2005). My goal was to generate a broad stroke impression of the factors shaping LGBTQ social movement dynamics in each church. In order to identify major situational elements and focus analysis on their relations to one another in more depth, I generated maps representing these churches’ current “situations” of “Welcoming”. This practice allowed me to consider all possible elements (e.g. material, symbolic, historical, emotional, discursive) impacting the “situation of inquiry” and provided a visual resource for analyzing their interconnectedness. I then re-ordered the maps thematically into categories of church history, materiality, leadership, governance/mobilization, and social relations, as well as structures of gender, sexuality, identity, and family, as per the guidelines set by Clarke’s (2005) approach.

However, when analyzing these themes in relation to one another, I also found that ‘what’ participants told me about the situation of LGBTQ social movement in their church was

only part of the story. Looking back at the data through a “practice” lens of organizational culture, I re-focused attention on the “cultural components that are used to construct strategies of action” (1986:273). I thus re-mapped the situational elements in terms of the connections I saw between LGBTQ social movement and the church’s shared “symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views” (Swidler 1986:273). Doing this illuminated significant patterns in the organizational embeddedness of the discourses and strategies of action used to construct, negotiate, and deploy meanings and actions for LGBTQ social movement.

In light of this development, I adopted Dauite’s (2014) approach of “dynamic narrative inquiry”, as a way to sharpening my focus on the active narrative *practices* of LGBTQ social movement at Hope and Hillside. As both cultural artifacts and dynamic cultural practices, local church narratives provide a platform for analyzing the locally available and organizationally grounded repertoires that people use to negotiate broader collective action strategies in locally intelligible and relevant ways, as well the discourses that give them meaning (Dauite 2014). Accordingly, rather than just focusing on ‘what’ participants’ talked about in their accounts of LGBTQ social movement, I also examined the data for themes pertaining to how, when, and under which conditions the congregations narratively constructed LGBTQ social justice and considered their involvement in it. As Chase (1996:55) explains, the goal of narrative analysis:

...is not to impose immutable of definitive interpretations on participants’ stories or even to challenge the meanings participants attach to their stories. Rather, its goal is to turn our attention elsewhere, to taken-for-granted cultural processes embedded in the everyday practices of storytelling.

Using a narrative analytic strategy can thus help to “illuminate the collective scripts of a social group” (Sangster 1994:90) as well as the “interpretative repertoires” (Wetherell and Potter 1988) that frame their meanings, and the embedded discourses that make them intelligible.

My analytic approach thus integrates insights and direction from multiple models,

including critical discourse analysis (Wetherell and Potter 1988), “dialogic/performative analysis” (Reissman 2007), and “values analysis” (Daiute 2014), which I discuss in more detail below. This project aimed to analyze the narratives used by congregants to construct, contest, negotiate, and mobilize collective action in order to discern their embeddedness within the churches’ organizational cultures. To this end, I generated subsets of narrative-rich data that highlighted distinct, yet overlapping cultural components of LGBTQ social movement.

First, I analyzed the data for patterns and variations in each church’s local appropriation of the “Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program”. To do this, I created a subset of data to include the narratives and other “forms of expression” (Daiute 2014) that draw on or directly address the “welcoming and affirming congregation” concept. The point, here, was to “map the contours of the interpretive process” (Reissman 2007) underlying congregants’ understandings of their church and its identity as “welcoming and affirming”.

I analyze the embedded scripts and “interpretative repertoires” defined by Wetherell and Potter (1988:1782) as “the explanatory resources to which speakers have access...the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes, and other phenomena.”¹⁸ Such terms, as Wetherell and Potter (1988:35) explain, “are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signaled by certain tropes or figures of speech.” Accordingly, I extracted and examined the ‘welcoming and affirming’ narratives that emerged in interviews and other texts for patterns in the strategic use of metaphors and other figures of speech. By arranging the narrative components this way, I found, it was possible to discern the overarching repertoires underlying locally embedded meaning to the denomination’s ‘welcoming and affirming congregation’ initiative.

¹⁸ Wetherell and Potter’s (1985) use of the term “interpretative repertoire” is not intended to be distinct substantively or analytically, from the term “interpretive repertoire”. Consequently, this paper draws primarily on the term “interpretive” for the sake of simplicity but makes no analytic or conceptual distinction between my usage and that of the authors.

My analytic focus in the following two data chapters was similarly rooted, but attended more closely to specific elements used in the construction of the LGBTQ political subject position in the church: first, the organizational structuring of identity discourses and identifying practices, which is a central component of UU church membership and church-based collective action strategies; and second, to the congregations' social relations micro-mobilizing discourse and practice with respect to "marriage equality".

I adopt a dialogic/performative approach to analyze the local interpretive practices of identity in each church. Dialogic/performative analysis expands analysis beyond coding texts to include the interpretation *and* practice of identity (Reissman 2007:115). The point, here, is to examine the narrative enactment of identity by analyzing both the locally available discourses and strategies of interaction as well as the dynamic practices thereof. For this project, I looked at how organizational relations of power at Hope and Hillside configured the local discourses of identity and identifying practices. My analysis similarly examined the impacts of sexual and gender structures on the congregations' narratives of individual identity and the deployment of organizational identity as a social action strategy.

Through these frameworks, I created a subset of data that included narratives (individual and organizational) of identity generated from interview transcripts, church newsletters, and church sermons. My units of analysis in this chapter are the structures of identity and identifying practices. I thus analyzed the data for explicit and implicit evidence of "identity work", noting patterns in "impression management" and other identifying practices that were distinguishable at the individual and organizational levels. I view them analytically within the epistemological and discursive structures of Hope and Hillside's 'closeting' and 'covering' cultures.

My analysis in the last data chapter builds on and focuses the insights developed in the

previous two; it focuses on the organizational structuring and practice of “values”, or the “principles that people live by” (Daiute 2014:69) and affect in the church. I analyzed the resonance of the UUA’s strategic uses of affect and values in their LGBTQ social justice initiatives with the organizationally grounded discourses and practices of these deeply embedded cultural elements. A subset of narrative analysis, “values analysis” provides a means for identifying “how values are performed, or not, across stakeholders” (Daiute 2014:75). To this end my analysis revealed patterns in terms of how the UUA’s social justice frames resonated within Hope and Hillside.

Situating narratives by their relative positions of power and authority enabled me to address micro-mobilization around marriage equality issues as processes of “values negotiation” (Daiute 2014). “Values negotiation”, for Daiute (2014:73) is “the process by which individuals do or do not take up values of others, in conversations and narratives created in the same setting or implicitly in interacting expressions across stakeholders.” While Daiute’s values analysis model distinguishes between the dynamic narrative practices by which members ‘perform’, ‘contest’, or ‘center’ the values performed by others, my approach focuses on the factors of organizational culture that are most salient factors in localizing the UUA’s strategic performance of values, as well as affect, as part of its broader social movement framing efforts. My analysis thus focused on the direct references made in the church to values, detecting patterns in the cultural resonance of the UUA’s “family values” frames within the two congregations that aligned with their church-based structures of family and community relations.

Discussion

Que(e)rying, as a locally embedded model of qualitative organizational research, aims to

uncover the organizational mechanisms shaping members individual and collective experiences. Que(e)rying helped to uncover discourses that were embedded at Hope and Hillside; discourses that shaped formal and informal group interactions and micro-mobilizing practices. However, it also enabled me to use my own embodied experience as an additional site for critical analyses of embedded histories, discourses and values; as well as the organizationally grounded ways of addressing sexuality and gender.

I will explain. I have always considered my body- as far as physical stature, strength, and as a site of gender disruption. However, since I was pregnant at the time of my fieldwork, my body increasingly became a site of vulnerability, as well as femininity. As such, it interested me to see the extent to which the normative structures of gender and sexuality embedded in each church would intervene in the assumptions that people made regarding my status as a gendered and sexual body. These assumptions, after all, would have implications for the types of positioning and responses participants would provide, particularly with regard to any sensitive or controversial issues pertaining to gender or sexual politics in the church. I thus decided I would only discuss my own situated-ness as a queer, white, working-class, upwardly-mobile, American, able-bodied, wife, and mother if they asked about it or made explicit any assumptions that required correction for the purpose of research accuracy and ethics.

This decision was strategically made: I wanted to explore the implicit and explicit. Specifically, I decided to maintain a ‘functional level’ of uncertainty regarding my social located-ness to participants throughout the research process. Accordingly, my interests were in examining the strategies they would use to navigate this terrain of uncertainty around identities of gender, sex, and sexuality, to better understand the discourses, values, and assumptions participants attached to me during the interviews. How, for instance, did the presence of my

visibly pregnant body shape the conversations I had with Hope congregants? How did their narratives differ from those offered by Hillside congregants, whom I interviewed postpartum? As it turned out, my focus on LGBTQ political activism provided ample ‘evidence’ for many Hope congregants that I identified as a lesbian, a point that became clear to me only after a particular exchange with George, during which he explained the congregants at Hope had collectively identified me as “the lesbian researcher”.

A little more elaboration may be helpful, here. In part, I had assumed that since these churches were ‘Welcoming and Affirming’, the challenges they faced with respect to LGBTQ social movement were primarily based on organizational, theological, or economic factors. However, as I was finishing up my interview with Bill, I asked him if he had any questions for me. “Yes,” he replied. “When did you know you were gay?” I smiled, asking “who told you I was gay?”

In that moment, I was not surprised by Bill’s assumption that I was gay, nor his account of the congregation’s interpretation of my sexuality. This interactional context and conversation reflects the power of heteronormativity to reinforce the perception that critical research on sexualities was only of interest to scholars whose work wouldn’t threaten to delegitimize their social identities (Carbado 1990; Sedgwick 1990). However, this interpretation provided a key insight: that the shared understandings and frameworks Bill had drawn on to interpret my sexuality came from the same discourses underlying Hope’s situation of Welcoming.

The overall purpose of my analysis was on generating theoretical premises on the organizational cultural factors shaping LGBTQ social movement discourse and practice in UU churches from the accounts found in interviews, informal conversations, church sermons, newsletters, websites, and other communications. Narratives from both churches revealed

interesting patterns in the values congregants' performed in relation to marriage, family, sexuality, and love.

I traced the discourses of the UUA's "Welcoming and Affirming Congregation" Program and the UUSC's "Standing on the Side of Love" initiative across denominational and congregational contexts, focusing on the local structures shaping congregations' interpretations and practices of broader UU strategies and the frames that encompassed them. From these analyses, it became clear that organizational structures of identity were predominant factors in both churches' constructions of LGBTQ social movement. Moreover, these local structures intersected with structures of gender and sexuality to invoke closeting and covering repertoires of discourse and action in response to marriage equality.

The data chapters that follow foreground the embedded discourses underlying the two churches' Welcoming Congregations. These discourses highlight the salience of church culture as a critical site for analyzing the mediating impacts of materiality, church history, and governance as factors structuring discourse identities, modes of belonging, and values in each church. In this process, I articulate the need for continued exploration of multi-dimensional attributes of organizational culture as an important inroad for analyzing their varying impacts on local discourses and practices at the intersections of normative gender and sexuality, according to the degree, depth, and dimension of their organizational embeddedness.

CHAPTER 2

Organizational Culture and Embedded Discourses of “Welcoming”

During our interview, Keith Kron detailed the work he did during his tenure with the UUA, including overseeing the Welcoming Congregation Program in UU congregations across the country. He noted, “When I came into this office there were seventy-one Welcoming Congregations out of about 1,050 UU Congregations and when I left there were 650.”

The Welcoming Congregation Program provided a useful platform for highlighting some of the most pertinent elements shaping the situation of LGBTQ social justice for congregants at Hope and Hillside. My initial analysis of data drawn from denominational and church texts, in-depth interviews, and participant observations revealed significant variations in the two congregations’ discourses, strategies, and practices of “Welcoming”. My focus in the first of these three data chapters is on the organizational discourses embedded in the congregations’ Welcoming repertoires, with their social justice strategies and actions addressed in the two chapters that follow.

Below, I explore pertinent elements that constituted Hope’s and Hillside’s “Welcoming Congregation” situations at the time of my research. While each congregation’s Welcoming repertoires no doubt corresponded to the UUA’s Welcoming Program frame, I found consistent patterns in the interpretations and practices of Welcoming that were decidedly local, reflecting facets of the congregation’s organizational culture. The data presented in this chapter highlight how structures of governance and mobilization, organizational history, and materiality, at the intersection of the churches’ structures of gender and sexuality, shaped the locally embedded discourses from which congregations interpreted and practiced “Welcoming”.

These elements, I suggest, constituted the contexts of micro-mobilization within which

Hope and Hillside congregants grappled with the situationally relevant structures of sexuality and gender to privilege *closeting* and *covering* repertoires of LGBTQ social justice discourses, strategies, and actions. In the following chapters, I plan to show how together, these embedded and situational elements impacted congregants collective action practices.

Review of Existing Scholarship

Recent scholarship in the area of social movement discourse has firm roots in the cultural framing perspective, which has taken shape over the last thirty years. Drawing on Goffman's (1974) analysis of cultural frames, Snow and Benford (1988) developed a cultural framing perspective to analyze how social movement groups strategically frame, or connect their movement goals, strategies, and identities to broader cultural meanings, values, and symbols. Scholarship in this area underscores the capacity of frames to shape groups' abilities to diagnose social problems, legitimize strategies of action, mobilize participants to act, and garner support from potential constituents (Benford 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 1986). The framing perspective quickly emerged as a useful approach for examining LGBTQ collective action strategies (Jenness 1995; Valocchi 1999) in terms of the dynamic processes by which members construct, borrow, adapt, and deploy collective action and identity frames.

Critics of the cultural framing approach described above have noted two of the basic assumptions on which the approach rests: first, that SMO members share the same position regarding movement frames, or at least develop some collective agreement about their meaning and relevance to the goals of the group; and second, that potential recruits interpret the movement frame in the ways SMO's intended (Steinberg 1998). These assumptions neglect relevant contexts of power, meaning, and practice configuring the discourses that make social

movement frames locally intelligible and relevant (Ferree 2009). Other contextual factors, including changes to the broader cultural landscape (e.g. Frank and McEneaney 1999), outcomes of other groups' framing strategies (e.g. Valocchi 1999), and the frames used by other movement groups (e.g. Miceli 2005), for instance, have all been shown to shape groups' framing strategies and the outcomes thereof (Snow and Benford 1988).

These works underscore the importance of discourse in the diffusion of collective action frames across multiple organizational contexts. Discourse, Bröer and Duyvendak (2009) remind us, "accounts for the difference between what can potentially be expressed and experienced and what is actually expressed and experienced in a given situation" (p. 339). A discursive resonance model is thus useful for examining how "public and political discourse is reproduced or challenged in everyday life by potential participants" within and across social movements (Bröer & Duyvendak, 2009:341; see also Steinberg 1998). For instance, the identity-based discourses giving meaning to LGBTQ activists' "gay rights" frames, Miceli (2005) argued, contrasted with the morality-based discourses underlying the Religious Right and Focus on the Family's political frames (2005:591). Too polarized to develop new motivating arguments or to direct their framing strategies toward the other, each side worked only within the discursive space carved out by their respective political realms with little hope for further progress (2005).

FINDINGS

The Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program: Excavating UUA Discourse

As the UUA's primary response to increasing turmoil in the United States with respect to sex and sexuality, the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program was meant to help each congregation make an assertive statement about its position on LGBTQ-based oppressions and

the systems that maintain them. Official UUA texts describe The Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program as:

...A completely volunteer program for congregations that see a need to become more inclusive towards bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender people. It consists of a series of workshops developed by the UUA. The goal of the workshops is to reduce prejudice by increasing understanding and acceptance among people of different sexual orientations.¹⁹

The Program strategically framed LGBT social justice as a matter of UU covenant by linking LGBT social justice to a belief in “the inherent worth and dignity of all people”, the first of the Seven Basic UU Principles (see Appendix A). Moreover, the UUA maintains that “Being welcoming means striving for radical inclusion, and creating spaces that honor every part of our identities, backgrounds, and experiences. (UUA 2016)

And then they had to file a report saying how they had met the guidelines and done the actions, and also send in a record that the entire congregation voted to become a Welcoming Congregation, or at least 90% approval; though, as the program progressed, it became more like 95%.²⁰

Since 1989, The Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program has undergone two notable transformations. The first came in 1997, when the Office published a second edition of the handbook. The UUA’s updated Program broadened the scope of the original program, while maintaining its original heading. The second edition expanded the Program’s discourse to include bisexual and transgender-identified people and to include more focus on topics related to transphobia and heterosexual privilege in its programming and materials.

The second transformation occurred in 2004, when Kron and other UUA leaders created a supplemental guidebook for the program called *Living the Welcoming Congregation: Resources for Continuing the Welcoming Congregation Journey*. Its purpose was to support

¹⁹ Source: <http://www.uua.org/leaders/idbm/bglt/welcomingcongregation>

²⁰ The lists of “guidelines” and “actions” to which Kron referred both appear in the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Handbook (See Appendix A).

active and ongoing practice in LGBT-based social justice. Accordingly, the text offers an updated set of ideas and materials for congregations hoping to maintain an active and ongoing LGBTQ political culture. It also addresses several questions congregants had after being certified, such as: What does a Welcoming and Affirming Congregation do? How can it work to actively welcome and affirm the lives and experiences of all, regardless of identity, expression, or orientation?

This second update required a deeper shift in Hope's and Hillside's Welcoming Congregation discourse. By emphasizing its connection to the Seven Basic UU Principles (see Appendix A), UU leaders have drawn on the Welcoming frame to symbolize the entire religion with respect to social justice.

However, in 2004, the UUA re-aligned the program's discursive base in an effort to construct LGBTQ collective action as evidence of "a deeper level of engagement with UU principles and purposes" (Walsh 2004:22). Thus, once drawn primarily from the first UU principle ("the inherent worth and dignity of all people"), the updated program now reflects a deeper connection to the seventh, which is "the interconnectedness of all living things". The purpose of this change was to put stronger emphasis on the structures of accountability tying members together. This, leaders hoped, would incite more action and prevent members from being satisfied with passive acceptance or "tolerance" of sexual diversity in their congregations.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, after several years of program implementation, the UUA all but dropped the word "Affirming" from its original frame. Instead, church leaders tried to evoke meanings of Welcoming as a set of affirming practices in and of itself, rather than fixed label, identity, or characteristic. To this end, in referencing the Program, I attempted to do so in a historically accurate way. That is, I attempted to be consistent in my use of the Welcoming

and Affirming Program title in reference to the program when Hillside and Hope leaders first implemented it in their congregations. While the exact year of the title change is unclear, I generally use the title “Welcoming Congregation Program” more often. While I address this title change as a potentially significant element in future discussions, I found little evidence to suggest that the “Affirming” component of the title was any more significant to the UUA than it was at the congregational level. As a result, subsequent discussions of this component of the Program are only tangential.

Embedding “Welcoming and Affirming Congregation” Discourse at Hope Church

Hope Church became certified as a ‘Welcoming Congregation’ “after a two-year process of study and reflection on the role of religious doctrine and religious institutions in perpetuating prejudice and misunderstanding toward gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people.” As part of Hope’s certification, its members adopted the following resolution:

Be it resolved that Hope Church shall henceforth be known as a Welcoming Congregation. We celebrate and support the lives, relationships, religious quests, and contributions of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people, and their families and friends. We affirm and promote the full participation of all people at every level of our congregation and community. We pledge our society’s commitment to do its part to heal centuries of religious and societal based oppression and prejudice, making our church a sanctuary of spiritual growth and welcome for all.

Hope members’ narratives of their church as a “Welcoming Congregation” were shaped by an array of embedded and situational elements of organizational culture. From the discourses underlying Hope’s Welcoming Congregation, I found evidence suggesting that the organization’s structures of governance, materiality, and social justice history were salient

factors shaping Hope's and Hillside's "Welcoming" cultures.

The data presented below also highlight themes pertaining to the intersectional impact of these factors with the normative structures shaping Hope's closeting discourses of gender and sexuality. Together, I argue below, these factors generated the available "toolkit" (Swidler 1986) of discourses through which the congregation collectively negotiated its Welcoming Congregation and participation LGBTQ social justice. The implications of these themes on congregational strategies and actions are discussed again in subsequent chapters.

Church History as a Contrast Structure of Welcoming

Several participants, such as Charlie, remembered a "period of time in which the perception was that there really wasn't a need to do a whole lot because folks were coming here and becoming involved." As Kevin recalled, "once we were a Welcoming Congregation, a lot of that stuff seemed to die away because it was like, 'well, do we really need this still?'"

Narratives used to discuss LGBTQ social justice at Hope drew most often on its Welcoming Congregation Committee. Yet, as Noelle explained, "People had sort of moved on." Lamenting the church's lack of Welcoming Congregation efforts, saying:

We had made huge strides; that's absolutely true. But, you know, it's very dangerous to say 'everything is fine,' just like you can't say 'racism is gone.' But, there is a temptation, a tendency to move on to something else that feels more urgent, you know, after everybody seems 'cool, cool, cool'.

This recurrent narrative of sufficient action provides an important insight about the theoretical pitfalls that come with any attempt to gauge or evaluate social movement outcomes through a lens of cultural frame resonance alone. In general, to the extent that Welcoming Committee leaders adopt at least some version of the Program to implement in their congregations and

leaders see enough evidence of program completion and a shift in church culture within the church, they could deem Hope a “Welcoming Congregation”.

The impact of Hope’s social action history on the congregation’s embedded Welcoming Congregation discourse was evident across several streams of data. As per the guidelines of the Office of LGBTQ Ministries, Hope developed a Welcoming Congregation Committee to serve as the primary group responsible for activating LGBTQ social justice discourse and activism in the church. Noelle, who was involved in Hope’s first Welcoming Congregation Committee, shared her experiences with leading the group, remembering it as being “very active” during its first few years. She recalled doing “a lot of educational events, social events, making sure we were in the Pride marches and attending all kinds of things.” Other congregants recalled having “lots of discussion groups,” and feeling “like everything was in a good place.”

Analyzing Janice’s reference to Hope’s church history as a contrast structure for depicting its current situation also underscores the importance of materiality and the availability of resources at the church. Janice, like most other members, lauded the program’s initial impact. Her account of the congregation’s successful actions drew instead on material elements to contrast its past from its present. “We actually had a table at Pride Day because we had enough people and enough money to have a table and brochures and enough people to staff the table at Pride Day,” she recalled. Also, Janice’s construction of “actually having a table” as a matter of material concern demonstrates the salience of Hope’s materiality as a factor shaping Janice’s and others members’ experiences. I turn now to this element of Hope’s organizational culture.

Organizational Materiality and Material Embeddedness at Hope Church

“This church has been just kind of hangin’ on since I’ve been here” (Jean).

Hope's recent congregational survey showed widespread belief within the congregation that the church's most pressing issues were "the inter-related challenges of membership growth and increased financial strength".²¹ Following suit, Jean, a middle-aged woman who was charged with managing Hope's administrative tasks, had her position reduced to part-time due to Hope's sharply diminished budget. She informed me that the congregation's size was still "about a hundred members." This number, she explained, has "stayed about the same, now, for some years. We're hoping that, with the new minister, we can pull in a couple more. It's a struggle. It's a big struggle."

While already proving detrimental, the economic impact of Hope's schism fully materialized after the Great Recession of 2007. A newsletter printed at the midway point of Hope's fiscal year described its investments as in "negative liquidity", making any remaining funds all but impossible to access. This situation forced leaders to make several decisions at the organizational level to help keep Hope afloat. Among these were decisions to reduce the salaries of the minister and other paid employees; to consolidate the committee structure of governance so that more responsibilities would fall under the auspices of fewer committees; and to press existing members to increase their annual "pledge" amounts, contribute their pledges early, and even make "above pledge" contributions to help cover Hope's operating expenses.

Hope's material condition was the most salient factor shaping congregants' current Welcoming Congregation. Material conditions structured the congregation's "Welcoming Congregation" discourses. First, as in Janice's account, the lack of materials was a primary basis used for justifying the congregation's inactions. In her case, while "having a table" refers to the action of setting up a table for presenting informational materials about the organization and its purpose and practices to passers-by who, in this example, meant attendees of the festival that

²¹ Ibid.

occurs immediately after the city's annual Pride Parade. Janice's narrative of Hope's history of participation in this practice emphasized "having enough people" and "enough money," as crucial resources to which the congregation no longer has access.

Going back to Janice's example, her use of "actually" in "actually having a table" indicates the depth to which Hope's discourses of action are embedded in its current material situation and the structures and practices thereof. The inference, here, is that Hope's current situation with respect to available resources is dire enough that "having enough people" in terms of human capital and "having enough money" in terms of access to materials is almost unimaginable in the church's current state.

As is often the case with small organizations, one of the most salient factors underlying Hope's narratives of individual and collective *inaction* was the experience commonly referred to in today's time economy as "burnout". No doubt, Hope's division of labor was organized between significantly fewer people than would be the case for more average-sized UU churches in the United States.

Not surprisingly, the congregation's lay leaders were among those for whom the impacts of Hope's dwindling resources were most acutely felt. Carol, for instance, was among a small group of leaders who "were kind of in the middle of the whole thing." She described feeling "exhausted" by the levels of work and stress she experienced while serving in the position at that time. Consequently, she explained, she "stopped being chairman of the committee, which dissolved, and we don't have one now. And it's bad."

Combined, these elements contributed to a material culture that privileged discourses of survival, growth, and social action through the increasing uses of commodifying repertoires. It is to these elements of organizational culture that this discussion now turns.

Materializing the Closet at Hope and Commodifying Practices of “Welcoming”

During our interviews, for instance, several participants implicated the church’s lack of financial resources when discussing the congregation’s current organizational culture. Janice’s account of Hope’s most recent ministerial search provides further evidence in this regard.

Calling the search “unsuccessful, because we just didn’t have the money to be in the market, really,” She explained that the candidate Hope members ultimately selected as a result of their lengthy and thorough search process ended up accepting another offer. Without hesitation she asserted that “money was the bottom line there.” Similarly, she explained that Joann:

took a serious cut in pay this year...because the restrictions for consulting ministers are different. As an *interim*, we have to pay her something comparable to what we were paying for our last minister. And we couldn’t do that anymore. So, I don’t know what we would have done had she not been with us.

The pay cut and title change were both part of the same shift: the interim can only be at a church for two years, whereas the terms and conditions for consulting ministers are more flexible and situationally specific.

Materiality with Hope also impacted the culture of mobilization and collective action at Hope, particularly with regard to the Welcoming Congregation Committee. Welcoming and Affirming discourses, while varied, were all similarly embedded within the materiality of social justice work. As Lauren, former member of the Welcoming Congregation Committee, recalled, “nobody wanted to be the chair of it for a long time. And people had been asking me to chair it for a while; so last year I decided that I had a little room in my schedule so I would do it.”

Congregants’ accounts of disengagement from committee practices suggest the salience of “burnout” when it came to Welcoming Committee work in a congregation the size of Hope’s. For instance, Noelle explained, “It was hard. It was hard. I mean, we had a good committee and

it was still hard to constantly be pushing. So, I stopped...for a while. And, unfortunately nobody else really took it on...very unfortunately.”

Commodifying Discourses, Welcoming Practices

Consequently, Hope’s dearth of resources slowly became the most pressing organizational factor re-configuring its embedded discourses. Widespread concerns about Hope’s survival shifted symbolic power from repertoires once used for mobilizing collective action to those meant for raising funds and unitizing congregants toward a common goal. Church publications printed during these years reveal a steady increase in the proportion that drew on fund-raising slogans and other commodifying repertoires.

These repertoires also gave meaning to Hope’s social activities and ritual events. Noelle, for instance, described what she saw as “a certain perspective that you cannot have fun without buying things” at Hope. She told me a story about her involvement in the church’s recently formed “Fun Raising Committee”, which was “something Joann came up with when people were freaking about not having money and everything that the congregation has been through in the past few years and all the work they’re doing.” According to Noelle, Joann suggested that the congregation form the committee “to just remember that we like each other and how to connect.” However, Noelle lamented, “I swear most of the committee meetings are talking about if we can raise money with this and what we can and can’t do; and it got to be a real drag.” She continued:

And, so finally, a few of us who were willing to stick it out said, “We’re not going to do anything with money.” And still when I took on this little get-together to make crafts, I was getting all this argument and email activity about, “Well we could charge money for this and we have to. Art supplies are expensive, and we could make money on this,” and I’m like, “No!” Anything that I do is not going to promote people buying more stuff, for one thing. And it’s not going to charge money, I’m sorry. If you want me to do this, then I’m not going to do it that way.

Noelle concluded by emphasizing the event's successful outcome, despite not involving money. "People brought their own stuff they had around the house," she explained, "...and they brought some food. And we had fun. And it was fine."

Hope's Governance Structure – Embedding Governance in Church History

In a Valentine's Day sermon, Joann proclaimed to the congregation that it "could no longer afford to live in the past". Indeed, the salience of church history as a factor shaping Hope's political culture was evident in a number of areas, not the least of which was members' trepidation over discussing the past in general, and gender and sexual justice in particular. Carole, a longstanding member and lay leader, recalled having "a rough year and a half, there." Congregants' narratives highlighted the salience of Hope's history of LGBTQ social action as a factor shaping their interpretations and practices of its "Welcoming Congregation". For many, Hope's previous ministry served as a contrast structure against which to depict the church's current Welcoming situation.

Closeting Discourse and Narrative Erasures

For longstanding members, narratives of church history were replete with memories of exclusion and organizational schism, contributing to a culture of silence, or what Joann called "a culture of fear" within the church. As Gail noted, "it would be interesting if you hear [about it], or if people are just going to brush it over. I would not be surprised if people don't talk about it, because it's painful." Hope's organizational history, participants' narratives show, structured its micro-mobilization context by creating a social environment that was conducive to congregational silence, which is also a central component of closeting culture.

The narratives through which participants gave meaning to Hope's current social justice situation during our interviews can be seen in the strategies of narrative erasure of sexuality from the church's history of sexual justice. The most oft used repertoires all were 'closeting', stifling the sexual politics and LGBTQ discourses once prevalent in the church. For instance, while more than half of my participants offered narratives of the Welcoming Congregation, they did little to emphasize the experiences of LGBTQ-identified congregants. Referring to Hope's history through abstractions was also a common practice during my time at Hope, with words such as "the whole thing" used to refer to the timeframe of Hope's history, *as well as* its emotional, interactional, political, and material impacts with respect to congregational life.

The Expansion of Welcoming Discourse

Hope's closeting culture is further evidenced in the shift I detected in the discourses embedded in everyday church operations. For example, once a major component of its Welcoming Congregation commitment, Hope's outreach was now largely devoid of sexuality and gender discourse, supplanted by discourses of survival and growth. Also, Hope's small size supported commodifying repertoires that also re-shaped the church's outreach strategies. Moreover, Hope's Welcoming Congregation Committee, became the Membership Committee, despite UUA rules that the committees be distinct. Today, it is called the Growth Committee.

Like many congregants, Gail admitted "getting people in the door is a big thing...So we either need new members, or we need richer members- I hate to say that!" Janice also believed that Hope needed to focus on "getting enough new people in the door". In Janice's view, "every single pledging member is pledged right up to the last penny they can possibly afford to give...and that does seem to be the case, as the canvass is coming in. We simply need more

members.”

And Charlie, now serving on Hope’s new Nominating Committee, described its goal as “finding people who are dumb enough to say yes to positions on the Membership Committee”. Since the goal of the Membership Committee is “growing the church”, the significance and humor of Charlie’s remark stems from two central points: first, the shared belief that UU congregations are notoriously keen on recruiting new members to positions in leadership and service; and second, from the difficulties of serving Hope as a committee member or leader when the congregation drops to one hundred or fewer members.

Unitizing Repertoires and “Welcoming” as Recruitment Practice

Hope’s closeting discourses were also evident across a variety of other repertoires. Hope’s skeletons had just about silenced the Welcoming program’s political energy, usurping it within a newly expanded discourse of outreach and replacing it instead with an increased emphasis on hospitality, or “inreach”. Embedded discourses of peace and tolerance, for instance, became increasingly salient in the church, replacing the discourses of justice and action previously embedded in the church, as seen in participant narratives and Hope’s monthly newsletters. For instance, Charlie, a long-time member who was widely considered Hope’s local authority on matters of UU history and activism, attributed Hope’s recent lack of LGBTQ-based mobilization to the congregation’s singular emphasis on the “Welcoming” aspect of the program. As he noted:

Holly, in a sermon she delivered in an attempt to mobilize congregants using a faith-based strategy, asserted:

It is interesting to note that in reference to our relationships with one another and with all others, we commonly refer to our capacity for tolerance, a UU buzz word

which ironically is not even found in the wording of any of our principles. We seemed to have adopted it as a catch all, as a means for overlooking those occasions when our direct input is required. In a sense, tolerance is a stagnant and sometimes dangerous word, which can mean to refrain from dealing with those ideas concepts from individuals or groups whose behaviors, practices and ideals may be contrary to our very principles.

By the time I left “the field” at Hope, Joann had grown even more frustrated with Hope’s “culture of fear”. This was manifested in many occasions, including a sermon, when she implored the congregation once again to act on behalf of LGBTQ social justice, saying:

Within our walls at worship, coffee hour and in our RE programs, we are a comfortable, inclusive group, welcoming all who come through our doors, as we should. However, when it comes to being socially vocal to advocate for the rights of those whose worth and dignity are ignored or treated with disdain, including those within our own congregation, we are noticeably silent....

In a way we have earned the right to wallow a bit, to recover internally from past events, but there comes a time when we need to shake ourselves out of the cocoon that has enveloped us. Basking in the comfort mode is easy, and certainly preferable to controversy. It keeps things calm, and peaceful...

But it also renders us internally isolated. However, every once in a while we may need to ask ourselves, “Are we really content with keeping this critical principle to affirm and promote ‘the inherent worth and dignity of every person’ all to ourselves?”

The above excerpt shows more clearly the impact of stifling repertoires on Hope’s embedded discourses. Despite calling out the congregations for being “noticeably silent”, itself a breach of the norms governing Hope’s closet culture, Joann’s narrative is still stifled by the skeletons of its history. That is, while the sermon implicitly addresses particular church decisions with respect to LGBTQ social justice and marriage equality, “those whose worth and dignity are ignored or treated with disdain” is the most explicit mention she makes. Also, her mention of “recovering internally”, as a vague reference to the past also reflects a broader pattern of tip-toeing around the issue of congregational schism and conflict.

In light of Hope’s schismatic past, leaders called on congregants to imagine a common

voice, vision, purpose, and identity for the church moving forward.²² Hope's disfigured political culture and history also produced a foray of unitizing repertoires in the congregation. To "unitize", according to Oxford, means to "form into a single unit by combining parts into a whole."²³ Over the last two years of my fieldwork, unitizing repertoires increasingly saturated the church's texts, growing in symbolic power and prevalence. Church leaders were the most ardent users of these repertoires, many of who constructed collective action as a crucial component of UU church unity. Joann's sermon urged congregants to begin this process, saying:

What would it take to unite us, to compel us to act in unison, outside of the safety of this sanctuary; to visibly uphold the principles we agreed to honor and profess? There is nothing more unifying for a Congregation than fighting for something very, very precious that gives value and meaning to our lives and our principles.

Joann's unitizing repertoire of micro-mobilization is evident, here, in her repeated emphasis on such words as "unite", "unison", and "unifying". As a repertoire for inciting collective action, this repertoire relies on the such notions as "values", "meaning", and "principle" to underscore the shared elements of Hope's congregation. This theme of increasing reliance on unitizing repertoires of congregational life is significant, and is echoed again and again in the following chapters.

Here, however, its significance and the degree to which it was embedded in Hope's culture was evident in the ways in which- and the ends to which- participants interpreted their congregation with unitizing repertoires, expanding the Welcoming frame to all newcomers, causing them to consider how they could be more open and welcoming to everybody. Gail, for instance, recalled:

...when people who weren't gay would say 'Well, we want to be welcoming to

²² This element was evident across an array of Hope's embedded discourses, which I describe in more detail in the following chapter.

²³ Oxford Dictionaries (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/unitize) The term originally gave meaning to American oil and gas laws, referring to "the joint operation of all or some portion of a producing reservoir" (Garner 180).

all,' I said, "the rainbow is welcoming to all. If you can come in here and be safe as a gay person, you might even consider that the rainbow is the rainbow connection, and you'll be safe.

Additionally, Hope's Welcoming and Affirming discourse is embedded within the church's economic situation, now reflecting its strategies of recruitment on a broader level. Most recently, the discourses underlying Hope's Welcoming Congregation also reflect its disfigured political culture. Its "Welcoming Congregation Committee" evolved into what is now the "Growth Task Force", and the idea of "affirming" all but disappeared.

Que(e)rying Hillside's Social Movement Culture

In 1993, after two years of educational programs and many scheduled discussion sessions by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Task Force, the congregation voted to become a Welcoming Congregation, an official designation by the UU Association" (*Hillside Church Newsletter*).

In this section, I present some of the most salient factors shaping Hillside's structure of micro-mobilization and embedded discourses of their Welcoming Congregation, drawing on the same dimensions of organizational culture as above; namely, organizational history, material culture, and policy structures of governance.

Church Histories and Structures of Legacy

Hillside's reputation as a stalwart for local, regional, and national-level activism has been due in part to its history of social action. Hillside's historical record of civic engagement and social action is central to its current social movement culture. Its leaders routinely drew on Hillside's history of activism by to advance the idea that social service and civic engagement are "pillar[s] of its very reason for being".²⁴ Deirdra, the church's former minister, described

²⁴ "The Hillside", Special Edition

herself to me during our interview as “a minister who takes social action seriously.” She was responsible for several important developments in the church’s micro-mobilization structures, including the development of a social justice system that she implemented to help congregants “focus on a few issues out of the many that concerned members had” (UUA 2009).

Hillside’s recent ministerial shift also marked the beginning of a significant discursive and structural overhaul within the church. Analysis of newsletters from 2000 to 2010 shows a steady shift in the discourses of social justice at Hillside; whereas earlier discourses of social responsibility, community action, and interconnectedness became more prevalent. Earlier editions were saturated with calls to action, narratives that linked structural inequalities in the broader society to UU’s responsibilities to engage in social justice work. In contrast, while newsletters printed between the years 2008 and 2011 also included discourse on social justice news, it was now relegated to the back of the twelve-page document, in a small space designated for Hillside’s social justice news. The church supplements this with an annual Social Justice Bulletin to provide updates on social justice practices.

However, the legacy of Hillside’s social justice history is still felt in a number of areas, including the procedural guidelines used to organize collective actions. The most relevant, of course, is the decision congregants made in 1993 to implement the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program. In addition, Hillside’s “Social Justice Handbook” is still a crucial resource for developing social movement repertoires and social action strategies. Hillside’s “task force” structure of micro-mobilization, provides congregants access to “educational, social change and social service opportunities around timely and major social justice issues, such as working to protect the environment or to address homelessness.” These and other regulations are codified in Hillside’s official “Social Justice Handbook”, further embedding the church’s

numerous social justice groups and practices in Hillside’s culture under the broader heading of the “Social Justice Association”.

Materiality at Hillside

“To me, this church is no dead pile of stone and timber – but a living thing filled with the voices and the faces of those who have worshipped here over the years.”
(Deirdra, Former Hillside Minister)

Materiality was also a salient factor shaping Hillside’s Welcoming Congregation discourses, though in ways that were distinct from Hope. At Hillside, the most salient facet of materiality was the space of the church and the congregation’s size.

Congregants’ narratives enacted several positions regarding this material element. Participants’ accounts of the church building are significant, commonly used in the church to evaluate its practices of “Welcoming”. The building itself was actually the most often cited factor in participants’ accounts; more than half of the members I interviewed considered Hillside to be “not particularly welcoming.” Of these, several implicated the church building, particularly its material space, as not conducive to welcoming new churchgoers in general.

Shelley, a six-year member and active participant in the church, recalled the space of the church as being “a big issue for me.” As she explained, “I wanted stained glass. I wanted a minister in robes!” Shelley, like several other participants, emphasized the tension she felt between her sense of what a church should feel like and her sensory experiences at Hillside. This theme appeared across several participants who struggled to avoid evaluating their religious experiences from their expectations for what a “church” should be like.

Congregants’ narratives suggest a broader understanding on LGBTQ social justice that reflects the community structure of relations within the church.

Community-based relations gave local meaning to the church's policy on church space and access to it, for instance. Groups from the broader community have been able to utilize available spaces within the church throughout the week, including LGBTQ-based groups such as Gay Alcoholics Anonymous. Interestingly, one of the major debates occurring within Hillside Church when I began my research was over the question of whether the church should host a local Gay Bingo event. In the end, the church decided *not* to avail its space for the event. The official explanation had to do with not wanting Hillside's organization to become associated with morally questionable practices such as gambling.

Several participants' accounts of Hillside's Welcoming Congregation also implicated the church's size. Some members, such as Shelley, thought favorably of the congregation's impressive size, as well as the size of the church operation, linking it to the plethora of diverse spiritual, social, civic, and social justice opportunities it availed to them. "What I love," Shelley remarked, "...is that there is room at church for him, and there is room at church for me." However, for the majority of participants who references Hillside's large size, the congregation's size meant a higher chance that, as Joni asserted, "people get lost in this push to welcome people." Hoping for a different structure of social interaction, she explained:

I mean, we have people greeting everybody in the morning. But once all are greeted, they're sort of on their own. So, I'd like to see them do something more to somehow quietly identify a couple more members, or else a buddy to sit with. They should do something that just makes them feel like they're not just hanging out on their own; where they don't feel like they're being ignored. It's just hard. I think it's hard for people to come into it, especially a big group like that.

Policy Governance at Hillside

The evolution of Hillside's Welcoming discourses reflects broader shifts in organizational governance that accompanied its ministerial transition. Hillside's newly

implemented model of “policy governance” allowed ministers to exercise creative control and authority with respect to church culture and the practices thereof without much congregational surveillance. Policy governance grants ministers the freedom to initiate organizational changes, manage church operations, and make public statements for the church on social and environmental issues, among other things.

At Hillside, ministers have a lot more autonomy in terms of church governance than at Hope. According to Joni, a longstanding member and active leader within the congregation, policy governance marks a significant shift “of moving away from traditional board leadership, which is looking over the ministers’ shoulders saying, ‘you need to do this and you need to do that’.” Having just recently served on the church Board during the last ministerial search, Joni was enthusiastic about the potential for this new model of governance to facilitate church operations. “The idea behind policy governance,” she explained:

...is that we’ve hired the best ministers to match with our church, our needs, our aspirations, our visions, our goals; and we need to set some parameters to say you can’t do these kind of things, like anything that’s illegal or unethical; you can’t do things that are fiscally imprudent; you can’t treat people poorly—there’s a whole list of things that you can’t do and these are our goals. This is what we want to attain...and we hire you with these limitations that you can’t do certain kinds of things to get us there...and as long as you don’t do those things you are free to be as creative and innovative as you want and we will support you in that effort.

Policy governance grants its ministry the authority to govern according to its strengths and perceptions of the congregation’s needs.

From an administrative perspective, Joni and other lay leaders embraced Hillside’s new model of governance, calling it “much more supportive of the ministry” and one that “keeps the board focused on strategic planning and policy”. Or, as Joni quipped, “it keeps them out of whether Adam puts paper clips on the left side of the desk or the right side of the desk.”

One of the central avenues through which Hillside’s policy governance contributed to its

covering culture was via the organizational and symbolic power it accorded to Hillside's ministry relative to the congregation. Both executive and symbolic power accorded to the ministry at Hillside. That is, the UU structure of congregational polity makes it possible for newly called UU ministers to profoundly shape how already established programs will evolve within the congregation. This was certainly the case at Hillside, where ministerial changes substantially reconfigured many of the discourses underlying its Welcoming Congregation repertoires and paved the way for decisive actions with respect to the UUSC's "Standing on the Side of Love" initiative.

Yet, other noticeable changes to the embedded discourses and congregational atmosphere occurred as well. For example, there was consensus among congregants that the younger age of their new ministers was a central factor in generating "a different atmosphere" in the church. By the last year of Hillside's previous ministry, the congregation's median age was one of its highest in church history. With the ministerial change came a significant shift in the median age of congregants; as longstanding members either passed away or left the church, newer members consisted of young families and middle-aged individuals who were looking for a fulfilling social outlet. Donna, for instance, who described Hillside as "probably the youngest church" she had been involved with, believed that "having young ministers also puts forth a young person's energy in the church."

Hillside's new ministry re-imagined the church's mission, beliefs, and values shortly after they began their tenure there. In contrast to previous years, Hillside's culture encompassed signs of increasingly focused on the internal experiences of congregants. Data from participant interviews suggested that there grew an increasing emphasis on individual spirituality, upheld by Hillside's small group structure of ministries and a range of programs for congregants to explore

questions about their spiritual selves in relation to UU principles. In contrast to the “whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” repertoires espoused by Deirdra, Hillside’s new Mission Statement begins by stating “Ours is a religious philosophy that believes religious values should fit individuals, rather than individuals all being made to fit into one single religious “box.”

Hillside’s structure of policy governance no doubt also shaped the discourses used to construct its Welcoming Congregation. Self-reflective narratives were common in participants’ evaluations of Hillside as a “Welcoming Congregation”. In fact, when asked if Hillside was a “Welcoming Congregation”, more than half of the participants reflected on their own initiation experiences and feelings thereof. Donna, for instance, drew on her own experiences as a new congregant in her critique of Hillside’s “Welcoming” culture, saying it put the onus on new attendees to develop social ties within the pre-established groups. She lamented:

I’m not surprised at it. They all, of course, know each other. There’s nothing more difficult than being a warm and friendly church when, basically, you come to church to see your friends and you’re not really that interested in saying ‘hello’ to new people.”

Changes in the church’s ministry and structure of governance impacted congregants’ internalizing usage of the denomination’s Welcoming Congregation discourses. It also supported the collective erasure of sexuality and gender discourses that were once foundation to Hillside’s Welcoming Congregation. “When you’re welcoming,” Maureen explained:

...you welcome everybody and you welcome anyone who’s interested in being a part of the congregation, part of the church. As a welcoming congregation, people are not forgotten; people who are new are not forgotten; they’re not led to wander. They’re brought ‘into the fold’, so to speak. And I think the church has some work to do there. And they know. That’s not divulging anything; it’s not a secret.

Internalizing Frames and Universalizing Repertoires

When I asked Barb to tell me about what she remembers of her first impression of

Hillside, she explained, “It was very welcoming.” She described the feeling of the congregation as “welcoming and open”. Trish explained that:

...Hillside was the only place with a message that was consistent with what I felt to be true. So that was important, and to be in a place where people seemed like me. You know, you go to the Zen Center or the yoga place and it, it wasn't- it didn't feel culturally me. It felt like ‘okay we're trying on this religion’ for me.

In Trish's case, ‘feeling culturally me’ equated to whether or not, as she explained, the “people seemed like me”.

However, the most common strategy used to demonstrate Hillside's Welcoming culture was to cite the presence of LGB members in the congregation. Donna's understanding of Hillside's Welcoming Congregation was largely based on seeing the “openness” of LGB-identified congregants, saying “They're very open; and they're very proud of who they are. And so I see that; I see that a lot.” Similarly, Eliza, a sixty year-old divorced white woman, said “Honestly I love being in the presence of people that are sure of who they are and are not afraid of who they are and are accepted for who they are, and they are at the church.”

Covering Discourses at Hillside

Hillside's covering culture provided congregants with normative repertoires from which to evaluate their Welcoming Congregation, as well as LGBTQ social justice, more broadly speaking. It enabled a particular ‘gay normalization’ (Seidman, 2005) whereby the most commonly used mobilizing repertoires were based on hegemonic (e.g. white, middle-class, young, able-bodied, cisgender, male) discourses of sexuality and gender.

Jonas, after five years, could still vividly recall his first impressions of the church. “The friendliness was a little daunting,” he said, explaining that “people sort of smile and grab your hand and say hello”. To Jonas, this practice felt “somewhat unwarranted or artificial, as just sort

of an assumed behavior...a style of friendliness here that does not necessarily mean that ‘we know who you are’.

Interestingly, Jonas’s construction of Hillsiders’ friendliness as “a style” echoed across participants’ narratives, particularly for those who situated themselves as “outsiders within” (Collins 1990) at Hillside. For instance, Patty, who identifies as the church’s “token bisexual”, shared a similar perspective. Patty, who “did not feel particularly welcomed” at first, explained “the only way I got kind of welcomed in was I signed up and got involved.” She continued:

I mean, I’m an extravert, thank goodness and I thought, well, I might as well do something. And they had an announcement that they were looking for people to consider putting some art on the front wall of the church and maybe do some other artistic touches and so I felt well I’ll sign up to be on that committee because I can’t stand the way this place looks. So, I signed the sheet and I got a call the next week from somebody asking me to chair the committee. I’d been with the church not even a year so my egoistical way went “oh, they really want me!” And I thought ‘oh well I’ll give back in this way I’m brand new to the church.’ Well, what I didn’t realize ‘til later was they wanted me to chair it because I was new and I wasn’t known to have an opinion!

However, Patty contrasted her initial experience to the church’s current culture. “We’re better than we were,” she explained.

Discussion: In the Closet and Under Cover: LGBTQ Activism and Embeddedness

Taken together, the data presented below indicate a value in conceptualizing ‘cultural innovation’ as both a social movement outcome as well as a strategy. Taken collectively, participants’ accounts illustrated a realignment of Hope’s Welcoming Congregation Program Frame. The repertoires through which Hope and Hillside members constructed their Welcoming Congregations both reflected and reinforced their respective closeting and covering cultures.

As the data in the following chapter demonstrate, the individualist (essential) identities from which the closet became a meaningful epistemology at Hope emerged from the same

discursive wellspring that generated the ‘normal gay’ as a subject of sexual/gender-based oppression in Hillside’s culture of the cover. In other words, both Hope’s closeting culture and Hillside’s culture of covering drew on and reinforced dominant repertoires class, race, dis/ability, age, and other categorizations, privileging the (homo)normal subject as the primary illustration of LGBTQ social justice.

Nevertheless, each church’s program came to life in locally relevant ways. In part, Hope’s closeting culture promoted a narrative disembodiment of its Welcoming Congregation discourse from individual LGBTQ bodies and identities. Instead, the church’s new configurations of discourses and social relations support commoditizing, and unitizing repertoires of Welcoming discourse that supported the notion of the church body as the primary political subject of LGBTQ social justice. Hillside’s ‘covering culture’ promoted disarticulating repertoires of the body politic, whereby the ministry’s strategic performances, or exhibitions, of church identity was detached from the collective sentiment of the congregation.

By appropriating Welcoming Congregation frame, for instance, Hope expanded the welcoming repertoire to interpret the experiences of all newcomers. Relatedly, they constructed as exclusionary any church-based efforts geared exclusively for LGBTQ-identified people. Congregants who saw “the LGBT community” as a crucial market for outreach, felt the disciplinary power of Hope’s closet culture in the pressure they felt to not pursue, or “push” for more outreach into LGBTQ or otherwise queer communities. Church culture shaped the actualization of the UUA’s “Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program” at Hillside by configuring locally embedded discourses of sexuality, sex, gender, and social justice in ways that reinforced the individualist identity discourses at the heart of its covering culture.

Indeed, as I hope to demonstrate in the following chapter, these same covering discourses

and practices reinforced a binary, not one of “heterosexual/homosexual” or even “out/closeted homosexual”, but rather, between the “normal gay” and “queer” subject. Congregants consistently drew on Othering repertoires as a boundary defining strategy and most often cited the presence of gay and lesbian congregants and their non-normative ministry as evidence of the church’s “welcoming” culture.

Moreover, Hillside’s narratives of sexual (and gender) based oppression reflected the identity-based interests attributed to white, middle class, educated, able-bodied (in most cases) man. In other words, Hillside’s structures of identity, at the intersection of its structures of representation, reinforced the perceived validity of Queer Liberal strategies of covering that represented the interests of the “Normal Gay” political subject. With the discourse of individual ‘rights’ still figured heavily into congregants’ understandings and practices of LGBTQ social justice, the following chapter explores Hope and Hillside’s structures of individual, organizational, and collective identity and the strategies of LGBTQ-based collective action they shaped.

CHAPTER 3

Gay (In) Church? Organizational Identities and Identifying Practices

The situational elements mapped in the previous chapter were significant factors shaping Hope and Hillside's locally embedded discourses, strategies, and practices with respect to LGBTQ social justice. I focused in particular on Welcoming repertoires, which provided a basis for organizational comparison of the church's most prevalent and deeply embedded discourses of social justice and the structures helping to sustain them. My goal in this chapter is to begin unpacking some of the mediating impacts of these structures- namely, materiality, governance, and history- on the strategies of action underlying Hope and Hillside's LGBTQ social justice culture. To this end, the findings in this chapter revisit the themes of materiality, governance, and history to further demonstrate their shifting salience at the intersections of the churches' normative structures of gender and sexuality. In this chapter, I build on my previous discussion of the UUA's social justice initiatives to explore the links between the structures of individual and organizational identity and congregants' strategies of action "social witness"²⁵.

This "interpretive practice" approach integrates insights from Foucauldian and ethnomethodological frameworks to highlight the normative power of gender and sexuality on individual and organizational practices in each church. In Holstein and Gubrium's (2000:96) words, "If Foucault works in a historical register, and ethnomethodology in an interactional one, we tell the story of the self at the crossroads of narrative, social interaction, culture, and institutional life."

The themes presented in this chapter address the politics and practices of "social witness"

²⁵ Also referred interchangeably to "public witness".

in each church. Building on the previous chapter's discussion of micro-mobilizing and governance structures, the data below highlight key linkages between the churches' structures of individual and collective identities and bodies and their LGBTQ social justice practices. Initial analysis of data drawn from in-depth interviews, church sermons, and church newsletters highlight patterns in the salience of identity structures in shaping social justice discourses. These data, I found, provided a crucial inroad to analyzing the embeddedness of normative sexuality and gender epistemologies and discourses- that is, the ways of *knowing* and *seeing* sexuality and gender that intersected with Hope and Hillside's individual and group-level identity structures to avail congregations' of locally meaningful strategies of micro-mobilization and collective action.

Review of Existing Literature

Several key developments mark the timeline of identity-based social movement scholarship since the emergence of "New Social Movements" (NSMs) in the United States in the 1960's. One of the biggest challenges facing researchers of these typically identity-based movements has been to ascertain the extent to which movement groups' "collective" identities reflected the identities, perspectives, and interests of their participants. Collective identities deployed by groups often do not represent the shared grievances and interests of all (Bernstein 1997; Gamson 1995). They also fail to represent the bodies and embodied experiences of all.

More recent studies highlight a variety of factors that help to address this challenge. By looking more closely at the individual and collective identity practices in movement groups, scholarship now offers insight into the significance of group cultural aspects, including interpersonal dynamics (Stein 2002), hetero- and homo-normative power relations (Gamson 1999) and its configurations of discourse (Ferree 2009). Collective identity practices within

organizations also reflect external considerations, including the embeddedness of identity discourses within institutional contexts (Bernstein 2002; Holstein and Gubrium 2000), opposing groups' framing strategies (Fetner 2002), and broader social structures of cultural and political opportunity (Cohen 1985; Frank and McEneaney 1999).

Scholarship on LGBTQ social movement since the turn of the century attests to the significance of identity as a primary basis for collective action strategies. For Bernstein (2002), the multiple understandings and uses of sexual and gender identities throughout the LGBTQ movement show the benefit of using a "political identity" approach as a way to disrupt the assumed dichotomy between groups' cultural and political goals, as well as between instrumental and expressive forms of activism (2002).

Bernstein's model highlights how identity "can be deployed strategically as a form of collective action" (Bernstein and Olsen 2009:871). "Identity deployment", or the strategic portrayal of group identity in the public or political realm, serves as a useful framework for analyzing the conditions under which group members work to collectively construct, codify, and present a collective identity as a social movement strategy. Identity can be deployed as a goal or strategy of social movements or, as Bernstein found, as a tool for education and empowerment. More recent research by Bernstein and Olsen (2009) loosely categorizes SMOs *tactics* of identity deployment as being rhetorical, discursive, or performative in character.

Identity-based research done in the areas of religion and sexuality is largely still focused on exploring how people manage, or integrate, their individual religious and sexual identities (Thumma 1990; Yip 1994;) or the strategic uses of identities and identity frames by LGBTQ movement groups. Many such studies, however, actually serve to reinforce essentialist discourses underlying dominant gender and sexual identity categories rather than unearth the

local conditions of discourse and practice that support these categorizations as markers of human “difference”.

This chapter similarly tackles the question of identity deployment at the organizational level as a means of challenging dominant cultural norms and ideologies and dispel myths and stereotypes, not about particular “types” of people, but rather, about the expected position of a religious organization in relation to LGBTQ social justice issues.

The Selves We Mobilize: Outing and Exhibiting as Embedded Identity Strategies

Analysis of the social construction of individual and group identities can highlight important distinctions between organizational actions and collective actions. Primarily, the concern of collective identity theorists has been to unearth the processes by which collective identities take shape and the factors that impact how identities form and are strategically deployed by social movement actors. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, many analyses of group’s social movement identity strategies are limited by assumptions that personal or political interpretations and interests among organizational members are shared, particularly in the case of movements organized historically through identity-based interests.

There is consensus within queer scholarship that identity is both fluid and contested, as well continually (re-created within local cultures. With respect to social movements, identity work occurs at every level of social interaction. At the micro-interactional level, identity work is one aspect of “impression management”, the presentational work we do to control the impressions we “give off” to others (Goffman 1959). As Broad (2002) discovered, PFLAG meetings offered a bounded set of “local relevancies” within which members’ locally re-appropriated ‘coming out’ and ‘closet’ repertoires held distinct meanings and significance for insiders of the group. Broad, Crawley, and Foley (2004) used the term “social movement talk”,

for example, to capture the work PFLAG members did to narratively align their personal identities in relation to LGBT social movement or movement organizations. In the same vein, “social movement selves” can be understood as “...the interactional construction of self from within the discursive possibilities of the local culture of the movement and social movement organization with which an activist is associated” (2002).

When it comes to members of voluntary, non-SMO’s, I am also interested in the narrative negotiation of individual and collective identity deployment as a social action strategy. Broad (2002) used the term “affiliation talk”, for instance, in reference to the patterned interactions of PFLAG members, whereby they routinely narrated their relation to lesbian and/or gay individuals and LGTBQ social justice in ways that also secured their own heterosexual identities. Through this, members constructed identities for both themselves and for their loved ones in ways that limited risk of harm, shame, or embarrassment.

Overall, Broad’s work signifies the importance of contextualizing practices of identity construction within the contexts of groups’ “local relevancies” pertaining to thought, language, and action. Previous research on the identity work done by LGBTQ social movement participants also highlights the salience of broader structures shaping activists’ identity strategies. Kendall and Broad (2004), for instance, found that activists using storytelling as a form of “consciousness raising” in schools, churches, and other organizations faced pressures to present their sexual identities in ways that resonated with established cultural scripts, such as “coming out” narratives, and via repertoires that position LGBTQ sexual identity as a static resolution of linear story of the self (Kendell and Broad 2004). The range of cultural scripts available within these organizational contexts, they argued, shaped activists’ decisions to discuss their experiences with sexuality and gender through tokenizing repertoires of identity, regardless

of how inaccurate or misrepresentative they were. Together, these and other studies can provide an essential in-road for analyzing the factors shaping identities performances also at the collective and organizational levels. Given their focus on individual-level identity construction, many questions remain about the identity work that organizations do, the organizational factors that shape how identities are deployed and in the name of LGBTQ and other social justice issues.

This chapter also critically interrogates the power of sexual- and gender normativities to discipline the identities and identifying practices of relevance to LGBTQ social movement. Dominant cultural epistemologies of gender and sexuality privilege essentialist discourses of bodies, desires, and relations, organized into binary models of identity based on a normative “sex of object choice” logics (Sedgwick 1990). The “epistemology of the closet”, articulated by Sedgwick (1990) relies on the idea of a static, able-bodied, cisgender sexual subject, for whom revealing a hidden, or “closeted” sexual identity entails practices of “outing”, or exposing a person’s “true sexual self” through a series of emotional, psychological, and social disclosures.

Epistemologies of “covering”, in distinct fashion, are less about disclosing one’s stigmatized sexual or gender personal identity as it is about strategically portraying, or “exhibiting”, one’s multiple dimensions of self in ways that still fall within the normative boundaries of expressions, values, interests, and relations (Yoshimo 2007). In both cases, closeting and covering epistemologies emerge from and reinforce the normative arrangement of monogamous hetero-patriarchal arrangements.

Thus chapter also examines how social movement discourses and practices related to LGBTQ social justice materialize through the interpretations and practices of embodiment. Examining the intersections of Hope and Hillside’s identity structures with their normative repertoires of sexuality and gender highlighted the salience of embodiment as individual and

collective constructions of bodies as both products *and* producers of each other. Included below are data that showcase the narrative enactment of LGBTQ political culture through a range of repertoires that can be organized into disembodying and disarticulating strategies.

This chapter also builds on the previous chapter's discussions of materiality, which I described as the conditions and experiences of material life by considering the social construction of individual and collective bodies as both a practice and a promise of material culture. Here, including bodies as an element of organizational/material culture also helped me to recognize practices of *materealizing* marked sexual bodies into "bodies that matter" in ways that reflected and reinforced the material realities of the churches' organizational cultures. The data presented below thus also highlight the *materealizations of* LGBTQ political subject positions through the discourses embedded in each church's material culture.

This chapter offers analysis of the locally embedded discourses that gave meaning to members' individual and collective identity practices. My goal is to contribute to a better understanding of how the interpretations and *practices* of social witness with respect to marriage equality can be linked to Hope and Hillside's organizational culture by examining the their structures of religious and gender/sexual identity. Hetero-patriarchal systems privilege white androcentric identity discourses that situate dominant groups' experiences as the bases for collective action. I turn now to these collective identity strategies by way of the organizational cultural factors that enable and constrain them.

FINDINGS

Identities, Discourses, and the Politics of UU Identity

The use of identity discourse throughout the UUA can be described as ubiquitous. As a

religious movement, the strength of Unitarian Universalism depends in many ways on public interpretations of “UUs” at both the individual and collective level. Unlike denominations whose members are held together through creed or doctrine, UU churches must find other ways to define their identities or, as Wright (1997:206) described, “what it is they stand for, and what might encourage others to join”. One common strategy for doing this is by formulating “principles and purposes” on theological matters or passing “general resolutions” on social issues, actions that Wright calls “boundary-defining statements”. However, he notes, “the adoption of formal statements of principles has been only one element in the definition of boundaries, and usually not the most important one” (1997:206).

How a church is ‘known’ or ‘represented’ to broader cultural audiences is a crucial practice for UU churches, particularly when it comes to social and environmental justice issues. At the collective level, the UUA relies on its history of “public witness” and other forms of social action as the primary components of UU identity. Public witness (which is also referred to as “social witness”) involves making a public statement on behalf of the congregation (or just on behalf of the ministry, depending on the type of resolution created) with respect to a significant social or environmental issue.

UU identity claims are thus often drawn from the UUA’s timeline of social witness regarding a plethora of issues, such as women’s suffrage, desegregation, civil rights, immigration reform, worker’s rights, transgender discrimination, and marriage equality, among many others. The UUA also emphasizes the importance of congregations’ participation in their local LGBTQ Pride Day activities as a crucial identifying strategy. Pride parades and associated events are constructed as crucial spaces for churches to engage in progressive identity performances as liberal and/or progressive religious organizations.

The UUA also offers a series of texts to be used as resources for congregations seeking guidance in the processes and pitfalls of social justice organizing. Within these texts, a significant portion is dedicated to practices of “social witness”, sometimes referred to as “public witness”, which can take on a number of different forms. The UUA even offers a “public witness team” for the purpose of increasing UU visibility “on any kind of social justice issue”. Specifically, it works with individual churches to formulate public identity strategies in regions of heightened political and cultural opportunity- that is, in areas where UU church statements would become highly visible on pressing social justice issues.

One such form, known as the “congregational resolution”, involves making a public statement on a social issue that supposedly represents the views of the entire congregation. Importantly, UUA leaders note, congregational resolutions are often “viewed as an end, rather than as a means to an end. In terms of strategic planning, a congregational resolution is a tactic, not a goal” (Leslie 2009:82).

In fact, for the UUA, the most pressing question congregants or church leaders should ask when considering this type of action is “to ask how it helps reach a goal?” Examples of goals that congregational resolutions are well-suited to help reach, according to UUA guidelines, include “changing a particular public policy, changing the position of an elected official on a given issue, or preventing or requiring a certain type of action” (ibid.). Leaders note that, while “there is no ‘one way’ for congregations to act,” or to decide how easy or difficult it will be to reach consensus within the congregation on the resolution, “the end result needs to lead to action for justice and a strengthening of congregational identity and community.”

The evolving title of the Office of LGBTQ Ministries serves as one indicator of the significance of identity and naming within Unitarian Universalism. As mentioned in the

Introduction, the UUA created the “Office of Gay Affairs” in 1973. Since then, the Office has undergone numerous changes to its title: from the original title, it became the Office of Lesbian and Gay Concerns. Another change in 1993 turned the group into an Office of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Concerns “to reflect commitment to the bisexual community”. After that, the Office spent a brief stint as the Office of BGLT Concerns before changing in 2010 to the Office of LGBT Ministries. In 2012 it adopted its current name, the Office of LGBTQ Ministries.²⁶ The Office attributes the evolution of its title to how “over the years...the language of sexuality and gender has shifted and changed” (UUA 2016a).²⁷

However, as my research suggests, the above changes also reflect the many nuances of identity political practice within the UUA. The change to “BGLT Concerns”, for instance, was a result of negotiations over the ordering of identity initials within the acronym. The idea was that BGLT Concerns, as configured alphabetically, was the most liberal configuration of letters. The acronym is also significant because it stands out as distinct from the acronyms generally used in U.S. popular culture.

While the UUA often relies on strategies of social witness that go “against the grain” of public discourse to showcase its progressive religious identity and principles, its reliance on identity categories to name the newest iteration the Office of LGBTQ Ministries is significant for other reasons as well. For instance, LGBTQ Ministries is part of the “Multicultural Ministries team”, which itself is “an office of the multicultural growth and witness staff group”. The website of Multicultural Ministries reads:

We envision justice-seeking faith communities where all people see their cultural identities reflected and affirmed in every aspect of congregational life. For

²⁶ The names use for this Office will henceforth reflect its current name, Office of LGBTQ Ministries, except for when referring to it as the Office of GLBT Affairs in discussions of the Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program. I use the phrases “the Office”, the “Office of interchangeably, since no other Offices of the UUA organization are included in this study.

²⁷ Interestingly, LGBTQ Ministries refers to itself as a “Department”, according to the Department’s website. According to other affiliated departments and offices in the UUA’s highly bureaucratic organization, it is an Office.

Multicultural Ministries, cultural identity includes sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, economic and educational background, physical and mental ability, and age, as well as race, ethnicity, and nationality.

The conflation of “culture” and “identity”, here, does well to illustrate the salience of liberal theological individualism to UU social justice discourse. The idea that the identities themselves are depicted as cultural, rather than a product of unequal power relations, reveals a significant obstacle to many of the UUA’s goals, such as denominational growth, increased diversity, and social justice organizing. Here, the structural inequalities embedded in someone’s “economic and educational background” are normalized through the “culture of poverty” repertoire that has long since become outdated within the field of family studies (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2012).

UU Identity Work

At the individual level, the ‘Unitarian Universalist’ identity relies on membership in a specific UU congregation. “It’s an odd thing about Unitarian Universalism,” said Ellyn, a longstanding Hope member. “if you’re not a member of a congregation, you’re not really a Unitarian Universalist, which is bizarre.” Justin, a Hillside member, similarly joked “that all it meant” to become a UU, “was that you had to write a check.” As markers of organizational membership, UU identities thus encompass a fluid, temporary, and contextual quality. However, as the findings below demonstrate, the local structures of identity embedded in each congregation signify something more about membership than the promise of annual pledges.

Identity Structures and Practices at Hope Church

This section elaborates on the themes that emerged from my analysis of normative gender and sexuality as factors structuring Hope and Hillside’s Welcoming Congregations. In general, I

found that individual and collective identities were central elements of everyday and social justice discourse in both congregations. This was especially the case with respect to LGBTQ social justice, though the ways in which identities mattered were locally embedded within each congregation. This section thus begins by exploring the local embeddedness of “identity” at Hope by presenting key linkages I found between Hope’s organizational culture and its identity discourses. To underscore the intersectional impacts of organizational culture and sexual and gender normativity as factors structuring identity, I then highlight the local configurations of discourse and meaning giving shape to LGBTQ social justice at Hope.

Social Action Histories as Closeting Structures of Identity

Sexual and gender identity was a salient factor shaping congregants’ narratives of Hope’s history. Words used to describe Hope’s culture prior to it becoming a Welcoming Congregation included “demoralized” and “dissipated”. In part, leaders attributed Hope’s circumstance to “an aging congregation, a shrinking membership base, a stalled building renovation program...[and] an unsettled sense of identity as Unitarian Universalists.”

A majority of those I spoke with connected the church’s subsequent turnaround and growth- particularly an influx of cisgender LGB-identified congregants- to the previous minister’s gay identity and push to make Hope a “Welcoming Congregation”. As Carole, the congregation’s president, explained, “it energized a lot of people and we got a lot of new members who were gay.” Kevin, a gay-identified man in his early forties who attributed his initial involvement at Hope to having heard “that the minister at Hope was gay.” Jane became involved at Hope around the same time, noting that “a lot more gays were there, and much more out and stuff” than there had been previously.

The discourse at Hope became significantly more saturated with discourses of sexual

identity and sexual politics during the latter half of Mark's ministry. Narrative histories provided by congregants emphasized the significance of sexual identity discourse as a factor shaping Hope's culture. Particularly, they highlight the moments of Mark's "coming out" as gay and the congregation's designation as a "Welcoming Congregation" as distinct markers of culture change in the church. Kevin, for instance, emphasized how "a bunch of people left" upon hearing the minister was gay. Similarly, Gail noted, "The fear when Mark came out was that 'oh, this is gonna be a gay church!' I wasn't here then, but it didn't happen."

Unitizing Structures of Identity: The Significance of Congregational Governance

Hope's social action history provided a lexicon of discourses pertaining to gender and sexuality as markers of identity that are still imbued with local significance at both the individual and organizational levels. Yet, when held up against Hope's longstanding structures of governance and social action, the impact of these identities becomes more clear.

At the organizational level, identity practices are constrained by formal church structures that vary from congregation to congregation. Hope's policy on making public statements stands as a legacy of its Universalist tradition and the decision made by congregants on this issue over one hundred years ago. As leaders have noted, "the congregation had long been committed to humanitarian service projects and good works efforts- near and far- but avoided the use of collective public witness for social justice." However, as church historians explain, "the first real test" of that formal policy structure occurred in the 1990s, when congregants debated whether or not to officially declare Hope as a "Welcoming and Affirming Congregation". According to historical documents:

Though this issue was concerned with establishing an internal church policy, and not taking a position on a public issue, a small but vocal minority opposed Hope's

self-designation as a congregation intentionally welcoming to gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender persons.

A little more than three years later, members voted on whether or not to officially designate Hope as a “Welcoming Congregation”. The resolution was “approved by a vote of 115 in favor and eight opposed.”

As mentioned in the previous chapter, adopting this designation, it seemed, exacerbated the cultural schism that had already emerged along lines marked by sexual identities and the politics thereof. As Kevin recalled, “then the people that were there were like, ‘ugh, we’ll deal with it.’ That’s kind of what it felt like, at least. They didn’t want that declaration, per se.” At the heart of this debate was the fear that designating the church with respect to sexuality and gender politics would have identity implications for both the organization and its members.

Embedded Structures of Individual Sexual and Gender Identity

The salience of Hope’s closeting culture was evident from the significance congregants placed on individual sexual identities in terms of being visibly “out” or identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Thirteen of the twenty congregants I interviewed from Hope interpreted Hope’s culture largely in terms of individual gender and sexual identities. Tanya, for instance, pointed to the visible presence of same-sex couples in the congregation as an indicator of Hope’s Welcoming culture.

When I sit in the pew I see couples; and some of them are male-female; some of them are male-male; and some of them are female-female; and some of them prefer not to be designated. I sit in the pew and see couples with their arms around each other, I don’t think that really happens in a lot of other churches.

Janice, who has been attending Hope with her partner Sylvie for twelve years, joined the church almost one year after they began attending services.

Like others, Lauren locates her experiences at Hope and describes its culture in terms of the sexual identities and attitudes of its congregants. She recalled that when she and Sylvie joined the church, “probably like twenty percent of the congregation was gay or lesbian.” She continued, saying:

We even had a transsexual in the choir. Okay, well, I don’t know if he was a transsexual or a cross-dresser, technically, because he went by his male name. But, there were quite a few people in the pews who were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. And there were quite a few who identified publically. So it was a pretty good mix, I thought, of us and the regular population, who were pretty casual about it.

This excerpt does well to illustrate the salience of individual sexual and transgender identities at Hope. Janis’s narrative draws on LGBTQ identities as a quantifiable measure of Hope’s Welcoming culture and quantifies those who “identified publically” as an additive marker of Welcoming. Noelle similarly positioned her identity as an “out lesbian” as integral to her experiences at Hope, shaping her participation in groups and service work, social justice participation and leadership; even her choice to marry her partner at Hope, despite knowing nothing about the church other than the minister’s sexual identity and Hope’s identity as a Welcoming Congregation.

Finally, Gail’s narrative of grappling with her own bisexual identity emphasized the part the congregation played as “a safe space” during her experience “coming out”. She described an interaction she had with another congregant who encouraged her to “come out personally to people.” Her circumstance was personally difficult, she recalled:

...because I was also in the closet; I never talked about my partnership. I didn’t talk about it because it was too painful. And then some of my friends said, “You know, you could just tell a few of your friends.” So, it was a safe place for me. And then one day one of the ladies that I knew popped into the kitchen and said, ‘would you like to talk to the chorus about being bisexual?’ I said, “Fortunately I’m out to everybody in here.” She said, “Did I just *out* you?” I said, “Well, you could have, yeah.

Hope's closeting culture was simultaneously manifested and reinforced by congregants in a number of different ways throughout the course of our in-depth interviews. One example was a recurring theme whereby congregants repeatedly emphasized the *lack* of importance they placed on individuals' sexual identities, during our in-depth interviews. The conversation I had with Carole, the then-president of Hope's Congregation, illustrates this theme. When I asked her about the current status of LGBTQ congregants, she responded:

I think that a lot of the LGBT congregants left after the minister left. But there are some here, and I can't give you a number because I'm not good at numbers. And I don't even necessarily know all who they are, cuz I don't give a rat's ass, you know? If I know, I know, but it doesn't matter.

Congregants' repeated assertions that they did not see or care about other members' sexual identities suggests that while explicitly, the significance of sexual identity decreased as a way of organizing congregants' social relations, *implicitly*, it became more so. In fact, data suggest that Hope's structure of sexuality was becoming a primary marker of identity from which congregants based their assumptions about others' experiences, interpersonal relations, and interests within the church.

Essentialist discourses brought life and meaning to the sexual and gender labels attached to congregants' accounts of human difference, acceptance, and 'tolerance'. As Jerry explained:

I can't say I'm uncomfortable around gays, cause I'm not. Um, I don't know how to say it- I'm making progress. I'm heading in the right direction. It's what I should be doing because I know it's right. Am I as accepting of gays as I wanna be? Um, no. Am I accepting of all people as I wanna be? No. But I'm sure a hell of a lot better than I was. And I see people in our church; we have some great people in our church, gay or straight, it doesn't make any difference. And I've worked on committees with some wonderful people and, good, caring, etc.

In particular, the LGBTQ subject was constituted through interaction and official church narratives of faith, membership, inclusion, and social witness. As a political realm of identity, LGBTQ identities were seen as socially significant, both inside and beyond the church.

Despite congregants' best efforts to inform me repeatedly that they didn't see or care about the gender or sexual identities of Hope members, it became clear that Hope's culture of the closet in fact prioritized identity as a primary feature through which people understood each other and from which they developed interpersonal relations in the church.

And I had all kinds of people who would tell me on Sundays, "oh, you know, I meant to come," or "I want to come." I had one guy come to me one day and say, "yeah, I'd like to join your committee." Straight guy. I really like him; he's a nice guy. And we were standing in the fellowship hall having coffee after church, and I said, "That's great! That would be great." And he said, "Yeah, I'd really like to come and join your committee because I think it's important that the LGBT members of the congregation--"

Janice stopped short, thinking. "Let's see if I can get this straight," she said. Looking up, then slowly lowering her gaze again, carefully recalled:

He thinks "*they* have subconscious resentment against heterosexuals that gets in the way of being able to have good relations between the two communities." And I was just looking at him, thinking "Oh my God." Like, *what??*

Material Structures of Organizational Identity – A Case for Out(reach)ing

At Hope, the material facet of organizational culture shaped the repertoires from which congregants drew to make sense of the church itself as the closeted sexual-political subject. In other words, the silencing of LGBTQ political discourse at the individual level made the church the primary sexed body and political actor in terms of LGBTQ social justice.

While a common feature of most UU congregations, the construction of social action as outreach, or creating "visibility outside our doors", was crucial for Hope.

The First Principle, "To Affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person" almost reads as an all-encompassing platitude, easy to say but at times the source of much discussion and dissention when it comes to expressing our beliefs in public and acting like we really mean it!

The "President's Report" from a 2011 church newsletter is one illustration of the profound need

felt among leadership with regard to the church's survival. Gail posited that the most crucial thing for church survival was a clear sense of the church's identity, purpose, and visibility. In her newsletter message to the congregation, she shared results from a recent meeting with the town's other UU church, saying:

Nearly all of us volunteer with organizations that address poverty, the environment, peace, education, and public broadcasting, among others. Both congregations have made numerous attempts to coordinate our social action. However, coordination has failed for more often than it has succeeded. The work we do, we do as individuals. We may never mention that we are there as UUs or because the cause reflects our values as UUs. Meanwhile, neither congregation is attracting new members. We have little visibility outside our doors.

In part, Gail attributed this double-edged problem to "the UUA's emphasis on marketing" which, she believed, "has largely failed". Quoting a denominational leader who spoke at the UUA's fiftieth anniversary conference in 2009, she argued "marketing is doomed to fail if we don't know who or what we are."

That takes us back to social action: Living our religion. Both Unitarians and Universalists have long, distinguished histories of social action. In our time...both have worked to end discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender citizens. Living our Religion: What does that mean, now? How, where, and with whom?

Her emphasis on visibility and marketing is coupled with a focus on UU religion as lived through social action. Janis noted, "I mean, how do you advertise *that* you're there and who you are?"

Church Politics and the Closeting of Collective Identities

The symbolic power of the closet is apparent in the organizational meanings attached to "coming out" repertoires. The salience of Hope's closeting culture can be seen the ubiquitous use of 'coming out' repertoires in discussions of LGBTQ activism, on both individual and collective levels. The closet culture at Hope is compounded by its structure of governance in

shaping how and through whom public statements are negotiated. She explains:

... I could have gone ahead I had the vote and I could say *the majority* said I could do this but the undertone I'm hearing is 'we do trust you but we're afraid'. And if they're afraid and the shit hits the fan whose gonna be there to say we stand up for this? They're going to say I knew this would happen. So, it's kind of a strange political savvy among members of the congregation, sort of, reading are they really ready to do this, you know, and they're not.

Contrasting positive images of transgender and gender non-conforming expressions with the 'flaming queens' referenced at gay pride parades, Joann's identity work normalizes the political landscape through the extreme depictions of trans* people.

In what may have been her most confrontational action in the church, Joann asks the congregation the following during her sermon:

Is our fear of making waves, being exposed, criticized or brought into the spotlight for practicing our beliefs, greater than our commitment to the first basic principle of Unitarian Universalism? If we were noticed by the press for our stand on an issue that was a social football, would we be willing and able to stand together as a united congregation to support it...or reject it? What would it take to unite us, to compel us to act in unison, outside of the safety of this sanctuary; to visibly uphold the principles we agreed to honor and profess?

Materealizing the LGBTQ Political Subject – Passing in/through Church

Within Hope's closeting culture, the appearance of other markers of human difference from the were seen not as a liability to the LGBTQ political subject but, rather, as a closeting agent that enabled individuals to "pass" as heterosexual. When I asked Abby, for instance, whom I introduced in the previous chapter, if she would become more involved with social justice in the church if there were more projects available, she quickly answered:

Sometimes I get paranoid. And I'm on Social Security, and I'm afraid if I became a really vocal activist I might lose it, because I know that, uh, some people who are in the SMO; like Molly, and she lost her job. And I don't know if that's why, but I have a funny feeling it had something to do with it...That's why I've never gone to a Gay Pride parade. Straight people and kids have gone to the Gay Pride parade, cuz I've seen pictures and stuff. But, I haven't.

Abby implicated her struggle with mental illness to account for not participating in Hope's LGBTQ social justice activities. This excerpt reflects a broader pattern of identity practices indicative of Hope's closeting repertoires. Abby's lesbian identity is overshadowed by her master status vis-a-vis her mental illness. Conversely, Hope's normalizing repertoires of the young, white, able-bodied LGBTQ political subject gave her a presumably heterosexual identity, putting the onus on her to claim her stake in the church body politic.

The availability of material resources was also central to Hope's structures of individual and collective identity and identifying practices. Janis linked her positive feelings about the congregations' Pride Day activities with the day's larger purpose and significance. "I really like it," she said, "that churches go and say 'we're okay with this and you should come and check us out.' I like it that we're not the only church there, too."

Yet, while sexuality shaped congregants' decisions to participate in LGBTQ social justice, Hope's material circumstances further mediated congregants' concerns about being 'outed' through participation. The drastic reduction in membership at Hope increased the need for participation from congregants in all areas of church and social justice activities. This changing situation enabled several of the participants I spoke with to remain closeted while still participating in LGBTQ social justice.

Stella, for instance, described herself as a bisexual woman in a heterosexual marriage. Previously, she explained, given the state of her declining marriage, she had chosen not to "press the issue" of her bisexuality by participating in the city's Pride parade and festivities. However, she explained her decision to march more recently, saying:

...partly it was acceptable at that point because the church was in such dire straits because we had lost so many gay members. So, for us to have a front at the gay pride parade, and show that we were welcoming in a public way was important. So, that allowed me to get by with it.

For Stella, Hope's situation of being in "dire straits" provided her with protection from being "outed" via her participation in the parade.

Ministerial Closets and Silencing

The salience of Hope's closeting culture is evident in the strategic use of stifling, silencing and disembodiment repertoires at Hope in relation to matters of sexual or gender justice or the congregation's participation therein. This was perhaps most evident in the local strategies encompassed in its recent ministerial search. Following the departure of their former minister, Hope congregants underwent a two-year interim period of ministerial transition, standard procedure for UU congregations seeking UUA support in their ministerial support. During this time, congregational leaders hired an interim minister, conducted a congregation-wide survey for feedback in their ministerial search, and executed a routine search, as per the UUA's guidelines.

Also during this time, the church offered the "Beyond Categorical Thinking" workshop, a program developed by the UUA's Office of LGBTQ Ministries, as mentioned above. Yet, despite the fact that Beyond Categorical Thinking falls under the auspices of the Welcoming Congregation Program and the pursuit of sexual and gender diversity and justice in the ministry was its primary impetus, church newsletters and other promotional materials drew on repertoires that all but erased sexual and gender diversity from its purpose and practices. Newsletters advertising the event called it a program designed "to promote inclusive thinking" and "help prevent unfair discrimination" in the congregation's ministerial search.

Church leaders drew on similar repertoires to promote the workshop event, calling it a chance for congregants to "consider the concerns, hopes, and expectations they have for their new minister; learn more about the ministerial search process; and explore how thinking

categorically about people sometimes interfered with choosing the best candidate.” In fact, amidst these narratives, gender and sexuality discourse appeared only once, in a cautionary note about how picturing “the ‘ideal minister’ (categorized by age, gender, gender identity, race, physical ability, nationality, and sexual orientation)” can make it “easy to unintentionally exclude ministers who fall into certain categories.”

Similar examples of Hope’s closeting culture can be seen in the narratives circulating among congregants regarding the sexual and gender identities of their ministry

Similarly, Kevin described the events by saying:

We did this whole thing a few years ago about what we wanted in a minister. And, a lot of people said “no gay minister,” myself included, when I was looking at it from the perspective from ‘I didn’t want Mark back.’

Materiality and the Closeting Structures of Collective Identity

Not surprisingly, church leaders relied increasingly on unitizing strategies for constructing a common vision and purpose for the church to move forward. Ministers’ sermons and church newsletters focused increasingly on the questions “who are we?” and “what do we stand for?” As a matter of survival, congregants positioned collective identity as a priority over the individual identities of congregants, putting more weight on the potential impacts of Hope being seen *collectively* as a ‘gay church’ than on the individual identities of its members.

Data from Hope also signify an overall distaste for identity-based politics. The narrative erasure of sexuality from the repertoires of diversity circulating at the church had to do, in part, with the urgency felt throughout the congregation members regarding their need to grow. In the discourse of LGBTQ social justice, disembodied structures of collective identity were central to congregants’ practices of embodying the church organization as the primary LGBTQ political subject shaping decisions about social action.

Hope's closeting culture thus produced a limited set of collective action opportunities structure within the church. Closeting repertoires stifled the strategy of social witness, constructing it as an example of organizational "outing". Underlying these narratives of resistance were the embedded church discourses of fear of the possible repercussions of Hope being identified as a "gay church" as a result of making a congregational resolution.

Collective silence was the only church-based action deemed suitable by members of the congregation in response to the issue, even as it emerged at the forefront of state-level policy debates. As I described in the previous chapter, Hope Church, according to Joann, is driven to (in)action by a 'culture of fear', which she referred to as the 'inevitable' fear that the congregation won't grow or, even worse, will lose members and be forced to shut down if it were identified as 'the gay church'.

Joann's reaction to what took place just days after a special February 14th congregational meeting held on marriage equality is illustrative, here. She explained:

They came to me during the pledge campaign with a tremendous concern, about eight or nine members, about how would any kind of heavy publicity about this would affect the church, you know, can we live through another controversy because there will be a controversy. One member more or less said, 'I know how the media functions; they're going to be all over you'. So, what I was hearing is that we are not ready to do this. People trust me, but they have questions and I just don't think it's wise right now, you know?

The closeting repertoires linked Hope's identity strategy of making public statements with regard to LGBTQ social justice with "heavy publicity" and "controversy". As Gail quipped about the now-cliché concern echoed in the congregation, "You hear the usual, 'Oh they're going to be a gay church'."

In 2010, Hope congregants once again found themselves constrained with closeting repertoires of gender and sexual social justice, when debates surfaced over making a public

statement on marriage equality. As marriage equality discourse became increasingly prominent throughout the state's political and cultural landscape, church-wide discussions concentrated on how making a public statement or pursuing other actions in support of marriage equality would impact the church's identity. Hope's congregation, according to Joann, was stifled by its 'culture of fear'; being identified as 'the gay church', some believed, would negatively impact the already vulnerable group.

Drawing on a strategy used previously by leaders to convince congregants to adopt the Welcoming Congregation designation, Joann drew on the frame of "living the first principle" as a way to align the church's mission and identity with its public support of marriage equality. In an emotional sermon, she urged congregants to "examine carefully how the first principle is lived, not just in our daily lives as individuals, but as a whole congregation." She said:

Whatever issues we determine to be a living part of our identity, we know that to keep them to ourselves is a surefire road to safety and comfort, but also ineffective as a visible and proactive force in the community.

Here, by framing this excerpt as an issue of identity, Joann's narrative relies on the dichotomous framework of sexual identity produced at the individual level by closet epistemologies. By linking "safety and comfort" with ineffectiveness and setting this in contrast with being a "visible and proactive force", Joann's dichotomous framing of identity draws an organizational parallel to the individual strategy of "outing".

Hillside Church Culture and Internalizing Structures of Identity

The use internalizing discourse was widespread throughout the church, saturating individual and organizational dimensions of interpretive practice. My focus in this section is

primarily on the linkages I found through my analysis between key organizational cultural elements at Hillside and the structures of identity shaping congregants' routine experiences as well as their interpretations and strategies of LGBTQ social justice.

You will also find us using other informal declarations, such as Gandhi's, "We must be the change we hope to see in the world," or a favorite of our church school kids: "Let us live simply so that others may simply live."

Policy Governance and Ministerial Authority: A Shift to Internalizing Culture

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Hillside's ministry promoted the increase of individualizing discourses of identity embedded in the church, in part by privileging more internalizing repertoires of members' experiences, interests, and beliefs as integral to their UU identity, rather than membership in the organization. A prime example of this shift to internalizing repertoires, for instance, can be seen at the organizational level, via Hillside's newest iteration of its Mission Statement. As mentioned above, mission statements are the primary way in which UU churches engage in the practice of identifying the congregation to outsiders. Hillside's current mission statement also reflects the internalizing culture of its newest ministry. "The mission of our church is: Creating connection by listening to our deepest selves, opening to life's gifts and serving needs greater than our own – every day!"

Analysis of church texts revealed a number of additional avenues through which internalizing discourses of individual identity took shape. Among the most evident were the internalizing repertoires of worship and the thematic organization thereof. The church's worship themes provided a solid platform for engaging spiritual repertoires of self-exploration and contemplation. Every month encompassed a different theme so that the ministers, whose responsibilities changed on a weekly rotational basis, could all address the same theme in depth in their sermons. Hillside's ministry often enacted these themes, Rachel explained:

...in the context of “what does it mean to be a person of _____”. What does it mean to be a Unitarian Universalist person of joy? What does it mean to be a Unitarian Universalist person of compassion? And so you’ve really deeply explored those topics.

According to Rachel, who is a member of Hillside’s ministerial staff, the purpose of organizing the worship calendar this way is so that each minister can present the theme differently, adding more dimensions to it for congregants to consider. “It’s supposed to be a spiritual experience for you,” she explained, “...to deepen your experience.”

Relatedly, despite its organizational roots, UU identity more often the form of a particular personality type, or via other personal attributes that are not tied to organizational membership or affiliation. Again and again, congregants discussed their UU identities through internalizing repertoires of personal belief, values, and spirituality. Tess’s description exemplifies the internalizing repertoires UU identity that circulated within the congregation. She explained:

I went and sat in all these churches and I liked some of the rituals in the other churches and, as having been raised Catholic, I liked some of the same stained glass windows and the reverent stuff. But, belief-wise, I kept coming back to Hillside. I thought, ‘I just can’t. I don’t believe Jesus died for our sins. I don’t believe I was born flawed with original sin. I just don’t believe that stuff.

By drawing the distinction between external and internal factors of her church membership, Tess’s narrative places even greater emphasis on internalizing her UU identity as a matter of deeply held beliefs.

Participants’ accounts routinely blurred the line between church membership and religious identity, primarily emphasizing aspects of their spiritual selves to account for their UU church membership. Other, less commonly mentioned factors included membership in an interfaith family and interests in the community experience of church life. For example, Spencer, a young husband and father of two, sought a religious home where he could explore his

own faith and spirituality. During our interview he explained:

I don't like to be told what to believe. I like to be told, "You need to find what *you* believe. You need to find *your* path, if it's right for you." So I was a UU who didn't know I was a UU for years. And I think that's the most common Unitarian Universalist experience; there are very few UUs who were raised UU.

Spencer's account draws on a narrative of religious freedom as central to his UU identity. Like several other participants in my research, he relayed this narrative of religious identity in response to my inquiry about his choice to attend Hillside church in particular.

Governance Structures of Organizational Identity and Exhibitive Actions

Hillside's model of policy governance allows ministers to make public statements (some as representative of congregation's collective belief) without getting consensus from congregants, putting the onus on congregants to negotiate their membership in the organization in light of its official positions on issues taken on social and environmental issues.

In a newsletter, Hillside's leadership presented congregants with the church's newly updated Mission Statement. It read:

"We the people of Hillside Church, connect in a community of support and trust that celebrates and enhances the fullness of life and experiences of the sacred. We know our deepest selves and can articulate our individual core beliefs. We are open to life's gifts, to the diverse beliefs, ideas, gifts, and talents of others and to the wisdom of the ages. We serve needs greater than our own...."

This mission statement appeared as a response to the question, "Yes, but why do we do it?", which they positioned as a central question driving Hillside's Ministry "for the last couple of years". Hillside church's mission statement was constructed by its "Board Leadership, in dialog with [congregants] and with close attention to our common congregational life".

Framing congregants' social justice participation as essential to their UU identities is a primary mobilizing strategy at Hillside. During church services, congregants routinely

entertained questions of “who are you?” and “what do you stand for?”, contrasting the questions of “who are we?” and “what do we stand for” more often posed by leaders at Hope. A good illustration of this is the following note of thanks that appeared in one of Hillside’s weekly newsletters, titled, “Petitioning Success and Our Sincere Thanks”. It read:

“We had twelve issues presented and together they received over 535 signatures. Social justice isn’t something just a few of us do, it’s an inherent part of being a UU” (*Newsletter*).

Despite its brevity, this statement provides a useful illustration of how church leaders deployed covering repertoires to manage congregants’ impressions of what “being a UU” meant.

Shannon’s mobilizing tactic is another example of exhibiting strategies routinely practiced at the individual level. Within the worship structure, the sermon provided a powerful opportunity for capturing congregants’ undivided attention. Shannon’s sermon tactic was often to spark dialogue and mobilize constituents by exhibiting some aspect of her personal experience through a magnified lens. Tess described one sermon as having “hit a raw nerve” with and within the congregation. Others described the strategy as “very gutsy”.

Covering Structures of Sexuality: Producing Hillside’s “Normal Gay” Political Subject

The salience of Hillside’s individualizing structures of identity also pertained to the social construction of sexual and gender identities and the patterned use of individual bodies/identities to draw inferences about Hillside at the organizational level. This was most pronounced in the repeated references congregants made to Hillside’s visible LGB bodies and identities as evidence of its Welcoming Congregation. Many members’ accounts resonated with the comment made by Tess, who saw Hillside’s congregation as encompassing “if not racial diversity, just diversity along the lines of gay and lesbian, transgender, that kind of thing.”

Analysis of identity discourses underlying congregants' narratives also revealed patterned practices of constructing LGBTQ social justice more broadly by extrapolating intra-organizationally from the embodied lives of LGB-identified members. Again and again, congregants who identified as heterosexual, or 'straight', referenced their relationships with gay and lesbian-identified congregants to comment on gender- and sexuality-based social justice. Importantly, given the demographic composition of Hillside's congregation, this imagined LGBTQ political subject resembled what Seidman (2002) referred to as the "Normal Gay", meaning, an assimilated gay subject whose ascribed characteristics situate 'him' into dominant identity categories in every (or almost every) other way aside from sexuality.

This Normal Gay political subject came to life at Hillside via the narratives offered by almost all of my heterosexual-identified participants. Gloria's description of LGBTQ social justice at Hillside serves as an apt illustration of this. She began her narrative by explaining her position on deserving LGBTQ-identified people, saying:

She's very proud of who she is and she has no qualms about it. And, to me, I guess it's brave. More than brave; I think it is that they know who they are just like I am who I am. They are who they are and they know it and they're, they're just normal. They're just so normal. So I think that's what it is, about them: that they're proud of who they are; and they're open about who they are; and they're honest about who they are.

Within the congregation, normalcy was marked by practices and behaviors that often signified 'normalcy' in other ways. Jonas, a gay white man in his seventies who spoke with me at length about his distaste for the assimilationist politics of gay and lesbian social movement since the 1980's, similarly referenced this normalized depiction:

Um, and why gay people want to imitate straight people beats the hell out of me, but they seem too. And now, if you want to get to queer radicalism is that those few gay people who like the renegade role, ah, they kind of have disappeared; they don't have much visibility 'cause it's all about politics now. It is not about getting fucked and I don't think I came into gay life because I was interested in

who I was going to vote for.

The political interests that Jonas associated with LGBTQ assimilationist discourses played a central role in his interpretations of both single gay men in general and gay men and lesbian members of Hillside.

Shelley's account of her participation in the most recent LGBTQ Pride Parade further illustrates this point. A white woman in her forties who identifies as bisexual, Shelly told me the following story of the first time she met her partner:

I would have never marched in the Gay Pride Parade except for the church. It gave like the feeling that, 'hey I'm part of a group', because I looked kind of L.L. Bean-ish and, you know how Gay Pride Parades are. So I would normally go but I didn't march. But that year, because of the ruling, another church member had created these little signs that said 'Been Together (X number of years)' and you could fill in how long you'd been with your partner- because part of the State rulings said we don't want to legalize same-sex marriage because gays are transients and, you know, this completely bigoted interpretation...

Shelley's narrative draws on several narrative strategies to enact her own Normal Gay Subject position. An example of boundary work, the phrase "you know how Gay Pride parades are" reinforces the distinction between Pride Parade participants and (normal) L.L. Bean consumers.

Materealizing the "Normal Gay": Class Structures of Gender and Sexual Identity

This section presents data that demonstrate the salience of Hillside's covering culture in shaping the interpretations of gender and sexuality identity at both the individual and collective levels. Embedded church discourses privileged the "Normal Gay" political subject in congregants' constructions of LGBTQ social justice.

However, the salience of material culture structuring identity at Hillside was also evident in the repertoires of social class shaping congregants' constructions of the Normal Gay political identity and subjectivity. Jonas, like several others, commented on the seeming class structure of

membership, saying Hillside's congregation seemed to be:

... an economically upward-ish kind of community. It's notable to me that it is not a community that includes many people of color. It seems to be a fair number of lesbian and not a proportion number of gay men that are either out or visible or assertive. But, you know, that was the impression.

From this description, the salience of class, gender, and sexual identities all serve as salient markers of the "typical" Hillside congregant. These markers, for several participants, signaled the perceived social class location of the Normal Gay political subject who, within Hillside's covering culture, lie at the heart of its embedded construction of LGBTQ social justice. In her comments about the social action practices of Hillside's congregation, for example, Allison made the following remarks:

I mean, a Unitarian church is full of people with money, is one of my complaints. It's like a Prius parking lot on Sunday, you know? They can afford to write checks but are they in the "gettin' their hands dirty" part?

...But, they can afford to be Unitarian, basically. I've gone to a lot of Gospel churches and City churches and, you know, it's a different. They're asking for stuff because they need it.

For Allison, the congregation's lack of active participation in social justice was directly related to congregants' individual social class locations. By drawing a distinction between "writ[ing] checks" and "getting their hands dirty", her comments point to the importance of individual "need" as an impetus for social action participation.

Barb, who had originally described Hillside's congregation as Welcoming, then qualified her statement, saying "There were some scary fringe people, though". Curious, I asked, "fringe people?" to which she responded:

Fringe people, yeah, just like, there are a couple of characters that stick out in this church, and everybody is just very good to 'em and very accepting. But when you're the new kid on the block, you're going 'whoah, okay! Where'd this homeless guy come from? You know, they're misfits. But it's a great place. It welcomes them. And, and they find their place here; or try to. So, what the heck?

We're all misfits.

Barb's description of "fringe people" as "misfits", here provides a good example. Barb, who a leader of Hillside's Reproductive Rights Task Force, had previously discussed the newest project in which her group was involved. In Donna's perspective, the social opportunity provided at Hillside is one of its biggest draws. She explained that by:

...not being from this city, when I go out with the Red Cross on a fire call it's like "where are these neighborhoods?" You know, it's like, oh my God, the poor people! Because, you know, I live in this really charming village where you don't see any- it's like there's no- poor people aren't in your face here, so you're much less aware of them.

Hillside's structures of identity could be seen by the patterned use of LGBT political discourse that privileged the identity-based interests of the 'normal gay'. Hillside congregants' drew on shared repertoires of 'normalcy' that delineated between people who were central and 'fringe' people, or, in Collins's (1990) words, "outsiders within". Othering practices were organized largely on the most apparent characteristics of individuals. By individualizing the problem of 'homelessness as a matter of character and reducing the act of donating money to a matter of mentality, the church privileged middle-class LGBT identity-based experiences and interests over the structures allowing problems of poverty and homelessness to persist.

Covering Repertoires, Exhibiting Strategies of the Normal Gay

Participants from Hillside drew on a variety of other boundary-defining repertoires, distinguishing the "Normal Gay" subject from the Queer Other in their narratives not only of Hillside's Welcoming Congregation, but also in social action narratives as well. Sandra, for instance, described how her strategies for LGBTQ action are shaped by her self-perception as a "pretty regular looking" lesbian. She said:

I feel like one of the ways I do social action quietly is by being mainstream looking physically and then coming out to people.

I think some of the bias in our world is less about your sexual orientation and it's more about gender expression how you look. So, lesbians who look very masculine; I think people struggle with that almost more than they struggle with somebody like me, who could pass as a straight person.

In her case, Sandra's self-perception as physically "mainstream looking" shaped her actions in relation to LGBTQ social justice. Doing social action "quietly" by facilitating group discussions in church or, beyond the church, "coming out quietly to [her] clients". Sandra maintained that her normative performance of gender was an important inroad for reaching out to people for whom more queer expressions may impede genuine dialogue.

Covering Structures of Governance and Representation

Hillside's strategies of organizational identity reflected similarly covering repertoires, whereby the public impression of the church was a salient factor shaping church leaders' pursuits of various social actions. Structured by its system of policy governance, Hillside ministers' strategies of public witnessing and other identifying practices technically represent only the church's leadership or social justice group, not the congregation as a whole.

Policy governance, from Gail's perspective, also provides an image of "authenticity to the task force". In other words, "the task force can then speak in its name, as the Task Force, but it cannot speak in the name of the church because there are a lot of people who may disagree." This system thus "disarticulates" the voice of individuals and social justice groups from the identity of the congregation as a collective body. Hillside's policy governance was thus a crucial factor shaping the congregation's identity strategies, whereby a social action group "can have a visible presence and speak on something like abortion, which not everybody agrees on but they

can take action, working on reproductive rights.”

Covering Culture and Mobilizing Strategies: Exhibiting Church Identity

In many ways, Hillside’s organizational culture privileged exhibitiv e strategies of action. The congregations’ record of public witness practices at Hillside resembled broader denominational discourses and practices of witnessing.

Before we were actually designated as a Task Force...most of us were part of the Church’s response to the vandalism to and replacement of our equal marriage banner in July and the huge church delegation participating in the “Streets of Pride” L/G/B/T parade that month.

The banner on Hillside’s exterior wall is an example of exhibiting strategies of LGBTQ social justice. The narrative of the banner became a symbol for congregants of the depth of social justice work being done at that church. Interestingly, however, evidence of Hillside’s impression management strategies can be seen in how Hillside leaders continually referred to the banner as an “equal marriage banner”, while the banner actually read “Standing on the Side of Love”, with no explicit mention of marriage equality on it.

Covering Structures of Collective Identity: Impression Management Strategies

What became clear from my research was that there were noticeable linkages between the impacts of Hillside’s covering culture on individual identity and its impacts on the church’s organizational identity strategies as well. At Hillside’s annual social justice meeting, for instance, I recorded these field notes:

...I am surprised that Warren, Fran, and Mae are even being called up to the front, given that there is no actual ‘task force’ to speak of.. The three enter from the right, as if in a stage performance, with Fran wearing a rainbow feather boa around her neck. She and Mae are carrying the banner that we used in the parade, walking with buoyancy. When they arrive at ‘center stage’, Warren stands at the

microphone to report, “It was a great turnout,” he begins. “We joined forces with Glendale and First UU and seventy UU’s marched in the parade.” ‘Seventy?’ I am thinking as those in attendance applaud the effort and Fran and Mae bounce the banner up and down...

What intrigued me here was the discrepancy that I noticed between Warren’s recounting of the event and what I had observed first hand, both before and during the LGBT Pride Parade. I had taken a few headcounts during the parade, for instance, and counted only fifty UU’s. Given the size of Hillside’s congregation and their partnership with two other churches from the area, I was actually quite disappointed in what, to me, appeared to be a meager turnout.

When I spoke with Deb, Hillside’s visiting minister, her evaluation of Hillside’s participation in the city’s 2010 Pride Parade was less than stellar. “It was terrible,” she specifically said. The congregational goal, she noted, is a twenty percent participation rate. In the case of Hillside’s one thousand-member congregation, that would equate to two hundred participants at the Parade. She explained further that:

You would like more than that, 30 or 40% would be great and especially from a congregation that has such a significant history of social justice. I mean Deirdra, who was the minister here for like over 30 years; he’s got the bible on how a church does social justice work.

The discrepancy between congregants’ actual participation in the parade and Warren, Fran, and Deb’s performative re-creation thereof illustrates an important identity strategy that aligns with Hillside’s covering culture: exhibition. That is, if covering is the performative enactment of self-surveillance and strategic self-presentation, “exhibiting” entails the strategic and highly visible performance of public identities intended to elicit the most impact. In this case, historicizing narratives of the marriage equality banner fortify the church’s identity as a stalwart of LGBTQ social justice through the exhibiting strategies used to recast its own narrative history.

Hillside also proudly displayed a “Marriage Equality” banner on the side of their church,

measuring at least ten to twenty feet in length, an impressive size to match the size of the church building. The banner represented two important things: first, the public display of their organizational identity as a safe and welcoming space, as well as a pillar of progressive politics and civic engagement in the community.

In 2006 our task force voted to have a more visible expression of our support for equal marriage rights for all by having a banner outside the church. With Board and Congregational support, members of the task force and the Social Justice Council purchased and erected the banner on June 1st...Unfortunately the banner was vandalized on the night of July 20th... Members of the congregation carried the torn banner in our city's annual Gay Pride Parade...a replacement was installed on the church after the service.

Importantly, the banner, as symbolic gesture of the church's commitment to LGBTQ social justice, marks both a moment of church history as well as a timeless indicator of church identity. As such, the banner also broadcasts Hillside's welcoming culture in the public statement. Narratives from congregants highlight the importance to the act of vandalism for Hillside's public identity strategy. Drawn on again and again by participants, this particular event solidified congregants' perceptions of Hillside as a leader in the fight for LGBTQ social justice.

Church Structures of History

Historicizing repertoires of identity in the church covered its lack of continued engagement in social justice practice. Carole, for instance, recalled how she felt about the discrepancy she felt between the public identity of the church and its internal culture. Hillside's identity of social engagement, manifested through various means, cemented Carole's decision to join Hillside. She desired to be part of an organization that strove to make a statement, to do "something that shows who we are, what we stand for and why; that it's a moral imperative". However, despite Hillside's impressive commitment to this identity work, she lamented at the lack of involvement at the individual level, saying:

I hate to say it, but there's a lot of apathy too. I mean, I went into this thinking that I was going into something, like, really into justice work, you know, just a lot of really huge social justice projects. And there are a lot of people who are not really involved.

In part, Carole attributes her church's overall lack of social justice participation to its recent transitions in both membership and leadership. "We've had many people leave; but we've also had like five hundred new people come in," she explained, which was why "we have people who don't really understand" the expectations for congregational participation in social actions.

Finally, the prevalence of Hillside's culture of the cover was evidenced in congregants' perceptions that LGBTQ rights had largely been attained and that not much was left that needed to be done. This was evidenced, among other things, in the debates I recently overheard at Hillside regarding "how long the banner on the church wall should stay up, especially now that equal marriage is the law in this state".

Discussion: Collective Identity vs. Collected Identities

Formal structures and practices of church identity – both collective and collected – identity. Each church adopted and (re)produced particular discourses of LGBTQ social justice that relied on normative structures of gender and sexuality. By tracing the organizational discourses of LGBTQ identity at Hillside and Hope, this chapter presents themes that address how the identity-based strategies espoused in each church both reflected and reinforced its closeting / covering culture.

Sedgwick's (1990) work on 'the closet' as an epistemology provides a crucial analytic point regarding the implications of church culture on church's LGBTQ-based social action strategies. The closeting repertoires enacted within formal and informal interactions and during interviews, had a stifling impact on the discourses used to debate the strategy of making a public

statement on behalf of marriage equality.

The time and energy a church puts into its social witness strategies say a lot about the importance of organizational identity, representation, and belonging to its members. On an organizational level, closeting repertoires favor strategies of collective silence over collective action. Whereas in Hope Church, the *collective* significance of sexual identity became evident in the silencing repertoires used to suppress LGBTQ social justice discourse among church members; its small size and lack of symbolic power created a political imaginary haunted by the specter of the ‘gay church’ identity.

In contrast, Hillside’s culture of the cover reinforced a micro-politics of homo-normalization through its ritualization of social justice practices. Hillside’s LGBTQ political culture was saturated with repertoires normalizing LGBTQ social justice by universalizing the experiences and interests of LGBTQ Hillsideers. Congregants routinely situated the “normal gay” political subject as an indicator of LGBTQ social justice, reinforcing an identity-based repertoire of rights-based interests.

Queer Liberal discourses operating at Hillside gave meaning to the “normal gay” political subject; a normalized one whose social justice needs and interests reflected the demographic makeup of the congregation. As such, congregants demonstrated a high level of “affiliation talk” (Broad 2002) in their accounts of LGBTQ social justice; their narratives referenced congregants they knew from the church, almost all of whom were white, middle class, educated and (in most cases) able-bodied men and women. While Hope congregants similarly referenced LGBTQ-identified congregants in our interviews, the church’s preoccupation with its collective identity overshadowed the identity work of individuals. This preoccupation no doubt further supported the passing practices of closeted Hope members and allowed them more flexibility with

regarding to their self-policing strategies.

While both churches constructed marriage equality as the most pressing social justice issue, each church negotiated strategies for mobilizing in ways that reflected its current situational contexts. Ongoing concerns about Hope's organizational vulnerability shaped congregants' feelings about their church; words such as 'risk' of being publically associated with the city's queer community. Hope's congregants negotiated possible strategies on the basis of their potential repercussions, not only in terms of public reaction, but also on the livelihood and identity of the organization itself. Despite displaying a more visible expression of LGBTQ support, not once did the idea of being considered a gay church enter into the accounts of Hillside congregants or leaders.

Analysis of the contrasting strategies deployed by the churches presented here also speaks to the impact that congregational materiality can have on negotiating ideas about organizational risk and risk management. It also underscores the importance of organizational power relative to the broader community. Hope's closeting repertoires of church history and sexual politics stifled the congregation's ability to make a public statement regarding LGBTQ social justice. Hillside's covering repertoires, in contrast, materialized the "normal gay" political subject from its internally available LGBTQ bodies and the repertoires of social class and nuclear family used to interpret them. Hillside's covering culture privileged strategies of organizational action that are thus more accurately described as "exhibitive", whereby the congregations' biggest challenge was to develop strategies that could reconcile the disarticulation between its mainstream, normalized construction of the individual LGBTQ political subject and its dominant strategy of exhibiting a "cutting edge" identity at the organizational level.

CHAPTER 4

Family and Community Values: Negotiating “The Glue” of UU Social Action

In 1998, Robert Bellah quipped about the individualist penchants of Unitarian Universalism, during a lecture he delivered at the UUA’s annual General Assembly. “The point,” he asserted, “is that emphasizing difference and respect for difference leaves us pretty well adrift when it comes to what could possibly hold us together.”

Bellah’s lecture drew on sociological and theological premises to address this major question and concern he had for the waning religious movement. To frame his discussion, he drew from the UUA’s 1985 initiative called “Fulfilling the Promise”, which it developed in its effort to “strengthen a sense of connectedness, interdependence, and community” within UU congregations. Its purpose, Bellah’s offered, was also “partly to counterbalance a perceived excessive emphasis on individualism” across the UU movement.

Among other things, the initiative launched with a survey of congregations, several of which Bellah addressed in the opening of his lecture. The last question he addressed was "What is the 'glue' that binds individual UUs and congregations together?" He noted that “the sixty-five percent majority answer was: ‘Shared values and principles’.” The least chosen response, he added, was “common worship elements and language”. These responses became the main platform from which he launched his discussion of the central concerns he had for Unitarian Universalism.

Likewise, I draw on this question as a way to launch my discussion of the major themes presented in this chapter. Of primary concern in the story I’ve told thus far has been with excavating the factors of organizational culture that shaped LGBTQ social justice work in two UU congregations. The mobilization contexts addressed above, comprised of organizational

modes of governance and mobilization, belonging, collective identity formation, and representation, intersected with embedded structures of sexuality and gender discourse in ways that privileged specific interpretations and practices of “Welcoming and Affirming” at Hope and Hillside. The salience of organizational culture, I then argued, was also evident through the congregations’ use of embedded discourses of individual and collective identities, including the LGBTQ political subject identity on which many based their interpretations of LGBTQ social justice.

Notwithstanding the similarities I found in the identifying practices of Hope and Hillside as organizations, my analysis of church narratives revealed disparities in the repertoires members used when referring to their UU organizations as collective entities: whereas Hillside members more often referred to the group through the language of community, Hope’s unitizing repertoires cast members as steadfastly bonded through metaphors of family.

How the above contexts intersected with other organizational dimensions of church culture to mediate congregants’ strategies of action for same-sex marriage equality is the main focus of this chapter. The themes presented below provide the structures of social relations and values that I discerned at Hillside and Hope. Subsequent analysis looks at the UUA’s mobilization of values and traces the embeddedness of those values with the context of each organization.

My analysis of denominational discourse suggests that the UUA’s initiative strategically emphasized repertoires of “family love”, drawn from universalizing discourses of nuclear family relations, values, commitments, responsibilities, and emotions. The congregational data presented below thus similarly illustrate the ways that organizationally structured relations, values, and emotions, as specific situational elements, helped to inform Hope and Hillside’s

mobilizing and collective action practices with respect to marriage equality.

At both Hope and Hillside, “family” played a central part in congregants’ everyday church experiences and interpretations thereof. Local discursive practices of family at each church were evident across a wide range of narratives, including membership, participation, social networking, values, conflict, and mobilization. Church culture also impacted how congregants interpreted and practiced ‘family’ at the organizational level. The most salient, nuclear family values, shaped the construction of “marriage equality” in the church. Examining the locally available repertoires for action exposes some of the points where discourses of family and ‘family values’ collided with the churches’ locally embedded values.

Unpacking the marriage equality discourses embedded in each UU church requires a closer look at some broader contexts of social, political, and cultural movement on the issue. The current landscape of marriage equality politics and public debate on the issue is still awash in family discourses (Liebler, Schwartz, and Harper 2009; Viefhues-Bailey 2010; Wilcox, Chaves, and Franz 2004). At stake is the institution of heterosexuality, reinforced through the spectacle ritual practice of “white weddings” as well as dominant nuclear family discourses and practices of labor, consumption, procreation, and kinship they legitimize (Ingraham 2009). For decades, conservative oppositional groups have largely controlled the interpretive practice of “family” and “family values” in this political arena. The dominance of nuclear, procreative, monogamous family discourse is apparent across biblical-, nature-, and morality-based arguments posed against same-sex marriage (Backer 2002; Viefhues-Bailey 2010, Fetner 2001).

Adding a social movement angle to Gubrium and Holstein’s ‘interpretive practice’ approach, the data I present illustrate some of the ways that churches’ *strategies* of collective action reflected its local structures of organizational relations, affect, and values. This project

highlights the value of examining how congregations' construct ideas about "identity", "marriage", "family", "community", "diversity", and "social justice" as *organizational* matters.

Debates over marriage equality typically followed one of two divergent logics: first, an advocacy of marriage equality that reflects the "Queer Liberal" goals of assimilation and "fitting in" (Stein 2013); and second, challenges to the idea that marriage equality benefits all people equally. Queer Liberal positions advance both micro- and meso-level politics of 'homonormativity' and the monogamous, ableist, white, middle-class, gender-normative interests and assumptions it reflects. Yet the Queer Liberal focus on marriage equality, critics argue:

...sacrifices and diffuses radical challenges to heteronormativity by privatizing sexuality, forces queer people to conform to a fundamentally heterosexual script, and negates the ways lesbians, gay men, and other queer people create alternative relational forms and intimacies (Stein 2013:41).

By neglecting to also consider how other oppressive ideologies, policies, and practices are constituted and reinforced through family discourse, Queer Liberal movement only exacerbates what I have previous mentioned as the ongoing process of LGBTQ social movement fragmentation (Bernstein and Taylor 2013).

Review of Existing Literature

I broadly locate my analysis along the overlapping trajectories of social movement theory and social constructionist, feminist and queer scholarship on family (e.g. Bernstein and Taylor 2013; Collins 1998; DeVault 1991). Queer and feminist research on family highlights the interplay of dominant family discourse and structural inequalities, as well as the practices and ideologies that sustain them (e.g. Arendell 2000; Baca Zinn 1994; Collins 1998; DeVault 1991). Mainstream family discourses reflect and reinforce dominant social structures and structural change, such as the persistence of liberal feminist repertoires of 'reproductive rights' (Smith

2003), the de-privatization of filial care (Margolies 2004), and the expansion of wedding markets to include same-sex consumer interests (Ingraham 2008).

Marriage equality movement is unique in that its collective strategies are forged primarily through relational understandings of ‘family’, rather than through individualist understandings of sexual and gender identities. But again, as feminist scholars lament, the salience of ‘family’ in organizing collective action for social change has yet to be fully addressed; a legacy of the feminization and relegation of ‘family’ to the private, micro-interactional, and ‘domestic’ areas of social scientific research. Important questions thus remain about how family discourse shapes (or can shape) collective action in progressive religious organizations, both in general and on behalf of LGBTQ social justice.

Importantly, a paradigmatic shift in family studies in the 1960’s and 1970’s paved new ways of critically examining ‘family’ as a social construction, or interactional achievement, rather than a de-facto form of social or biological relations (Holman and Burr 1980). The work of Bernardes (1985:276), for instance, highlighted the need for thinking about “family ideology”, which he defined as “that varied and multi-layered system of ideas and practices which holds ‘The Family’ to be a ‘natural’ and universally present feature of all human societies, an ‘institution’ which is positively functional and the basis of morality” (279).

The saturation of nuclear family discourse within broader-level social relations, practices, policies, and ideologies is hard to ignore. Feminist and queer scholarship attests to the salience of hegemonic family forms in solidifying broader relations of power and inequality. Since its original meaning as “a band of slaves” (Coontz 2000), the social construction of ‘family’ has shifted in myriad ways to legitimize a vast array of hierarchies and inequalities. As Coontz (2000:43-44) notes:

Even after the word came to apply to people affiliated by blood and marriage, for many centuries the notion of family referred to authority relations rather than love ones. The sentimentalization of family life and female nurturing was historically and functionally linked to the emergence of competitive individualism and formal egalitarianism for men.

Critical approaches to family underscore the multiple and shifting ways that power is enacted in and through family discourse to constitute normative ideals and practices, such as ‘hegemonic motherhood’ (Arendell 2000), the ‘dominant family ideal’ (Collins 1998), ‘motherwork’ (Baca Zinn 1994), “white weddings” (Ingraham), the “nuclear family” (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2012), and the ‘normal American Family’ (Pyke 2000).

Dominant family discourses often reinforce broader structural arrangements of sexuality, gender, race, (dis)ability, and nation/citizenship. For instance, medical discourses associating family and citizenship to genetic and blood relations support policies of reproductive justice that reflect dominant racist, ableist, and heteronormative assumptions and hierarchies (Smith 2005). Family studies research has a long history of relying on falsely universalizing theories of gender and sexuality that naturalize the dichotomous organization of domestic labor to public/private domains of social life (Baca Zinn 1994). The dominance of hetero-nuclear family ideologies is also evident in the prevalence of scholarship drawn from frameworks that continue to pathologize ‘difference’ when it comes to non-normative (e.g. non-nuclear or minority) family formations, such as single-parent, ‘lesbigay’, or ‘chosen’ families (Ferguson 1990; Gabb; 2004; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2012; Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

These and other examples raise important questions about how power is variously enacted through family discourse in ways that give ideological backing to unjust policies regarding marriage, reproduction, adoption, and domestic and intimate partner violence. Social policies shaping couples’ access to adoption, for instance, still reflect dominant narratives that

equating blood ties with ‘real families’, hyper-sexualize same-sex relationships between able-bodied, cisgender people; villainize gay men as predatory, perverse, and ‘at risk’, and recycle outmoded gender-essentialist ideas about childrearing and parenting practices (Augoustinas and Crabb 2011; Stacey and Biblarz 2001). There are myriad other examples of the authorial power of hetero-nuclear family discourse in contemporary U.S. society, including those separating ‘legitimate children’ from ‘bastards’, ‘real’ from ‘chosen’ families, ‘baby-daddies’ from ‘Mr. Mom’s’, and ‘welfare queens’ from ‘tiger moms’ and ‘soccer moms’, along with myriad other categorizations (Augoustinas and Crabb; Fergusson 2007; Haney and March 2003). This is not to mention the numerous social welfare policies and programs that privilege ‘nuclear family’ formations and further marginalize ‘alternate’ arrangements of domesticity or kinship based on (Sarkisian and Gerstel 2012).

Normative Family discourse has a tremendous impact on dominant cultural discourses of values, responsibilities, and commitments. Family can be a powerful discursive tool for entrenching an array of oppressive norms and practices in the dominant social order on account of its proximity to cultural discourses of love, social reproduction, morality, health, and nation. Scholarship on religion and church culture attests to the salience of ‘family’ within local religious contexts, noting the prevalence of family discourse as “a source of anchoring schema and symbols for religious life in the United States” (Edgell 2003:166).

Indeed, research on the mobilization of ‘family’ as a social movement strategy has done well to expose the ideological underpinnings of ‘family’ by those powerful enough to stake a claim in its definition, including conservative religious groups and political leaders (Viefhues-Bailey 2010; Wilcox, Chaves, and Franz 2004). Scholarship on the subversive use of family discourse is almost completely absent from scholarship on social movements. In fact, until very

recently, it appeared that the Religious Right was enjoying an apparent monopoly on the political deployment of ‘family’ meanings and language.

The UUA’s denominational framing strategies, when held up the complex backdrop of social justice repertoires operating in the United States, reflect many of the central premises of “Queer Liberalism” (Stein 2013). Queer Liberal strategies both challenge and reinforce dominant cultural positions taken across the United States on LGBTQ social movement as a matter of individual “rights”. The movement for marriage equality, when examined against this backdrop of assimilationist discourses and strategies of action, embeds discourses of romance and love within the institution heterosexual marriage (Ingraham 2007).

The increasing visibility of marriage equality movement, however, nonetheless disrupts the hegemonic influence of hetero-nuclear family discourse by exposing dominant societal assumptions on which many debates over LGBTQ social justice are based. The recent legalization of same sex marriage, for instance, is evidence of the de-institutionalization of heterosexuality, or the “loss of marriage as a primary means of disciplining and even producing heterosexual desire” (Moddelmog 2009:168).

Normative family discourses also shaped congregants’ perceptions on marriage equality. Through the UUA’s relational discourse of ‘family affect’, for instance, disrupts the often hyper-sexual and predatory discourses used to construct queer bodies, expressions, and desires (Moddelmog 2009). Scholarship in this area shows that dominant media depictions of same-sex marriage often draw on normative family discourse to generate morality claims about gay parents (Liebler, Schwartz, and Harper 2009; Moddelmog 2009). Media depictions that positively portray LGBTQ-identified experiences, they show, still fail to challenge the institution of heterosexuality “in ways that don’t challenge hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality, and

by employing frames that privilege heterosexuality” (2009:656).

A group’s “structure of organizational relations”, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) contend, is an “additional resource” for understanding the mediating impacts of a group’s culture on its members’ practices. As before, I apply Holstein and Gubrium’s framework of “organizational embeddedness” because of its ability to capture linkages between organizational structures of social relations, collective and relational discourses, shared values, and what I describe as “negotiated actions” in each church.

As noted previously, membership in a UU congregation is required for claiming a UU identity. Despite the UUA’s statements of shared UU principles and values, congregants’ patterned use of UU identity repertoires nonetheless demonstrated the salience of values as locally structured within the congregation and its embedded social relations.

As the “glue that holds individual UU and congregations together” shared values at the level of organizational culture also reflect the churches structures of social relations and relational practices. UU church membership connected members to each other, to the congregation, and to the church organization in locally negotiated ways. Structured organizational relations, the below data demonstrate, shape embedded discourses of belonging and connectedness, as well as the expected practices of church participation. They provided not only a blueprint for gauging the strength of social ties among members, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) aptly noted, but also for interpreting the embedded congregational values driving congregants’ negotiations of best practice in the church.

Below, I attempt to highlight the themes that emerged from my analysis of Hope and Hillside’s organizationally embedded values. Drawing on my data, I suggest that the groups’ structures of organizational relations and values are salient factors shaping congregants’

narrative practices of. These locally shared values, the data below suggest, were foundational to congregants' narrative enactments of belonging as well as the narrative negotiations of best church practice and collective action practiced by the congregations.

This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the “local assignment of meaning” (Holstein and Gubrium 2008:8) to the issue marriage equality, and to the UUA’s “Standing on the Side of Love” initiative. In the following sections, I present themes that illustrate the salience of Hope’s covenantal relations and Hillside’s contractual relations on the relational discourses and shared values embedded in their “negotiated actions” of LGBTQ social justice.

FINDINGS

The UUA’s strategies of mobilizing repertoires of “love” in support of marriage equality can be seen, in part, as a strategy of universalizing the issue by invoking this widely shared cultural values as the basis for action. Interestingly, the UUA’s abstracted use of the “Standing on the Side of Love” frame broadened its relevance across multiple social justice issues. This strategy can be seen in the UUA’s expansions of the campaign to encompass immigration inequality as an issue of compatible substance and comparable significance.


As early as 1984, UU’s participating in the UUA’s General Assembly voted to support a UUA resolution affirming congregations’ practices of “conducting services of union for gay and lesbian couples”. General Assembly participants voted again in 1996 in support of its resolution in support of full marriage equality. For the Office of LGBTQ Ministries, widespread debates occurring across the United States at that time over same sex marriage equality signaled an immediate call to social witness and any other locally pertinent actions deemed worthwhile.

Policy debates occurring in several states, Kron believed, were already having a polarizing impact on the general sentiment in these areas. The discourses from this polarization provided political and discursive opportunities for local UU churches to mobilize and/or make a public statement on the issue:

There were a lot of UU's who got very involved in Massachusetts around the marriage equality work and then in Vermont, California, Maine, California. Wherever there's a state that has been looking at marriage equality or civil unions our congregations do tend to get very active....

Given the increasing visibility of marriage equality in dominant popular and political U.S. culture, it comes as no surprise that both the denomination and congregations I studied advanced the issue as the church's foremost LGBTQ-based political concern.

The following illustration depicts some of the UUA's most recent strategies for mobilization on behalf of the issue:




Ask Congress to Pass the Respect for Marriage Act

While the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a crucial part of the discriminatory Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in June 2013, several parts of the bill remain the law of the land...

We must persist in speaking out against this unjust law, which demeans LGBTQ people, keeps crucial protections out of reach from loving couples, and is blatantly un-American.

Please tell your members of Congress to support crucial legislation—called the Respect for Marriage Act—that would repeal DOMA in its entirety.

It's time for the federal government to stand on the side of love, not exclusion!



Churches seeking to join in the conversation quickly adopted this framing strategy; the idea that Love, as a universal value frame, would resonate in churches along dimensions of individual and collective experience. These frames often depict parenting and other care work practices as basic acts of human intimacy, morality, and social responsibility, love as a universal right and hard

work and self-reliance as core values of marriage and family in an effort to incite participation in a variety of possible actions, such as public witnessing, petitioning, lobbying, and marching in parades.

Interestingly, the UUA's framing of marriage equality within the master frame of "Love" allows the UUA to group the issue alongside that of immigration rights, raising the question of how dominant sexual and gender discourses are enacted at these activist borders. Queer, alien, immigrant, foreigner, different, perverted: all symbols of 'difference' used by the UUA as a contrast against which to narrate the universality of love²⁸. Queer immigration issues are missing from this Side of Love.

In our interview Keith Kron described how the marriage equality issue presented UU churches with an important opportunity to make a public statement on the issue of LGBTQ social justice. He described it as "one of the places where we could make a lot of news," and stand out as a denomination.

We were often the only denomination making any kind of statement on gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender issues. We got a lot of press attention for that, and it turned out to be a really good thing...So, I was like, *there's* an opportunity. And because we had already begun to do the work through welcoming congregations, our congregations that had gone through that process were ready to be public voices in their community on GLBT issues.

Kron compared equal marriage to other issues, such as poverty, where, he explained, "ten other denominations could make a statement about that or do an action about that and make news".

On a broader level, the UUA's strategic use of family discourse²⁹ reveals much about its individualist, 'mainstreaming' constructions of sexuality and gender as a matter of orientations and identities. Denominational repertoires of social justice also construct 'family values' as a

²⁸ As discussed in the previous chapter, the notion of the 'sexual citizen' instantly comes to mind in this pairing; the conjuring of 'immigration rights' and 'marriage equality' begs the issue of queer migration and the technologies of power policing the borders of nation, state, body, and desire.

²⁹ While these segments are presented together on the UUA's website, I disentangle them here for the purpose of discussion.

positive force of social cohesion and responsibility, and indicate positive moral character. The UUA's home page presents a series of images featuring family-based values and commitments, such as "We nurture families: Families of all sizes, shapes, ages, and stages will find loving support and engaging programs here." By following this link one can find a more in-depth description of the UUA's embedded family discourse, as in the following:

Family-- so simple and yet so complicated. In our rapidly changing world, families are under more pressure than ever. When it comes to religion, interfaith families and those with diverse beliefs can struggle to find support. When it comes to living life with courage, compassion, and connectedness, all of us could use a little help. Every day, Unitarian Universalist congregations help families live more balanced, resilient, and joyful lives. And it all begins with the acceptance your family will find in Unitarian Universalism.

By defining family in terms of broader societal conditions, this depiction universalizes 'family experience'. UU repertoires of family repeated drew on discourses of religious freedom and diversity; discourses that enable the UUA to advertise their religion to "inter-faith", multi-racial families and their need for courage, compassion, connectedness, balance, resilience, and joy.

The website also draws on universalizing repertoires of 'family' organized by discourses of care work, to mobilize UU members' participation in the UUA's initiatives:

We know what family really means. Changing dirty diapers and getting up at 3 a.m., holding hands at the hospital bedside, sorting through Dad's stuff when he has to move out of his home of 55 years, worrying about people who don't want to change.

Again, they include in their universalizing frame of family experience an array of family 'types', demonstrated in the following definition:

Family means chosen family, family of origin, second family, blended family, adoptive family, extended family. Family means two married men with three cats, a grandmother raising her granddaughter, a single adult with far-flung siblings, and a man and a woman with three kids. We celebrate the full spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities that families include. We nurture all kinds of families, helping families be resilient and loving.

This passage reflects broader patterns in the UUA's strategy to universalize family experience through affective discourse. The UUA's definition of 'family' simultaneously emphasizes diversity of relations and universalizes the "family experience" through a discourse of relational affect. Constructing family inclusiveness in terms of a spectrum of "sexual orientations" and "gender identities" underscores the normative (e.g. monogamous, nuclear) structures of family embedded in UU repertoires and the salience of individual identities as structuring the UUA's repertoires of 'diversity'. These and other themes are taken up in the following sections.

Covenantal Relations and Familial Negotiations of Action

Church relations at Hope are covenantal and the modes of belonging are mostly informal, voluntary, and form the basis of close bonds of caring and commitment between members, resembling an extended kinship structure. Hope's covenantal structure of social relations reflects elements of organizational governance, material culture, and social action history. Hope's covenantal structure of social relations, as I show below, was most evident in the prevalence of family and kinship discourses on which congregants drew to make sense of their collective experiences. It also shaped the language of official church texts and provided a framework for understanding the expectations and privileges attached to group membership. They also provided congregants with repertoires of shared values and connectedness, and structured the values around which members negotiated collective actions with respect to LGBTQ social justice and marriage equality in particular.

To be sure, members' individual families were also salient factors shaping participants' narratives of church membership and participation. In fact, family was one of the primary reasons for joining this UU church, particularly for parents with school-aged children. For

many, the UUA's programming for Youth Religious Education (YRE) was also central to this decision. In these narratives, shared values were prominent in family repertoires, as seen in Josephine's account of her decision to join Hope. A married professional woman with two daughters, Josephine wanted her daughters to learn "basic, human values of responsibility, respect and difference." Also among the list of values she associated with Hope was its attention to "social justice issues" and having "some sort of broader picture." She said:

I want them to think beyond themselves; to think about the world in the larger framework; to think about how there are other people living other ways of life that are less fortunate, or more fortunate, or just different from how you're living. And all is good; or it's not good and we should try and change it, or try to help or whatever. I want them to have some sort of broader picture.

She then also noted, "I think it's nice for them to have a context to talk about those things with people other than their parents, too."

Yet, Hope's local construction of family pertained more significantly the collective dimension of congregational life; that is, the shared values, experiences, obligations, and emotions of its covenantal structure of relations. How these elements of collective life took shape via family discourse was a matter of organizational culture and the facets I addressed above and will discuss again here.

Hope's Family and Practices of Care Work

People come to this church out of the blue with nothing in common, often times, with anybody, looking for somebody to care, somebody to hear them, somebody to share portions of their life with (*Joann, Hope Church*).

The family discourses that interested me the most were those that upheld congregants' narratives of collective identity, belonging, and the discourses of belonging and shared experience. Congregants drew heavily on repertoires of family to express their connectedness to other Hope members and leaders. This was evident in narratives such as Diana's, who described

her feelings for Joann's by saying, "she's a motherly presence. It's nice. I like her."

Family discourse also gave meaning to some members' narratives of their most personal, intimate, and supportive relationships at the church. For others, it signified "home", a place of comfort and belonging. And finally, for others still, it became a metaphorical framework for making sense of church conflicts and the commitments and loyalty of remaining members to the continued well-being of the group.

Tanya's narrative serves to illustrate the salience of Hope's structured relations on her experiences and sense of belonging to the congregation. What she cherished most about her church experience was "the chance to be spiritual and hear other people's spiritual selves; to connect in a way that's meaningful and spiritually intimate and interpersonally intimate". Tanya drew on extended family repertoires to underscore the importance of emotional support she feels from the close, personal ties she developed with other single women in the church. "We look out for each other," she explained. She added:

I get emotional support because I'm single. I live alone; and these are the people who know really what's going on with me. And, not just in a "what I did this week" type thing but, what happened this week and how it impacted me and what might be the spiritual connection or what is just the life's connection.

For Tanya, "family" signified a high level of closeness, emotional support, companionship, and intimacy, all part of the privileges of belonging to Hope. Similarly, Noelle explained, "There are so many people there who are just kind, interested in your wellbeing, and positive. And, even when bad stuff happens to them... I like that about a lot of people at Hope."

These relational attributes also shaped the expectations of membership, the modes of belonging and expected commitments that went above and beyond the financial commitment of pledging. Accordingly, members also drew on family discourse to designate these relational elements as part and parcel with the responsibilities of "care work" typically associated with

family membership. As she noted, “We sort of make sure we don’t spend holidays alone.” She explained further:

I don’t think any of us have too many family members. It just sort of fell together that way. Lilly is eighty something and part of what the group is talking about is, well, we’re a family here. We see her deteriorating. Is it time yet to call her son? Her son doesn’t really know us...So we’re sort of extended family.

Here, Tanya draws on family discourse to describe the quality of her relations at Hope in terms of care work and filial responsibility. Hope’s familial mode of belonging was reinforced in the narratives of almost every participant, as well as in routine church practices congregants like Greg, who announced during a special Thanksgiving Worship Service, “I don’t have a lot of DNA family, but I’m very grateful for the family I have here.”

Hope Is Where the Heart Is

The concepts of “home” and “comfort” appeared repeatedly in congregants’ accounts of the social relations at Hope. Congregants’ narratives routinely invoked the repertoire of “home” to emphasize feelings of comfort, closeness, and belonging they felt at Hope. Lauren, for instance, recalled her first experience at a regular Sunday service in Hope’s sanctuary. She emphasized the moment when she “was just like ‘Oh my God, this could be like a spiritual home. This could be it’.” When I asked Jason, a newer member, about his first impressions of Hope, he replied that “It felt like a familiar but forgotten home. Everyone was happy to see me, and I just ‘fit in’.”

The covenantal quality of relations invoked by Hope’s embedded family discourse shaped members’ shared values, including stability, comfort, belonging, and connectedness. The idea of comfort was particularly salient for members who had experienced the death of a close friend or family member. For others, narratives of “home” invoked the comfort of belonging and

value of acceptance and loyalty to the group. For instance, when I asked Abby if she ever considered leaving the church over the congregation's struggles, she replied:

I didn't want to leave cuz this is my spiritual home. I've come here since the 1970's. And we've healed, here. We've healed. And a lot of people left and went other places. But, this is really where I feel the most comfortable because it's welcoming and because it's more liberally religious, and because I've always learned to accept other points of view as far as politics and religion...

Here, Abby's usage of "spiritual home" invokes comfort and acceptance as elements of congregational life she values most.

Repertoires of "home" also gave meaning to collective life at Hope in official church texts and correspondences. Church newsletters often incorporated metaphors of home as a way to emphasize collectively shared values of comfort, belonging, and care. In a church newsletter published at the start of the new year, Joann's "Minister's Column" was dedicated to considering:

...all the blessings that have been bestowed upon me. The first is finding all of you, and having the opportunity to be your minister and feeling so at home among this warm and welcoming parish. You are one tough and resilient congregation who has much to face in the coming year which will not be easy; but in your remarkable history, 'easy' has not been a part of your recent evolution...

This excerpt illustrates the embeddedness of family discourse in provided not only the repertoire of "home" to signify the close attachments and "warm" and "welcoming" culture of the congregation; it also draws on family discourse as a framework for narratively reconciling the congregation's past with its present and desired future. The next section looks more closely at these themes of organizational history and its impact on family discourse.

Family Discourse and Organizational Histories

Hope's embedded family discourse also provided congregants' a repertoire for making

shared sense of organizational history. Several members incorporated repertoires of family values into their accounts of group conflict and dysfunction, emphasizing affect, connectedness, sacrifice, collective resilience, and emotional commitment. Others emphasized caring and loyalty as deeply embedded qualities enabling Hope congregants' to endure collective hardships. Importantly, family discourse became a crucial framework for situating group conflict within a broader narrative of enduring relations. Janice's explanation to this end is revealing. She said:

Um, it's like a family. I mean it's got hard stuff and good stuff. It's not like all wonderful, peaceful, la la type of thing at all, probably how I thought church should be when I was a kid or something. And we're trying to have more fun, because we went through several years of total, just, really *not* fun. And we lost an awful lot of members, and a lot of hurt people for lots of reasons.

The metaphor of Family for Janice, invoked the enduring qualities of social relations she experienced at Hope. Typically brought to life in dominant cultural frames such as, 'through thick and thin', or 'for better or for worse', taking the good with the bad was an inherent principle organizing members' decisions about their loyalty and commitment to the church and the social relations therein. Similarly, as Judith explained:

It's hard when you've known them for years, in many cases, and you care about them, and all that. And there is some loyalty in me. It breaks my heart and it's very hard to let it go; to carry on and recreate relationships with people when you don't admire how they behaved.

Likewise, Gail recalled:

The reason I could deal with the church going through that was that I had done it with my ex-partner. And, that it didn't mean that people didn't care about each other or love each other. It did mean that they couldn't live together anymore. And so, it was difficult. But, it's reality.

Gail's metaphorical use of family provided an inroad for emphasizing the collective impact of the group's past schism in terms of affect and for reconciling the tension between the congregation's conflictual past and its enduring collectivity. Kevin also drew a metaphor with

family to emphasize the emotion toll of Hope's past conflicts, embedding family discourse within Hope's saying they made him feel like a "child of divorce" rather than a member of a voluntary organization.

Unitizing Repertoires of Family

Discourses of affect embedded in the congregation's family structure of relations also provided congregants with a framework for unitizing the congregation's past experiences of conflict and schisms, and for making sense of the church's membership loss. Carole, for instance, noted "We still have some gay members, but a lot of them left...Partly they were just grievously hurt. A lot of people were grievously hurt, and not just gay members. And they left because it was just too painful." Unitizing repertoires of family conflict disembodied the congregation's subject position from sexual subject position of the individual, providing a framework of empathy and compassion from which congregants could collectively reinterpret the conflict.

Lauren similarly deployed unitizing repertoires of affect to describe Hope's conflict through the lens of shared experience. She recalled:

...one of the women was...crying her heart out. And I could see how hurt she was by the whole thing. And then my heart just went out to her. And, until then, I had not been willing to forgive any of 'them' for what they did to 'us', right? And then, when that happened, I was like, "Oh!" Like, she got hurt. Like, *everybody* got hurt. It wasn't just me. It was *everybody*.

In her interpretation, it was the shared experience of affect that subsequently strengthened members' ties and commitments to one another.

Organizational Boundaries and Family Relations – Disembodying Practices of the Closet

Interestingly, family discourse at times also served as a measure for evaluating the congregation's relations as lacking in some way. Evident in congregants' more critical narratives was a patterned use of "family" to depict an ideal; a "contrast structure" against which they described their current social relations in the church. However, even in these examples, the family and covenantal structure of relations brought to the fore in participants' narratives offer a glimpse of the expectations attributed to membership at Hope. Members who did not describe deep connections with other members nonetheless still reinforced the church's covenantal structure of relations. Julia, a sixty year-old divorced mother of two college-age daughters, joined Hope to develop deep relationships with others who shared her political and spiritual beliefs. When I asked Julia to describe the relationships she had with other Hope members, she replied:

I have a lot of friends. I'm not the kind of person who develops deep friendships easily. I have a lot of friendly acquaintances. I'm in a small group and that relationship is stronger. But in general a lot of people know me. I think that I'm well liked. I do a lot of different kinds of work. If I were to be able to develop deeper relationships, it would probably start there. It's just- I'm a shy person and I don't make strong connections easily. I want those kinds of connections but I don't make those kinds of connections easily.

Julia's account shows the values she associated with Hope through her reference to "deeper relationships" and "strong connections". Her explanation also signifies her perceptions of Hope's relational structure, whereby she implicated her own character, rather than Hope's culture, to account for her lack of "strong connections" to other members.

Que(e)rying the Sexual Structures of Belonging and Exclusion

Hope's shared experiences, values, and expectations further promoted unitizing uses of family discourse. With respect to LGBTQ social justice, however, sexual identity continually

reinforced the schism left by the church's history of sexual politics. Janis's account of the congregation during her first years as member, which I referenced in the previous chapter, illustrates the salience of sexual identity to the congregation's sense as a collective group. For her, as with many others, sexual identity marked an important division within the congregation when she recalled "it was a pretty good mix between "us and the regular population, who were pretty casual about it".

This and other evidence suggests that, prior to the Hope's conflict and the schism that it generated (which was *not* exclusively structured by gender and sexuality), the structure of sexuality at Hope was the most salient factor dividing the congregation culturally, with sexual identities marking lines of inclusion and exclusion between social groupings and participation in LGBTQ social justice within the Welcoming Congregation Committee. In fact, the covenantal structure of social relations and unitizing discourses that were embedded in Hope's closeting culture after its decline can be seen in the exclusionary meanings congregants bestowed upon non-normative sexual identity; or any individual identity marker, for that matter.

For instance, while it was not uncommon for groups to form among congregants in light of their shared interests or experiences, these groups were not held up to the same scrutiny as lesbian or gay-identified groups. Lauren and Alice's experiences with her group of 'girlfriends', for instance, highlight the inconsistent treatment of congregational groups at Hope. When discussing her group's upcoming outing, Alice explained how they were, "getting 15 people that we like, sort of 40's, you know, 40's and 50's, with kids basically." As a group based in part on shared experiences and values, Alice's circle is defined primarily via their identities as middle-age mothers, familial identities that carry social meaning and significance. The 'mothers' participating in this group, however, all identified as heterosexual.

Jenna's social group experiences serve as a stark contrast to Alice's. Jenna, a white lesbian-identified woman in her thirties who had been active in various capacities at Hope for the past ten years, explained her experiences and frustrations with the complaint that sexual identity-based groups were exclusionary. In collaboration with some of her acquaintances, Jenna organized the church's first group dedicated to addressing the concerns and interests of lesbian-identified congregants. A week later, the church's newsletter explained the basis of Hope's newest group for lesbian-identified women. The newsletter read:

...Our first meeting was a resounding success. The women present agreed that we feel incredibly supported at Hope and don't want to separate ourselves from the congregation. Yet, we do want to get to know each other better, form stronger bonds, and reach out to the community at large...

In our next meeting we'll be discussing "Vocation, Avocation and Passion." The group is open to the community at large – all lesbians are welcome. Tell your friends. We're a thoughtful, fun-loving and welcoming group. Come, join us!

The language used in this excerpt is illustrative, serving to highlight the tensions embedded between being seen as wanting "to separate ourselves" and "form[ing] stronger bonds". Yet, twice, the repertoires of sexual exclusivity through which the "community at large" actually only refers to "all lesbians", served to undermine the stated goals of not being separate from the congregation. As is not surprising given the covenantal structure of relations at Hope, the existence of a lesbian community group sparked a number of tensions within the congregation, understood mostly in terms of identity discourse and exclusionary politics. Lauren recounted experiences she had where:

For like a year, all the straight women were saying, "Well, we just feel kind of left out. I mean, like, you know, no one invites us to do stuff, and you look like you're having so much fun; and we don't have an identity like that that we can kinda really coalesce around." And I'm like, "what are they talking about?" The *whole world* coalesces around your identity! And, like if they want to hang out with us, why not call us on the phone and say, "You wanna hang out?"

Another example of the work congregants did at the boundaries of identities can be seen in the

following narrative offered by Lauren, a former leader of Hope's Welcoming Congregation Committee. Lauren recounted a particularly vivid, challenging moment in which:

We had a straight woman who came to me and wanted to be on the committee; and it was strange. She was concerned, because she felt that we were ignoring the fact that there weren't enough people of color in the congregation and she wanted us to do more outreach into the black community. And I said, "that's good, but that's not the charter of my committee, unless they're LGBT African Americans, in which case I can do that. But the charter on my committee is not to increase diversity for the whole congregation; it's for the LGBT." And she was just like, "well I just think that's narrow-minded"

Janis, for example, began participating annually with the church in the city's Pride Day parade and festival, "mostly because this city ought to see its gay people at least once a year." Yet, as this narrative also suggests, Hope members' participation in these events prior to its current situation largely fell on the shoulders of its LGBTQ identified members.

Normalizing Repertoires of Family Values

Congregants' repertoires of LGBTQ social justice were also laden with repertoires of family work and family values that normalized same-sex partnerships in various ways. This was perhaps most evident in the accounts that circulated among the church with respect to marriage equality. For instance, in our interview, Cal, who once struggled with his own discomfort around 'gays', expressed his support for marriage equality and same-sex family adoption to me by normalizing same-sex parenting through the discourses of social class and education. He exclaimed:

...anyone who says that they're not providing that child with a loving, caring home is full of bullshit... Yet, at the same time, the same people pointing this finger are having babies, and not raising the kids right themselves; trailer trash, ya know? I shouldn't say that, but if people are doing the job they should be doing as a parent, providing that child with love and care and a roof over their head- what a parent *should* be doing, then who the hell cares? And I look at our church and I see some children who are leading a pretty nice life and a life they deserve

to be leading, who are being raised by a gay couple. God bless ‘em.

Cal’s use of family discourse normalized the LGBTQ political subject through repertoires of commitment, responsibility, and the ability to provide “a loving, caring home”. Julia’s narrative provides a similarly normalizing strategy. She explained:

I just firmly believe that any two consenting adults that want to be married should be able to call it whatever they want, you know? Any two people who are willing to make that kind of commitment...for other people to even want to have an opinion about that is just...their marriage doesn’t affect yours. It should only affect theirs. And, if your marriage is so shaky that somebody else who happens the same gender being married affects it, you’re in trouble anyway.

Here, Julia’s emphasis on “two people” and “commitment” exemplifies how she and other deployed monogamous marriage as a normalizing strategy for advocating LGBTQ social justice.

Several of my participants recalled attending same-sex wedding ceremonies at Hope as their first introduction to same-sex marriage politics; and almost half recalled a same-sex wedding being their first exposure to Unitarian Universalism. Tanya, who identified as a “single straight woman”, recalled her interest in joining Hope after her experience at a friend’s wedding, saying “And it was a UU Church. I thought, this is cool.” Lauren drew on her own same-sex wedding to describe Hope’s culture. She said:

We had our wedding there, and a bunch of our friends and family left our little Orders of Service in the pews. And so we went back after a couple weeks for a Sunday service, and this little old lady I did not know sat down next to me and looked over at me and Sylvie and said, “are you the girls that got married last month? Because I saw your order of service in the pews and it looked like a very nice service. Congratulations!” And I’m like, this woman is, like, *ninety*, congratulating me on marrying my girlfriend. I just love that! That’s what I loved about it here.

Lauren’s account of her wedding provided a basis for articulating her view of Hope’s embedded values and for extrapolating on the congregation’s position in relation to LGBTQ politics.

Standing on Which Side of Love? Family Politics at Hope

Walking into the sanctuary, I see something different; a large white banner hangs high up on the front wall, just above the stained glass window. Roughly six feet long and two feet high, it reads: “Standing on the Side of Love”. Curious, I read the day’s Order of Service. The sermon is titled “Will You Be My Valentine?”

The issue of marriage equality provided an avenue for illustrating the salience of Hope’s closeting culture as a factor mediating between the broader political discourses and congregants’ participation in LGBTQ social action. It was Valentine’s Day when congregants voted on whether or not to support Joann’s proposed strategies of social witness and action in support of marriage equality. I turn to this negotiated action now in depth, drawing on the analytic lens developed above to interpret it as an enactment of Hope’s closeting culture as a multi-faceted and salient obstacle to social justice participation.

During one of our two interviews, Joann explained that her strategy was to use the theme of the holiday as an opportunity to align the UUSC’s “Standing On the Side of Love” frame with inherent values of Unitarian Universalism and Hope’s congregation. Joann’s strategy was to use the sermon as a platform for urging congregants to support her proposal for a congregational resolution regarding its support of marriage equality. She also called on them to stand together in support of her “refusal to honor heterosexual marriage licenses until the worth and dignity of our own membership, both heterosexual and same sex, is equally honored”.

Analysis of Joann’s narratives revealed patterns in her deployment of family values and affect as a strategy for mobilizing congregational action. The centrality of family values as a normalizing mechanism can be seen in the following sermon excerpt. She asserted:

No one’s marriage is damaged or cheapened by the love of same-sex couples. Rather, we are so enriched by those who have fought in our wars, healed our sick, cut our hair, managed our bank accounts, and adopted children who were abandoned or unwanted. We are strengthened by hard working couples whose devotion and love for one another and for this congregation is a tribute to our

principles, our community, and our faith.

Joann's strategic use of love, devotion, hard work, and children, drew on Hope's collective values structure to normalize same-sex marriage and construct marriage equality as complimentary to the congregation's collective values.

Joann's sermon also demonstrates the salience of Hope's structures of governance in the congregation's collective actions. As a preventative measure, its purpose was to prepare congregants for the decision they would soon collectively negotiate during their upcoming congregational meeting. At the start of her sermon, she explained her proposed action, saying:

I will certainly officiate and there are a number of options for signing the license. This is a highly emotional issue for some; and what I choose to do as a minister of this congregation depends very much upon your endorsement or rejection of my stand on this question.

Up against the formally structured mandate requiring all congregational statements to be approved by a consensus decision, she offered a multi-dimensional interpretation of "love" as a way to unify the congregation on the basis of collectively held values. She warned, "I wish for us to stand on the side of love in as many ways as we can, as a whole society; but I also know that we will not all agree."

The remainder of Joann's sermon emphasizes several other deeply embedded values shared by congregants in her attempt to unify the congregation and reach a consensus decision regarding her proposed strategies. These included "a deep and abiding respect for the opinions of others," "feeling welcomed," "standing together," and the commitment to "speak gently and listen kindly to one another." She concluded with another call to love as a value uniting congregants in diversity, saying "May we be the example of the words of our ancestors that ring true today; God, however each of us may perceive our creation, is love." Here, Joann's strategy was also to amplify the UUSC's framework of "love" as a central framework of affect for

promoting the actions she advocated, constructing it as a pathway for healing covenantal bonds within the congregation.

The vote that occurred later that day showed an overwhelming majority of attendees in favor of making a public statement in support of marriage equality and Joann's refusal to sign marriage licenses. However, it was just one month later, at Hope's annual congregational meeting, when Joann stood up to offer the church's resolve on the issue. She explained she "decided to sign marriage licenses for heterosexual couples" after all. The congregation, she believed, needed to reach a place where "fear would be surpassed by courage" and commitment to the group and *all* its members would prevail. A few days after her announcement, Joann lamented her decision, saying "I'm going to get this gay pride group together to get signatures. We're going to be working on marriage because I think it's so incredibly absurd that gay couples can't marry."

The cultural significance of this negotiated action is not adequately captured by the personal sentiments of congregants. Of the few narratives offered by congregants during the meeting; none took a stance or even engaged in explicit discussion on marriage equality for same sex couples. Rather, the contention was over the action of social witness and the policy requiring a consensus vote of support by the congregation. In this case, salience of Hope's closeting culture was evident in the use of silence that night by those who chose to avoid the meeting altogether, making any consensus decision on the matter impossible to achieve.

In our second interview, Joann explained her take on Hope's negotiated inaction:

I am not writing an article to the paper speaking for the congregation because I get this sense that this would cause some real trouble. They're not there yet. Many folks are; but as a bulk are not there yet...

...And so what I've done is I'm meeting with heterosexual couples, I'm talking to them and telling them about my personal feelings about gay marriage: that to have

members of my congregation, gay members who have been *committed couples for a long time*, sitting next to heterosexual couples and not having the right of marriage really bothers me, and I'm only asking that when the gay marriage vote comes up that you consider this seriously. I'm not telling you what to do or how to think about it but I want you to know how I feel. I find it difficult to be marrying you when my own people don't have that right...

...That's how I'm dealing with it because I did not want to cause another split at this time and as much as it kills me, I'm trying to do the best thing for the congregation despite my own personal feelings which are 'damn it, what's the matter with you?' You know, oh my God, to come here and, you know, see this kind of crap going on; it just blows my mind.

Joann's statement attests to the salience of Hope's closeting culture in shaping the silences that were built into both the negotiation and the action. Negotiated as a matter of procedure rather than sexual justice, the congregation's strategy silence also reflected its history of social action. the schism that resulted from its prior designation as a Welcoming Congregation without consensus approval, and lingering fear that, as a congregation with strong covenantal relations, the collective identity of Hope, if seen as a "gay church" would implicate the identities of its individual members.

Hope's collective discourse of family configures its collective values by privileging peace over conflict. To this end, the impact of the Hope's closet could also be seen in the silences that followed the vote. Kathy, a five-year member who attended the original meeting, expressed her frustration to me weeks later, saying:

We've had the vote and now it's just dropped. Like, there's no publicity; there's no- nothing. I think the board has completely forgotten about it. It's just like it's over. Okay, we support gay marriage, whoop de do. It's not in the paper; it's not anywhere. So, it's like, what's the point of doing it?

Joann's Pride Day Sermon marked another effort to mobilize congregants through the use of family-love discourse. She framed the issue with the opening phrase, "At times we may be guilty of tolerating the bad behaviors of one person or a single group, at the expense of affecting

the wellbeing of many.” She concluded by saying:

Equal Marriage in our state *will* happen. We have some choices here that are serious and will not be laughed at fifty years from now. As a Welcoming congregation, we offer for people everywhere who care for children, who truly love one another, a faith that is larger than dogma and a creed that professes that love is not only for a chosen few. If there was one creed that every faith community needs to observe it is the phrase "hatred is not a family value."

Hillside Church: Negotiating Normal Gay Family Values

Hillside’s Contractual Structure of Social Relations

Hillside’s structure of social relations is distinct from Hope’s. A large, bureaucratic organization, Hillside has a complex division of labor organized across a team of ministers and lay leaders, all specializing in specific areas of church life. The structure of social relations shaping members’ experiences with each other and with the congregation is thus best described as *contractual*. Formalized structures of initiation through classes offered to new members also shaped how and what newcomers learned about the “obligations and privileges of membership.”

Not surprisingly, congregants at Hillside were less likely than Hope members to draw on family discourse to describe their congregation as a collective unit. Rather, Hillside’s structure of social relations privileged individualizing repertoires of “community”, representative of the congregation’s individually *collected*, rather than *collective*, values. The following sections address the embeddedness of community discourse and values and their relation to Hillside’s covering strategies of action for LGBTQ social justice.

Embeddedness of “Community” and Individualizing Values

Hillside’s contractual structure of relations also supported individualized modes of belonging to the church. These structured modes of belonging shaped the embeddedness of

community discourses that gave meaning and significance to the collective narratives of the congregation. Tracing the discourses of collective representation used over time by church leaders revealed a significant increase in the use of community discourses overall, as well as the scope of its usage across different aspects of congregational life.

Community discourses, embedded in Hillside's contractual structure of relations, promoted individualizing repertoires of belonging and participation, privileging personal over shared repertoires of UU values. These themes were evident in numerous accounts offered by interview participants. One such example is Nicole, who narratively constructed her membership as a matter of individual values. For Nicole, identifying as a "UU" meant:

...that I identify myself with their values, even if I'm not involved in a lot of the activities: social justice, equal rights for everybody, and just a sense of fairness in the world...and the environmental stuff is important to me as well.

Community Discourse and Structured Modes of Belonging

The salience of Hillside's contractual structure of social relations was evident in the depth and degree to which community discourse was embedded within Hillside's culture. To be sure, congregants' usage of the term "community" often varied, often in reference to the broader aggregation of people who lived in the general vicinity of the church. Camryn, for instance, an active member and leader of Hillside's Reproductive Rights group, identified herself as "part of the LGBT community," referring to both members and non-members. Other uses pertained to their narratives of hometowns, schools, and other social contexts. This fact alone, however, lends further credence to the idea that Hillside's contractual structure of relations privileged individualized experiences of church and the relationships formed therein.

In any case, the use of community discourse by church leaders was consistent, offering the congregation a loose sense of connectedness based on common personal qualities, interests,

needs, and commitments. Community discourses also helped to underpin Hillside's repertoires of collective experience. "Community" was the primary concept used in official church documents to link churchgoers to one another and to the church, and to attach meaning to social relations both *within* the church and between the church and the city. Embedded community discourse invoked ideas and feelings about *connectedness*, responsibility, voice, and shared experience; all primary values espoused at Hillside.

Community-based repertoires, it seemed, resonated more with LGBTQ congregants than heterosexuals, as expressed in the prevalence of community values of "support", "growth", and "connectedness" referenced in their narrative accounts of church participation. As Miles, a longtime member at Hillside, explained:

We can't forget all the good that has happened and come out of religion as well. For a lot of people, it does help provide them with a community, with reason for existence, and a lot of that has to do with their own personal beliefs. And I think all religions have, at their center, community; and that's important. I think we all benefit from support of others and from living and making this journey with others and not by ourselves; religion provides an opportunity for people to do that.

Miles was one of several participants to invoke community values as a deeper motivation for linking religion to LGBTQ social justice.

Covering Hillside's Negotiated Actions through Policy Governance

Organized originally through a bureaucratic task force system, social justice participation at Hillside ranged from church-wide sales and hospitality events to letter writing campaigns and public witness efforts. However, at the time of my research, Hillside's actions were increasingly structured primarily by its policy system of governance. Policy governance grants ministers the authority to engage in social actions in ways that disarticulate the voice of the ministry from the 'body' of the congregation. This structure facilitated the ministers' ability to engage more

efficiently in social actions by bypassing the negotiations required by Hope's consensus structure of social action.

The impacts of this organizational cultural element were dramatic and far-reaching, evident across most areas of social justice addressed by the church. Congregants' narratives of both routine and collective action practices were saturated with references to the church's ministry. The landscape of social justice issues addressed by the church also reflected this change in governance. Dwayne's take on Rachel's social justice ministry serves as an important illustration in this regard. As a member and former employee at Hillside for over twenty years, Dwayne's perspectives offered valuable insights as to the impact of this important shift in Hillside's micro-mobilization structure. "It seems," he began:

...like we kind of go, "okay this year it's this; this year it's that", so there is not quite as much consistency in the particular things we take action on as there used to be. But there is consistency in our stance on taking a stand for causes that we need to take a stand for.

This passage, taken from one of Dwayne's longer narratives about the organizational changes he has experienced since the start of Hillside's current ministry, also highlights a key facet of Hillside's covering culture. His repeated use of "consistency" suggest a favorable take on the church's commitment to executing actions on social justice issues. Yet, this practice of shifting from issue to issue reflects an increasing focus of Hillside's ministry on the covering practices of impression management, which Dwayne referred to as the church's "stance on taking a stand for causes we need to take a stand for".

It was partly this structure that can also account for the covering strategies of action taken by Hillside's ministry on behalf of marriage equality. Almost a decade ago, during a late Sunday morning church service, Hillside's ministers announced to a group of four hundred congregants that they were going to stop signing marriage licenses or perform legal marriage ceremonies until

full marriage equality was achieved in the state, essentially meaning until every member of their congregation could legally marry. In a special edition of the church's newsletter, they explain:

We stopped signing marriage licenses because we are committed to living lives of integrity - spiritual lives that ask us to ever more align our actions with our deepest values. We believe that we are called to do the difficult work of putting our faith into action, even when it is unpopular or inconvenient to do so. And while we realize that not everyone will agree with our decision, we do hope that in sharing our choice with you that you, too, might be challenged to consider the many ways that your faith calls you to act.

This correspondence, however, also illustrates the increasing salience of the individualizing repertoires and values of Hillside's embedded community discourse within its covering culture. Here, the ideas of "deepest values" and "integrity" helped justify the ministers' action by constructing it as a matter of individual values and conscience.

Subsequently produced texts reveal the salience of Hillside's embedded community discourse as a factor shaping the ministers' social action practices. As one announcement from a church newsletter reads:

What do you think? Whether or not you have already discussed your views with the ministers, they want to hear from the church community and this is your chance. While this is a personal decision and act of conscience, it has an impact on our church community. Come share your thoughts, support and concerns.

Elsewhere, they state "This is a personal decision; we are not doing this on behalf of or in the name of Hillside, but we hope for- we welcome- your support and blessing as a congregation." Here again, their emphasis on the decision being "personal" disarticulates the action from the collectively held values of the community.

Nonetheless, the salience of Hillside's covering culture as a factor shaping its negotiated actions can be seen in the public statement it made in association with the UUSC's Standing on the Side of Love initiative. It states:

Our work for LGBT rights is rooted in the simple belief that love and commitment in any form should be celebrated, protected and encouraged. We also

believe that diversity of self and sexual expression is something that is natural and enriches us all.

This covering strategies embedded in this statement can be seen in the direct uses of the terms “our” and “we”, despite the disarticulated structure of social action limiting the representativeness of its public statements. While “we” and “our” can certainly refer only to the members of Hillside’s ministerial staff, the impression given off here can also be read as a more collective statement of the congregation.

Contractual Relations and Collected Identities: Negotiating Impressions of Collective Identity

Interestingly, many Hillside members engaged in social justice activities and other forms of civic engagement independently of the church. Rose, for instance, actively participated in social justice groups outside the church, including the city’s Interfaith Council, which she described as “a group of people of different faiths coming together to do social justice types of work to which they are drawn by their spiritual beliefs.” Rose’s participation in social justice outside the church was largely due to experiences she had in the past trying to blend her religious and civic interests. In her words, Rose doesn’t participate in social justice at Hillside because she is “doing the same thing in other places”.

Rose believed that the city “is full of well-intentioned organizations, many of which are repeating each other’s efforts”. While Rose saw “nothing wrong” with the issues Hillside was currently addressing, she tried to avoid getting involved “in any more organizations doing the same thing.” Sighing, she asked, “The Unitarians have a group doing it. The Catholics have a group doing it. The Lutherans have a group doing it: Why shouldn’t we all be doing it together?” Rose, like many others, felt pulled in myriad directions by organizations doing social justice work and pressure to represent multiple organizations working toward the same social change goals.

What I observed from participating with the church the local Pride Parade can be seen as an example of the challenges inherent in the mobilizing practices of groups that are bound by community values and individualized modes of belonging. Carla, who participated in the parade for the first time this year, said “it just felt great in the sense of, like, taking my words into action and being supportive to the LGBT community and living out my values in that sense.”

Interestingly, while there, I saw several congregants who were clearly marching in the Pride Parade, but not as members of their church. As I noted:

We made fourteen signs between the three of us and went downstairs to meet people at one o'clock. Only Arlene and Jonas show up. Yet, while we wait in the parking lot for people to carpool to the parade, five people pulled in, but not to meet us. They walk toward the church building and stand huddled in the shade that is cast by the small tree near the front entrance. *I am confused at first about the group congregated just sixty feet away, because I recognize several as Hillside members.* I notice they are all wearing white shirts with rainbow-colored writing that reads “Inequality for some is Inequality for all”. I realize that these signs are meant to align the animal rights frame with LGBT rights and that they will be marching in the Pride Parade too, but as a distinct group (*Field notes*).

This observation, in concert with several congregants' narratives, illustrates a significant discrepancy between the ministries efforts to negotiate UU individual and collective identities through social action.

Material Culture and Normal Family Structures of Action

Material culture at Hillside shapes the congregations' negotiated actions in multiple ways. Monetary giving, for instance, is the most prevalent strategy of action at Hillside (and most UU congregations) and occurs on both the individual and collective levels. All but one of Hillside's weekly plate collections go to social justice or service-based groups, events, or causes in the broader community. The largest of these is a church-wide grant program in which congregants vote on one non-profit organization, from a handful of potential recipients chosen by

the church's youth group, to be the grant recipient. Funding for the project comes directly from members during the holiday season, when ministers challenge them to donate, rather than spend, a portion of their anticipated holiday budgets.

Direct actions constitute the second major stream of social justice participation at Hillside. In this regard, the space of Hillside's church, as open and welcoming to residents of the community, further promoted congregational discourses of community, civic engagement, and hospitality, privileging congregational actions of hospitality and community service initiatives that were open to the public.

It is in this arena of social action where the impacts of material culture on embedded family discourses can also be seen. Normalizing discourses of family shaped meanings in multiple areas of social justice work at Hillside, particularly for social justice issues that dealt with issues of social class, such as poverty or homelessness. The church sponsored several family-related events each year, including guest speakers who visited to present on domestic and gendered violence just days before the nation's Take Back the Night rally. In addition, GLEHN, a program that "utilizes faith communities as a homeless network for people who temporarily do not have housing" regularly drew on family to invoke compassion among potential participants. Advertisements offered "getting families 'back on their feet'", "make a difference in the lives of local families!" and "achieving a sustainable independence" as primary social action goals. Recruitment phrases offered "a chance to you and your family to be involved in a social justice project right here in our church home." Importantly, family discourse also broke down the well-worn narrative of homelessness as an experience had only by men, particularly men of color.

Family Discourses and the Normalization of LGBTQ social justice

Congregants' interpretations of the Normal Gay political subject, which I addressed in the previous chapter, often relied on social class-based repertoires of nuclear family and the commitments and responsibilities therein. For example, Jonas's assertion that "post-plague gay people wanted to be like straight people" drew on a similar discourse. Impersonating his imagined sexual subject, he quipped:

Let us get married and we'll live next to you and I swear to God we will not play the music loud after 11:00 at night. And what I love to joke about...is not only are they wheeling baby carriages down the narrow sidewalk; they have twins!

In this excerpt, it is clear that getting married, being quiet, and parenting are all elements that, to Jonas, characterize the Normal Gay political subject which he sees represented at Hillside and elsewhere. Likewise, Lori pointed to the family obligations and experiences of LGBTQ-identified congregants to account for Hillside's lack of LGBT task force. She explained:

I also think that what started to happen is as we've gained acceptance in the world more GLBT folks have had children and they've gotten busy with soccer games and PTA meetings and so they don't have time to march. They're doing, they've sort of been integrated mainstream.

Despite not having this experience herself, Lori's conception of "GLBT folks" reflects the integration of sexuality into Hillside's broader economies of family as indicating an overall lack of available time and/or energy. Both Jonas's and Lori's depictions of LGBTQ-identified populations include long term partnerships and having children, despite the cost of adopting (depending on the race and nation of origin for adoptees) or using artificial reproductive technologies being prohibitive for most in the United States.

The Politics of Family: Exhibiting Actions for Marriage Equality at Hillside

While the impacts of this family-based articulation of the Normal Gay political subject are not completely clear, my analysis of the dominant interpretations of LGBTQ social justice at

Hillside revealed themes suggesting that both the salience of the nuclear family structure as a factor shaping members' participation and ministry's singular emphasis on marriage equality profoundly impacted the congregation's interpretations and participation in LGBTQ social justice overall.

Routinely, congregants drew on marriage equality as the most pressing, if not only, issue within the arena of LGBTQ social justice. The ubiquitous use of normative family discourse as a principle organizing social justice practices further embedded normalized depictions of the LGBTQ political subject and social justice within Hillside's political culture. Hillside's embedded discourses of the LGBTQ political subject, constructed via embedded church discourses of social class, race, and family, reinforced congregants' perceptions that marriage equality was a culminating issue of LGBTQ social justice and that LGBTQ equality had largely been attained otherwise.

Allison's remarks in this regard are illustrative. As we sat outside, watching her young son chase her two dogs around the yard, Allison, a self-proclaimed masculine lesbian in her mid-fifties, commented on the church's recent inactions around LGBTQ social justice. Upon hearing my comment about being surprised by the dissolution of Hillside's LGBT Task Force, given how active other task forces were, she replied "What's the task at this point?" She continued, saying:

That's the problem. I mean, a task force is- you need to have a task, by nature, by definition. But what's the task? I don't know what the task is, other than marriage equality. And, I'm kind of over that myself. But, I mean, in my experience, it has been gay women who get married and then they're divorced just like anybody else. And they gotta go through all the hassle of that...

Allison's used of family discourse, here, served to normalize the LGBTQ political subject, emphasizing "the hassle" of marriage and divorce to analogize the LGBTQ family experience to that of "anybody else." Camryn drew on similarly normalizing discourses to explain the lack of

LGBTQ task force at Hillside. She remarked:

We don't really have a task force for LGBTQ. We used to, but I guess we don't really need it anymore. It's pretty queer friendly, here. I'm part of the community, the LGBT community, and there is a lot here for people; we have the banner outside...I was in a UU church in Ohio, and they were *for* discrimination in housing, or maybe workforce. So there really was a *need* for action. But here—and part of the reason we came was because of the community.

Normalizing repertoires of the LGBTQ political subject, which reflected the social class, race, able-bodied, and nuclear family status of LGBT-identified Hillside members, promoted the idea that LGBTQ social justice was either already addressed by the church, or that it moved into the mainstream of political culture and discourse. Repeatedly, my questions about LGBTQ social justice invoked references to the ministers' refusal to sign marriage licenses. These references typically resembled the one I heard from Fran, who called it “a powerful message that the church is standing behind you and we're not signing this until it's legal for everybody.” The other perspective I heard was that the LGBT Task Force, which had been “very vibrant and very out front” in the congregation, lost traction because “the leadership moved into more mainstream kinds of things... But *the church* certainly supports marriage equality.” From Joni's account, “mainstream” equates to the legislative arena of public policy.

Decreasing interest in LGBTQ social justice by Hillside's ministry on account of it being perceived as “mainstream” was another dimension of Hillside's covering culture; namely, the value it placed on exhibit strategies. In her perspective:

When those things happen, things are moving and UU's tend to like cutting edge stuff, so, it's not that we don't support it, it's just not cutting edge anymore...In fact, a lot of the members of the old LGBT Task Force are involved in...the next cutting edge piece.

Hillside's covering culture, in other words, promoted more politically visible, or ‘cutting edge’ actions. Together, these excerpts suggest that the normative discourses of gender and sexuality

that once gave shape to Hillside's Welcoming Congregation became central factors relegating LGBT social justice into the cultural and political 'mainstream', thereby limiting the repertoire of available strategies from which the congregation could negotiate possible actions.

The impact of the church's homo-normalization of LGBTQ social justice was fully apparent when the state's government legalized same-sex marriage. Hillside's website features a photo with a caption depicting "Congregants gathered after the Sunday service to celebrate under our banner, five years after it was hung." Hillside's ministers began signing marriage licenses and offering wedding ceremonies in the church once again. Their website read:

We are thrilled to now live in a state that recognizes equal marriage. If you are planning to get married or have a ceremony so your existing marriage can receive legal standing in our state, we'd love to officiate and celebrate with you.

Another section of the church's website offers this expanded description of the church's renewed participation in this ritual:

Congratulations! If you are thinking about getting married great things have already happened for you. We are excited for you and for the love that is expanding in your life. Our ministers are available to officiate at weddings for church members and non-members, for opposite-sex couples and same-sex couples, and we strive to create personal ceremonies that reflect your individual values and beliefs. We are especially proud and grateful that we can celebrate with all couples now as the state has passed legislation for equal marriage!

...We also offer recommitment and blessing ceremonies for couples who are married but have not had a marriage license signed...

The salience of Hillside's covering culture as a factor shaping the discourses, strategies and practices of LGBTQ social justice was also evident in the actions negotiated by the congregation after the state legalized same-sex marriage. Congregants, that is, debated whether or not to take down the "Standing on the Side of Love" banner for marriage equality that still hung on the outside of the church building since "marriage equality has been achieved."

Before marriage was legal in our state, our ministers took a stand of conscience

and stop signing marriage licenses for all couples until same-sex couples had the same right... We are proud of our ministers and grateful for their stance. We are even more proud and grateful, that *they can now sign licenses for all!!*

As an exhibitivite strategy, “taking a stand” for marriage equality was more imaginable for the ministry at Hillside on account of the policies mandating whom the “stance” represents, which, in this case, was only the ministry, rather than the entire congregation. Nonetheless, there was agreement among Hillside congregants that, as Joni stated above, “the church certainly supports marriage equality” and that it had sufficiently participated in LGBTQ social justice, despite the fact that marriage equality was still illegal in most states at the time of my research.

Discussion

The current landscape of marriage equality in U.S. popular and political culture represents an important ‘discursive opportunity’ for queer challenges to the normative family-based meanings and practices of Queer Liberalism. Signifying a shared experience of affect, family discourse embedded within the UUA provided the denomination a lexicon of *values and affect* with which to mobilize UU congregations to act on behalf of marriage equality, through the strategic deployment of love. The universalizing discourses of ‘the family experience’ relied on frames of ‘nurture’, ‘resilience’, and ‘love’.

The themes presented above suggest that the strategic deployment of family discourse by the UUSC and UUA provided the churches with interpretations of LGBTQ social justice and marriage equality that emphasized affect and values. Yet, *how* these family discourses contributed to mobilization and action in each church was not uniform. Various aspects of church culture shaped how the UUA’s use of ‘love’ and family values would take shape within Hope and Hillside.

Data from both churches also highlight the significance of social class and economic factors in shaping the meaning(s) of family. Hope can be seen as a closeted micro-mobilization context. Analysis of the discursive practices already established at Hope suggests that the congregation's silence on the issue is best seen not as a *lack* of action, but as a negotiated action in and of itself. Hope's collective family discourse also subjugated the LGBTQ political subject through repertoires of loyalty, tolerance, and peace. The UUSC's "Standing on the Side of Love" initiative provided Joann with a discursive resource for advancing the marriage equality issue in a more universalized, normative, way. Hope narratives drew on collectivizing repertoires, nuclear family discourse offered ways of being 'at home', as part of a church 'family'.

When juxtaposed with the church's urgent need for more members, the closeting repertoires generated negotiations about risk and visibility. Given the group's policy on consensus on church statements, neither a statement on marriage equality nor an internal action were worth the risk of dissolving the group altogether. The material structure of action, in this case, privileged the interests of the most generous contributors in the negotiation of action; the fear being that without their financial support, the church would no longer be able to exist.

Among Hillside's covers, the 'Normal Gay' emerged with and solidified white, middle class hetero-normative family norms and their corresponding homonormative social movement goals, positioning marriage equality as both a mainstream and culminating issue of LGBTQ movement. A vast majority of the narratives I heard advocating marriage equality were drawn from repertoires of parenthood/parenting. The recurrent construction of marriage equality at Hillside as an issue that had been addressed and then later 'achieved', reflects the church's covering culture and practices with respect to LGBTQ social justice. The economic construction of LGBTQ (political) subjects as middle class conceals the poverty of LGBTQ youth and

homelessness, suicide, as major social problems.

Hillside's mobilizing efforts attached normative family discourse to a variety of social justice issues, including homelessness, illiteracy, and reproductive rights. Family in these cases served as a vehicle by which to inspire action by drawing on universalizing repertoires of affect, strategy for generating what may be called 'affective resonance' within the congregation.

However, as far as LGBTQ social justice was concerned, family discourse primarily became an avenue for normalizing LGBTQ social justice by attaching symbolic capital to the 'Normal Gay' as the sexual political subject and for universalizing white middle-class, able-bodied, cis-gender versions of 'family experience'. Family discourse in this regard became a way for congregants to mainstream marriage equality through the construction of the LGBTQ political subject as time-spent, overcommitted parents, divorcees, and the like.

My analysis of 'family' and 'community' values discourses here thus reveals an inconsistency in the local construction of family. For Hillside congregants, dominant family discourses used to advocate marriage equality, resonated with the nuclear family discourses that normalized both the LGBTQ political subject and LGBTQ social justice in general. At Hope, where nuclear families constituted a smaller proportion of the congregation, embedded family discourses gave meaning to the collective experiences of the congregation through the repertoires of shared values, belonging, and care work. The difference in family discourse embeddedness across these two congregation, therefore, mediated not only the extent to which, but also how the values deployed by the UUA/UUSC resonated with each congregation to shape its mobilizing practices and negotiated actions. Findings from this analysis point to directions for further research on the meaning and significance of shared values in social movements and the utility of using "values resonance" as an index for measuring mobilization outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Reflections: Closets, Covers, and the Possibility of Coalitional Identity Politics in UU Churches

*We're talking about cultural change, here.
And that kind of change is not easy;
nor is it quick;
so I'm speaking of a shift over time
(Sewell 2006:27).*

It seems only suitable to begin this conclusion by revisiting the magnified moment that I introduced at the start of this work. From the findings and analyses presented in this dissertation, the interactions I captured at Hope that morning take on new significance. This magnified moment revealed how Hope's closeting culture structured congregants' interpretations and practices in the sanctuary, for instance. During a morning of heightened consciousness with respect LGBTQ social justice, congregants' narratives of "joys and sorrows" reflected the organizationally embedded silences that characterized Hope's closeting culture. Within this culture, the unitizing repertoires of "joy and sorrow" gave voice to the narratives meant to reinforce the bonds between group members and stifled those that threatened to dredge up internal schisms. The only participant in that morning's ritual to reference the service's Pride theme was Abby, a closeted lesbian, whose mental health status kept her sexuality protected from being 'read' as having a non-normative sexual identity.

The goal of this project was to examine LGBTQ social justice participation in two Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations. In this comparative, queer theory-based study, I "que(e)ried" the churches' current situations of LGBTQ social justice and Welcoming Congregation practices to examine the repertoires of LGBTQ activism circulating in each congregation. This situational analysis of offered me the ability to detect cultural elements that

were dormant, or latent, within organizations until ‘activated’ through particular situational contexts. These elements, if not invoked in group members’ practices, may be dismissed view examined through a singular ‘culture-as-practice’ framework. It may be argued that there is something of value in examining this store of latent cultural factors as a reserve of latent, or inactive “toolkits” that can become activated in specific situations.

Tracing the usage of Welcoming and Affirming Congregation and Standing on the Side of Love discourses across denominational and local church contexts revealed key patterns in the interpretation and practices of LGBTQ social justice that were organizationally embedded. Critical, intersectional analysis of embedded church structures helped to highlight the salience of organizational structures as salient factors shaping the interpretation and practice of LGBTQ social justice in several ways. As well as shaping the local contexts for micro-mobilizing practices, they also embedded the discourses from which congregants’ made sense of LGBTQ social justice and their relations to it as UUs, developed individual and organizational strategies of action, and engaged in organizationally negotiated actions.

The themes I presented are meant to add to existing conversations about organizational factors shaping religious micro-mobilization both within and beyond the walls of the church. The first substantive chapter focused on the situational elements that shaped Hope and Hillside’s practice of “Welcoming” during the time of my fieldwork. These elements constituted each church’s “micro-mobilization context”, shaping how Hope and Hillside continually practiced Welcoming as part of the “total life of the congregation” (Leslie 2009). Interestingly, each church experienced a significant shift in organizational culture over the last decade, due to various changes in church leadership, economic resources, and structures of LGBTQ political and cultural opportunity.

The embeddedness of church discourses pertaining to gender and sexuality, as seen above in congregants' narratives of their "Welcoming Congregations", has implications for the collective action strategies pursued in and by each church. Hope's culture, for instance, was deeply impacted by the congregation's material circumstances. Everyday church discourses were heavily laden with repertoires of organizational survival and growth. What Hope needed, according to members, was a significant increase in families and young people; to "get some butts in the pew" and a renewed sense of energy. The domain of Welcoming Congregation discourse expanded as a result, becoming a primary resource and strategy used for generating overall church growth. While this situational element manifested in starkly different ways at Hillside, materiality was nonetheless a major contributing factor to its Welcoming Congregation discourses, strategies, and negotiated actions.

Chapter Three attempted to set a foundation for examining key linkages between UU church culture and congregations' prevailing identity strategies of LGBTQ social action. Findings from my research demonstrated the predominance of the LGBTQ political subject as a foundational social construct from which congregants could interpret LGBTQ-based oppressions and social justice needs. My goal was to demonstrate how the structure of identities deployed within and by each church both shaped and were shaped by organizational factors of materiality, governance, and narrative histories. It focused on organizational identity as a central site for negotiating available strategies of UU social action.

To this end, I addressed the patterned and divergent repertoires of identity that I found across church contexts and explore the factors shaping how each congregation enacts and policies locally embedded discourses of identity and the politics thereof. Congregants brought meaning to LGBTQ social justice in ways that reflected Hope's unitizing repertoires of

collective identity, on one hand, and Hillside's internalizing repertoires of the Normal Gay political subject, on the other. Each church structured these individual and collective identities as foundational to the goals and strategies of LGBTQ social justice. These factors, I suggested, were fundamental to understanding how leaders at Hillside could attempt to mobilize congregants by asking them "Who are you?" and "What do you stand for?" while those at Hope would ask "Who are we?" and "What do we stand for?"

Discerning Hope's 'closeting' culture from Hillside's as 'covering' helped to account for key differences in their organizational identity strategies of collection action. Specifically, their *closeting and covering* cultures configured the epistemologies and discourses from which the LGBTQ political subject emerged at Hope and Hillside. Their repertoires of LGBTQ social justice both privileged essentialist, totalizing discourses of gender and sexual embodiment. These cultural components intersected with the churches' embedded structures of individual, collective, and organizational identity and mobilization to support distinct collective action strategies.

Hope's closeted configurations of sexuality and gender discourses positioned 'coming out' as a primary mode of LGBTQ resistance and "the *out* homosexual" the predominant subject position of LGBTQ social justice. These frameworks, at the intersections of Hope's other elements of organizational culture, no doubt had a stifling effect on the congregation's LGBTQ social justice strategies. The salience of Hope's closeting culture in silencing congregational participation also increased as membership declined and the need for material resources grew in urgency. Without a clear narrative of the church's identity, mission, or purpose, Hope's sexual identity discourse also became less salient as agents of mobilization. Its embeddedness within the congregation's history of identity-based schisms shaped congregants' perceptions of sexual identity as crucial factor disfiguring Hope's identity as a church body governed by consensus.

With the primary movement tactic in UU congregations being the identifying practice of public witness, the skeletons in Hope's closeted history diminished its organizational capacity to act on behalf of gender and sexual justice as an organization.

Hillside's situation presents intriguing points of comparison and contrast to Hope's with respect to organizational culture. The salience of Hillside's organizational culture was evident in the covering discourses used throughout the congregation to constitute the LGBTQ political subject. Hillside's dominant repertoire of LGBTQ activism was based largely on dominant interpretations of existing gay, lesbian, and bisexual church members. Consequently, the landscape of available political repertoires for making sense of LGBTQ social justice at Hillside resonated with Queer Liberal discourses that privileged the interests of the 'normal gay' political subject. The church's predominant repertoires reflected the interests of an imagined white, middle-class, gender-normative, able-bodied political subject position, embodied by the "Normal Gay" political subject. Covering practices of "impression management" at the organizational level resonated with the church's covering culture to promote strategies of exhibiting at both the individual and organizational levels.

Finally, the last data chapter explored linkages between organizational culture and the churches' micro-mobilizing practices. The UUA framed marriage equality by appealing to core UU values and principles to frame "love" as a universal right for all individuals. While the UUA's strategic use of affect had the capacity to incite a wide array of actions, it was nonetheless vulnerable to local congregational values, which were also shaped by locally structured modes of belonging, social ties, and collective discourses. Findings from this chapter point to the value of developing a model of "cultural resonance" that can assess SMOs mobilizing efforts on the bases of not just the resonance of frames, but also the resonance in

terms of discourse and values.

At the organizational level, each church's current repertoire of collective action was saturated with stories, beliefs, claims, images, signs, and banners that imbued marriage and family with normative meaning and significance. Accordingly, the resonance of the UUA's "Standing on the Side of Love" initiative was multi-dimensional and locally specific, inciting organizationally negotiated actions. Hillside's embedded family discourse, for instance, drew on intra-organizational understandings of the "Normal Gay" political subject, whose family experiences were imagined within the normative discourses of monogamous, middle class, nuclear family life. Marriage equality, constructed as a mainstream social issue, was seen as already addressed via the ministry's "cutting edge" actions and narratives of exhibition,

The organization of social relations was also a significant factor shaping the discourse and practices of LGBTQ social justice at Hope and Hillside. The contractual relations at Hillside privileged the use of community repertoires to describe the church as both a primary site of social networking and hospitality. Presenting the church's social relations as constituting "a community" was atop the list of Hillside's mobilizing strategies. Hope members, in contrast, more frequently drew on metaphors of 'home' and 'family' in reference to their congregation, reflecting the covenantal structure of social relations at Hope. Congregants' references to their church as a 'spiritual home' repeated use of kinship repertoires reflected this covenantal quality of social relations. The same can be said of Hope's embedded values; commitment, tolerance, loyalty, and peace outweighed values of faith-based action. Hope's closeting repertoires of sexuality and gender became even more salient at the intersection of its consensus structure of negotiated action, causing many to view social witness and other actions as too cutting edge, or expository, and therefore not worth the risk of outing the church.

In contrast, Hillside's contractual structure of relations privileged individualizing repertoires of community and values of personal spiritual growth, fellowship, hospitality, and interconnectedness. It also loosened the social ties between congregants, as well as members' feelings of obligation to the congregation as a whole. The church's structures of negotiated action made it so that any actions taken by the ministry and task forces reflected only those responsible for the action, and not Hillside as an organization. This organizational structure loosened many of the restrictions that would otherwise confine their negotiated actions.

Consequently, Hillside leaders faced a different set of challenges when it came to inciting collective action in/by the congregation. The most oft-used strategies of micro-mobilization espoused community values via repertoires couched in relational frames such as "caring" and "compassionate". They also drew consistently on historicizing narratives, exhibiting an image of Hillside based on the insights and actions of early church leaders for the purpose of inspiring action on the bases of shared values.

These and other patterns suggest that the church serves as more than just a "mediating structure" (Hargrove 1983), but also as a "mediating practice", whereby broader social movement frames are continually re-negotiated through organizationally grounded discourses and practices that are themselves situationally specific.

Reflections on the Dissertation Project

I designed this study to explore how UU congregants went about making sense of LGBTQ social movement initiatives designed at the denominational level. In this project my primary focus was on articulating the organizational dimensions of church culture; that is, the embedded factors of organizational life that impacted the congregations' "toolkits" of discourse

and action, particularly with respect to LGBTQ social movement, from which members' collectively practiced meaningful social actions (Swidler 1986). From this perspective, an organization's "culture" becomes evident in and through the interactions of group members, as well the artifacts produced therein.

The mediating impact of organizational culture on the churches' responses to the UUA/UUSC's family equality framing of the "Standing on the Side of Love" initiative became more clear when my lens of cultural analysis expanded to include the organizationally structured practices of social relations, values, and affect. Organizational structures of social relations promote norms and expectations for members' interpersonal performances, as well as the affect and/or values orientations of members. My research findings suggest key linkages between covenantal and contractual structures of church relations on the discourses and practices of value and affect at Hope and Hillside.

In general, however, more studies are needed that focus on the interplay between religious social action and the organizational factors that shape them. Questions about how religious group members discursively adopt, adapt, and employ socially inspired theologies of action, liberation, and justice can help further uncover the impacts of structured belief systems on group practice, and the mediating impacts of structured beliefs, principles, values, and commitments- what one might call 'cultural intangibles'- on collective accounts of group history, governance, materiality, discourse, and other this-worldly elements. While non-religious voluntary organizations may not be so explicitly structured by shared beliefs, examining the principled and belief-centered organization of group culture can provide added insights into this dimension of group life, no matter how implicit, across a variety of group contexts.

Resonances: Cultural Frames and Discourses

This study contributes to social movement scholarship on the links between groups' meaning making and mobilization practices. The data presented above highlight the need for analytic models that can address questions about *how* and *in which ways* social movement frames can variably influence action, and sometimes with unintended consequences.

Despite evidence of common resonance with the UUA's "Welcoming" frame in both churches, there was also tremendous variation in the local meaning, usage, and significance of the program's discourses and initiatives across church contexts. Organizationally embedded structures of governance, history, materiality, identities, modes of belonging, organizational relations, values, and affect were all salient factors that *variously* shaped Hope and Hillside members' interpretive practice of UU movement frames for LGBTQ social justice in locally specific ways. Within Hillside, for instance, it was clear that the UUA's Welcoming and Affirming Congregation discourses resonated with congregants predominantly through internalizing repertoires. In contrast, Hope's unitizing and commodifying repertoires facilitated an expansion of the Welcoming and Affirming frame.

However, Hope's expansion of the UUA's "Welcoming Congregation" frame to all newcomers only diluted the political potency of the program by normalizing "welcoming" repertoires as a quotidian component of congregational life. By expanding their welcoming frame, Hope's congregants repeatedly found themselves returning to the question "well, how inclusive can we be, really?" I argue that this outcome was inevitable within Hope's context, at once reflecting and reinforcing the closeting repertoires circulating within the congregation.

Organizational Culture and Embeddedness: Considering Theoretical Implications

The research model demonstrated above can benefit activists working to mobilize participants within other voluntary organizations, as well as organizational leaders hoping to effect deeper changes to regular group practice that also promote in-group solidarity. The themes and analyses presented above demonstrate the potential of re-imagining organizational culture research as emergent, and locally and situationally grounded. Findings from this research can thus also help to add further nuance to the notion of “embeddedness”.

Real systemic changes to organizational culture, however, require better understandings of *how* organizational structures shape group relations, discourses, and practices. Likewise, my findings suggest some important inroads for developing these understandings by conceptualizing organizational embeddedness in terms of its varying degrees, depths, and dimensions. This dissertation project also made cursory distinctions between *degrees*, *depths*, and *dimensions* as potentially important properties of embeddedness that helped to highlight the differential impacts of materiality, social movement history, and governance on each congregation’s social justice practices. By “degree” of embeddedness, I refer to the number of existing church relations holding the structures in place. I use *depth* to indicate the salience of those structures, measured, for instance, in terms of how quickly they could rise to the surface of change; how often they are held up for negotiation, challenged, or re-configured. By *dimension* of organizational culture, I refer to the specific mechanisms of church practice that were shaped by these structures. I hope to develop these conceptual tools in subsequent research projects.

Que(e)rying “The Beloved Community”

The biggest challenges facing Unitarian Universalism as a religious movement can be found at the intersections of the organizational structures I have been presenting throughout this

essay. Leaders of the movement often point to the “convergence of diversity values with normative, professional, and upper middle-class forms of political organization” as the central challenge to UU membership (Ward 2008:133). The UU appropriation of “the Beloved Community” repertoire, as envisioned by Martin Luther King Jr., is an important example of the confluence of these two factors of organizational UU organizational culture (Williams 2002).

At Hillside, I founded numerous parallels made between LGBTQ social justice and racial justice narratives of the Civil Rights Movement. Ministers drew on this parallel as a justifying strategy when presenting to the congregation their decision not to sign marriage licenses until same-sex marriage became legal. For instance, they urged “please let us know what you think and where else you feel this parallel with the exclusive racial practices of the civil rights era are calling us as a church community.” Embedded in this repertoire is a concealed history of Unitarian Universalist resistance to “examin[ing] the racist assumptions built into their own predominantly white, upper-middle class institution” (Bumbaugh 2000:188, 189).

Committed to individual religious freedom, UU congregations are bound by commonly held liberal theological values and principles for living purposefully in relation to the world and others in it (Lee 1992, 1995). Yet, as a religious movement, it also requires “a center” and a collective presence as a force of social change. As UUA leaders note, “the time is ripe for bringing together all who desire to advance the causes of freedom and human community through liberal religion” (Mendelsohn 2007). These divergent commitments push and pull UU congregations to be simultaneously diverse and united, individual and collective; characterized by strong ties as well as freedom of conscience. This is the challenge Lee aptly referred to as the “UU Dilemma” (1992, 1995). In this sense, Unitarian Universalism highlights many of the issues at the fore of contemporary LGBTQ social movement, broadly speaking. At its core, the

challenge of mobilizing collective actions within religious organizations based on values that border on “radical individualism” (Bellah 1998) runs parallel to paradox coined by Gamson (1995) as “The Queer Dilemma”.

Indeed, one of the biggest challenges for scholars researching LGBTQ movement dynamics has been “to explain how a sense of collectivity is produced in movements predominantly focused on individual, formerly private, concerns” (Broad, Crawley, and Foley 2004:319). There is consensus among feminist and queer scholars that movement groups organized around individual identities and identity-based interests will inevitably experience tension between the boundaries reinforced through the construction of social movement goals and strategies and the pull to dismantle the normative structures of identity that marginalized, or Queered, non-conforming bodies and relationship in the first place (Gamson 1995).

Many members of Hope complained about the exclusionary quality of its LGBTQ-oriented groups. Members of these groups, however, implicated other members’ complaints in their narratives explaining why the church is not Welcoming to LGBTQ members. The dissonance in Welcoming discourses used by members situated differently within Hope underscores the salience of its closeting practices on congregants’ interpretations of the UUA’s Welcoming *and Affirming* Congregation Program as it was originally intended.

As mentioned above, Gamson’s discussion of ‘The Queer Dilemma’ provides a powerful commentary on the phenomenon by which LGBTQ collective identities, constructed to gain political voice, can end up reinforcing boundaries that exclude people; the very boundaries against which LGBTQ activists have waged war from the 1960’s (Gamson 1995; see also Kirsch 2000). It is possible that mainstream religious support of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or otherwise Queer (LGBTQ) social justice will remain sidelined as an area of sociological

inquiry as long as the individual identity-based structures of knowledge and interaction remain dominant within the academe as well. However, understanding churches' identity strategies can be valuable for churches or other organizations seeking to mobilize on behalf of LGBTQ social justice. How a church's public statements and social justice resolutions will translate into organizational identity is also a question of interest for LGBTQ and other identity-based movement groups. Critical research on identity-based movements has shown that collective identities formed within groups often do not represent the shared grievances and interests of all members (e.g. Bernstein 1997; Gamson 1995). Findings from my research thus also underscore the value of generating strategic dialogue within groups to address the relations of power embedded in their collective identity strategies.

Reflections on Project Goals

A primary goal of this research was to develop ways to confront the challenges that religious organizations may face in trying to support LGBTQ congregants. Findings from my research challenge the congregations of Hope and Hillside to find solidarity in their support of LGBTQ social justice through discourses of inclusion and diversity. However, inclusion and diversity discourses can be unintentionally deleterious to an organization when understood only through liberal political frameworks of individual identity and rights. Moreover, identity-based strategies of LGBTQ social movement consistently privilege essentialist discourses of gender and sexuality, relegating bisexual, trans*, and otherwise queer experiences, expressions, and subjectivities to the margins in the struggle for self-determination, as well as those oppressed via matrices of race, class, nation, and disability-based oppression.

Phelan (2002) developed 'coalitional identity' as an alternative model for deploying

collective identity that both respects the diversity of human experience and seeks commonalities in the pursuit of political and cultural goals. This concept calls for a shift from:

...thinking of people as single condensed entities to envisioning identities as social processes then calls into question the position and interest of “not marked by difference” in dominant discourses. If “difference” is no longer the property of one group, but is the mark of a relation of (dis)similarity, then it is not enough to fit “Others” into a previously existing frame, nor can we simply modify the frame to include them. There is no avoiding it; what is needed is not a specific result, but a process- that of public deliberation among a group all of whose members are treated as equal participants...part of a larger project of radical democracy that aims at making all the difference, at eliminating the privilege of hegemonic identity (Phelan 2002:344).

Developing a more expansive lexicon of coalitional identities and identifying practices would complement embedded UU principles that privilege shared societal perspectives and interconnectedness, rather than individualizing identities or fixed belief systems.

What’s Love Got to Do with It?

The increasing use of “family” as a primary discourse in recent political campaigns has opened up considerable opportunities for further dialogue on the role of identity and relational status in policies of inclusion. The mobilization of ‘romantic love’ as a universal right no doubt also reflects the symbolic power of Queer Liberal voices to construct LGBTQ social movement goals and strategies. As Stein (2013) recently noted, the public proclamation of love through same-sex weddings is not a strategy afforded equally across boundaries of race, class, ethnicity, nation, (dis)ability and gender. Likewise, drawing on its embedded discourse of “every family”, Hillside’s mobilizing strategies subjugated the experiences of LGBTQ homeless people by obscuring the social fact that LGBTQ-identified people, youth in particular, are three times more likely to experience homelessness than cisgender heterosexual people.

The question of how recent changes in marriage law will permeate into family-based

institutions and the programs and services offered therein will no doubt inspire another considerable swell in research on the dynamics of organizational culture. What needs to be addressed now is how family discourse can be deployed in queer(ing) ways? Which discourses and practices can be help to queer religious-based mobilization and collective actions?

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

As the trajectory of sociological scholarship on LGBTQ movement indicates a move toward more queer and feminist analyses, it appears that scholarship in social movements more broadly could learn from the analytic impulse and direct strategies of que(e)rying. The usefulness of this multi-faceted methodology contributes to the growing collection of empirical approaches to ‘queering’ research that can be applied in the systematic investigation of various organizations.

Some of the most evident limitations of this research are those that are likely shared across critical research traditions; whereby my commitment to critical organizational research may invite skepticism from participants in the setting, especially those who are already invested in LGBTQ collective action for social change. The risk of ‘stepping on the toes’ of people who are already passionately involved in social justice work can be detrimental to the research relationship and perceived value of the research. Thus, I contend that the job of que(e)rying extends beyond processes of data collection, analysis, and presentation. It may also require research to aid in the development of organizational forms that privilege critical sociological discourses for generating social justice and collective action strategies.

Other limitations pertain more to project framing and design. As with any comparative research, my project continually challenged me to resist falling into overly simplistic binary

frameworks to articulate my findings. Taking note of the “outliers” in my research was an important task, if only for the direction they inspired for future research and analysis. For instance, while I detected a strong pattern in the use of family discourse to make sense of collective life and internal relations at Hope, some members drew on family and/or community discourse as a “contrast structure” against which to critique what they saw as the weakness of interpersonal relations within their churches. However, these and other submerged family discourses can be an important vehicle for imagining techniques for promoting cultural innovation or generating organizational forms more conducive to a relational politics of LGBTQ social justice.

The Significance of “Affirming” Discourse and Practice

Many of the findings presented above also highlight the importance of in-depth investigations of the obstacles faced by UU churches (and other organizations) that have struggled to entice congregants to participate in their religious and social justice activities. Many of these obstacle lie at the core of the denomination’s liberal theological platform, where its individualist principles of religious and intellectual freedom collide with its need for group membership and collective practices of worship and social action.

Given the prominence of the UUA’s Welcoming and Affirming Congregation Program, it is no surprise that congregants positioned religious inclusion as a central interest of LGBTQ social justice, placing less emphasis on other social actions or modes of participation. However, more attention should thus be paid to developing meso-level indices of social movement success that pertain to groups’ internal changes (e.g. Rao, Morrill, and Zald 2000). For instance, my analysis of the discourses underlying congregants’ usage of Welcoming repertoires suggested

that locally embedded church discourses resonated more to the frame of Welcoming than to the Affirming frame. Welcoming discourses were already embedded in both churches; at Hope, via longstanding negotiations over the moral boundaries of inclusion and religious diversity in the congregation; and at Hillside, by the theological and community repertoires that placed value on hospitality and service. Within the discursive space of Hope and Hillside, in other words, *Welcoming* became the “master frame” for the program, with *Affirming* being all but erased from program discourse.

This re-framing strategy had fairly significant implications for churches’ collective practices that, without sufficient attention to discourse, would largely go unnoticed. The findings presented above may suggest that if the UUA incorporates internal changes to church culture via its social justice initiatives, then framing a program based partly on pre-existing discourses may do little to incite actions if it does not provoke sufficient tension between pre-existing church discourses and those introduced by the initiative. In this case, the disappearance of “Affirming”, then, may have more to do with the difficulties congregations had in enacting “affirming” discourses. Rather, the Welcoming frame invoked ‘safe harbor’ repertoires of home, comfort, and community, challenging the boundaries of acceptable church citizenship while reinforcing the already embedded discourses of inclusion, freedom, and tolerance.

Commitments and Challenges of Que(e)rying Sociological Research

Que(e)rying activism in these churches helped to reveal some of the normative impacts of embedded church discourses on congregants’ narrative of marriage equality. It also revealed the normative cultural arrangements that contributed to the production, regulation and subjection of queer bodies, identities, desires, and relationships. In this light, I believe that que(e)rying research, whatever name it may take, can develop and grow in nuance and sophistication over

time as a model for public sociological interventions both in and beyond the academe. Situated among the various branches of critical and action research, que(e)rying can also be expanded or adapted to projects in collaborative and/or evaluative research with(in) different kinds of groups working collectively to achieve goals. The next commitment for this project is to support the churches I studied by presenting them with key findings that can facilitate dialogue for more effectively achieving their organizational and social justice goals. I plan to present summaries of my findings through texts that are accessible and relevant to members of each congregation.

This project thus hopefully contributes some relevant insights about how to develop projects for generating dialog and changing vocabularies of justice and rights. The narratives through which members constructed their Welcoming Congregation left little discursive space for thinking about how sexuality impacts other social justice issues or changing the discourse from which LGBTQ congregants are seen as illustrative of church diversity. Que(e)rying research can thus also be a useful model for organizations seeking *to dis-*embed liberal theological and social justice discourses on gender and sexuality through the use of subversive discourses that disentangle LGBTQ social justice from congregations' liberal theological positions on love, work, community, citizenship, violence, poverty, disability, race, immigration, home, and family.

Hope and Hillside's "Welcoming and Affirming" narratives, for instance, drew on repertoires of diversity as a matter of individual identity. These individualizing repertoires created significant discursive obstacles to dealing with the problems of diversity, community, and social justice. Without grasping the structural and cultural dimensions of social inequality that help to secure many of the privileges many members already enjoy or the liberal theologies they espouse, the UUA will be left with few strategies for increasing "diversity" beyond just

calling on congregations to “work harder so that people of all ethnic, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds feel welcome in our congregations” (ibid.).

In her seminal work on intersectional feminist analysis, Patricia Hill Collins advocated using a “matrix of domination”, rather than additive lens for “seeing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression”. The matrix model, she argued, “fosters a paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about other oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity.” This model helps to address multiple systems of oppression as interlocking, mutually constitutive, though not mutually interchangeable. Suffice it to say that learning about structures of inequality and justice as intersecting is a central task for the denomination in order to maintain a positive outlook into the future. Equipped largely with the liberal discourses of “freedom”, “choice”, and “rights”, UU leaders continue drawing on individualizing repertoires of gender, sexuality and other social categories to address the challenge of “diversity”.

As my analysis of Hope and Hillside’s embedded discourses suggests, changes at the level of “cultural paradigms” within UU organizations are likely to be the most important as well as the most difficult to make. The salience of liberal individualism to Unitarian Universalism, as Sewell’s (2006) work highlights, is evident in its commitment to “religious freedom”. My research suggests that change at the level of organizational culture can help to produce subtle shifts that are needed in everyday and embedded church discourses and catalyze new repertoires for practicing the UU principle of “religious freedom” as a matter of “freedom for” rather than “freedom from” (Sewell 2006). Yet, the quest for increased membership and more diversity will not likely occur in UU congregations until they adopt a framework that is conducive to repertoires of *diversity culture* instead of diversity across individual identity categories.

Generating a *culture* of diversity also requires democratizing discourses and practice of

knowledge through sustained, strategic dialogue among members that goes deep into questions about how power operates in groups through multiple, intersecting structures and practices. It will also rely on key changes to organizational structures, including routine practices, structures of belonging and interactions, and structures of social relations, to name a few. Finally, it will require leaders to develop sustainable strategies for democratizing church practice that disrupt current hierarchies of knowledge, discourse, and emotion in the church and affirm and validate the experiential bases of knowledge.

From these proposed strategies, new questions emerge, such as: how can organizations that rely on the individualist repertoires of “religious freedom” and “inherent worth” instead develop discourses and practices of the coalitional self? Questions such as these should inspire public scholarship that informs responsible approaches to program development, evaluation, and management. And it should no doubt also take seriously the embodied dimensions of members experiences in social organizations; from the individual bodies of members, to the body politic underlying organization’s internal affairs, and finally, to a re-articulation of the organizational body as a participant in broader social movement initiatives.

In light of these questions and considerations, I conclude this project with a nod to the words Robert Bellah (1998) offered almost twenty years ago to UUs at their General Assembly:

“I am forthrightly asking: give up ontological individualism and affirm that human nature is fundamentally social. That would mean making "the interdependent web of all existence" the first of your principles and not the last.”

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism

- 1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- 2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- 3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- 4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- 5th Principle: The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- 6th Principle: The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- 7th Principle: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

APPENDIX B

Six Sources of Unitarian Universalism

(Unitarian Universalist Association)

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions, which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

APPENDIX C

“Welcoming and Affirming Congregation: Commitments”

- A Welcoming Congregation is inclusive and expressive of the concerns of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons at every level of congregational life – in worship, in program, and in social occasions, welcoming not only in their presence, but the unique gifts and particularities of their lives as well.
- A Welcoming Congregation does not assume that everyone is heterosexual.
 - Vocabulary of worship reflects this perception; worship celebrates diversity by inclusivity of language and content.
- An understanding of the experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons will be fully incorporated throughout all programs, including religious education.
- The bylaws and other official documents of a Welcoming Congregation include an affirmation and nondiscrimination clause affecting all dimensions of congregational life, including membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.
- A Welcoming Congregation engages in outreach into the gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities, both through its advertising and by supporting actively other lesbian, gay, and bisexual affirmative groups.
- A Welcoming Congregation offers congregational and ministerial support for services of union and memorial services for gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, and celebrations of evolving definitions of family.
- A Welcoming Congregation celebrates the lives of all people and welcomes same-sex couples, recognizing their committed relationships, and equally affirms displays of caring and affection without regard for sexual orientation.
- A Welcoming Congregation seeks to nurture ongoing dialogue between gay, lesbian, and bisexual, and heterosexual persons, and to create deeper trust and sharing.
- A Welcoming Congregation encourages the presence of a Chapter of the Unitarian Universalists for Lesbian and Gay Concerns.
- A Welcoming Congregation affirms and celebrates gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues and history during the church year (possibly including Gay Pride Week, which is in June)
- A Welcoming Congregation, as an advocate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, attends to legislative developments and works to promote justice, freedom, and equality in the larger society. It speaks out when the rights and dignity of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are at stake.
- A Welcoming Congregation celebrates the lives of all people and their ways of expressing their love for each other.

APPENDIX D

Welcoming and Affirming Congregations: Actions

- Form a broad-based Welcoming Congregation committee to offer programs and monitor progress.
- Adjust congregational bylaws and other relevant documents to include and affirmative nondiscrimination clause concerning membership, hiring practices, and the calling of religious professionals.
- Use inclusive language and content as a regular part of worship services, and provide worship coordinators and speaker with guidelines on inclusive language.
- Promote participation by the congregation's minister, religious education minister or director, president, and/or moderator in the Welcoming Congregation Program.
- Offer religious education that incorporates gay, lesbian, and bisexual life issues.
- Celebrate and affirm gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues and history during the church year (possibly including Gay Pride Week in June).
- Participate in and/or support efforts to create justice, freedom, and equality for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in the larger society.
- Provide main worship space and ministerial services for gay, lesbian, and bisexual rites of passage, such as services of union and dedications of children.
- Welcome gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons in the congregation's brochure.
- Ensure that publications, public information, and programming reflect the requested status of any individual as s/he sees appropriate; recognize lesbian and gay couples in directories, and other publications as they desire.
- Offer a congregation-wide workshop program, with follow-up opportunities for study and reflection.
- Establish and maintain contact with local lesbian, gay, and bisexual groups to offer support and promote dialogue and interaction.
- Use the curriculum About Your Sexuality.
- Advertise in the local press and/or other media that reaches the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community.
- Provide use of building space on an equivalent basis with other UU organizations when requested by members for programs and meetings of a Unitarian Universalists for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (UULGC) chapter and/or for UU Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (UUFFLG).

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