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## The Constraints of Culture: Evidence from the Chicago Dyke March

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### **ABSTRACT**

Drawing on an ethnographic study of the Chicago Dyke March, this article focuses on an instance in which a movement's ideology and identity contradict in order to advance, the theoretical question of how culture 'works'. In forming as a reaction to perceived exclusions by the national and annual Gay Pride parades, Dyke March organizers developed an ideological commitment to inclusion. This ideology affected the March in three key areas: constructing an organizing structure, establishing recruitment and outreach procedures, and engaging in framing processes. However, the Dyke March's broad ideological commitment to inclusion conflicted with organizers' narrower collective identity, which formed around and celebrated a specific type of movement participant, and thus undermined their mobilization efforts. This study suggests that organizational dilemmas can arise for movements when their culture has internally contradictory elements. It introduces new theoretical perspectives about the conditions under which cultural elements work more or less effectively.

### **KEY WORDS**

culture / gender / identity / ideology / sexuality / social movements / Gay Pride / lesbian / Swidler

## **Introduction**

**T**he Dyke March began in 1993 in reaction to Gay Pride. Pride is an annual parade held across the USA that commemorates the 1969 Stonewall Riots. Many criticize Pride for inadequately representing gays and lesbians' diversity, particularly for excluding women and people of color. The Dyke March formed as a corrective response: it was a political event celebrating women in

a movement men dominated. Dyke March also differentiated itself from Pride by aiming to serve as a broadly inclusive event, welcoming those who felt they had nowhere else to belong, such as transgender individuals. Every year in cities across the USA, the Dyke March is staged on the Saturday before Sunday's Pride Parade.

As the Saturday of the 2003 Chicago Dyke March approached, organizers grew suspicious that their event would fail to be the model of broad inclusion they hoped it would be. Despite efforts to recruit women from diverse backgrounds, they worried the March would replicate the exclusivity that caused dykes to splinter off from Pride. On the day of the 2003 demonstration, the majority of participants appeared similar to the organizers: most were young, white, urban women wearing short haircuts and t-shirts with political slogans. This was not the first year Dyke March exhibited such homogeneity. Despite intentions to be broadly inclusive, organizers acknowledged that they had unwittingly replicated the same systems of exclusion that incited the March. Why did Dyke March organizers fail to create an inclusive demonstration? How did they end up replicating the same practices of exclusion for which they criticized Pride?

Dyke March organizers did not reach their desired objective because of a tension that inhered in their movement culture. Organizers embraced an explicit ideology of broad inclusion while implicitly using the March as a vehicle to celebrate their own, narrower dyke identity, which they believe Pride organizers marginalized. As elements of their movement culture oriented around this public-private split, their ideology and identity created internal contradictions that undermined three mobilization tasks: establishing an organizing structure, recruitment and outreach procedures, and framing. In this article, we build on the work of those who demonstrate the importance of ideology and identity (Downey, 1986; D. Gould, 2002; R. Gould, 1995; Johnston and Klandermans, 1995; Wilde, 2004; Williams, 1995; Wood, 1999) within social movement organizations (SMOs) constructed around friendship networks (Freeman, 1972–3, 1975; Polletta, 2002) to investigate cultural processes within political organizing. We demonstrate how the contradictions of movement culture complicate alliance-building (Lichterman, 1995), task strategizing and execution. We therefore challenge the claim that culture is a uniform resource that helps activists reach their desired objectives (cf. Becker, 1998; Swidler, 1986, 2001). Culture can constrain when its internal elements are contradictory, especially during 'unsettled' sociopolitical moments (Swidler, 1986, 2001).<sup>2</sup>

We begin with a review of research on social movements and culture. We then discuss our methods, followed by an outline of Dyke March history, which we organize around the concepts of ideology and identity. Next, we present evidence of how a contradiction between these two elements of movement culture undermined the successful completion of mobilization tasks. We conclude with a consideration of the theoretical implications for how culture 'works' in social movements.

## Culture and Social Movements

Our investigation contributes to research that examines the relationship between organizational and cultural processes within movements (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995; McAdam, 1994; Morris and Mueller, 1992), especially within lesbian and gay movements (Adam, 1995; Armstrong, 2002; D'Emilio, 1983; Engel, 2001; Gamson, 1995, 1997; Ghaziani, 2008; Seidman, 1993; Warner, 1993). Like others before us, we adopt Wuthnow's (1987) definition of culture as 'symbolic expressive behavior' and, through an examination of ideology and identity, suggest that it includes multiple and sometimes contradictory elements.

Movement scholars have recently emphasized culture as a corrective response to extant paradigms that highlighted structural resources (Bonnell and Hunt, 1999; Fantasia and Hirsch, 1995; Johnston and Klandermans, 1995; Polletta, 1997). Compared to other subfields, the 'cultural turn' within the study of social movements has been comparatively uneven and late (see Bennett, 2007). Nonetheless, research has distilled various 'locations' (Lofland, 1995) or 'problematics' (Cohen, 1985; Gamson, forthcoming) for further inquiry such as collective identity (Bernstein, 1997; Melucci, 1989; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Stryker et al., 2000; Taylor and Whittier, 1992), ideology and consciousness (Mansbridge and Morris, 2001; Smelser, 1963), and agency, emotions, and meaning-making (Berezin, 2001; Goodwin et al., 2001; Gould, 2002; Jasper, 1998; Kane, 1997). These studies warn against neglecting cultural goals – such as building and affirming identity – that may not require a political referent such as the state (Larana et al., 1994; Meyer et al., 2002; Williams, 1995). Activism can sometimes be 'expressive' or aimed for movement members rather than the polity or mainstream society (Bernstein, 1997).

Movement scholars' interest in how culture works borrows from a venerable sociological tradition. Marx's argument (1978: 176) that the 'ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas' provided an early framework for viewing the connections between culture and class-based organizing.<sup>3</sup> Weber (1992[1930]) argued that culture-as-ideology enabled a particular type of social action, while Durkheim (1915) emphasized how groups use rituals and collective representations for self-affirmation. Following this tradition, cultural sociologists generally document how culture *works* by considering the ways people use it to meet their needs. This line of thinking makes it difficult to ask questions about the constraints of culture or 'culture failure'.<sup>4</sup> We outline research on how culture works to provide a context for our arguments.

Swidler (1986, 2001) asks how 'culture is used' and argues that 'people are better equipped for life' when they have multiple cultural repertoires, tools, or ideologies on which to draw (2001: 5, 183). She does not believe that 'cultural meanings operate ... as logical structures that integrate ends and means'. Rather, they serve as 'tools or resources that cultivate skills and capacities that people integrate into larger, more stable "strategies of action"' (2001: 187) 'to solve

different kinds of problems' (1986: 273). Swidler refers to 'skilled users of culture' (2001: 277) and argues that 'ideology serves interests through its potential to construct and regulate patterns of conduct' (2001: 280; see also Walzer, 1974).<sup>5</sup>

Becker (1998) builds on Swidler by proposing that culture 'works' when applied to solve organizational problems. She argues that pastors used ritual, formal leadership changes, and a literature of church growth that emphasized local identity, to sustain their congregations while becoming more diverse (1998: 452). They engaged in 'the intentional and strategic manipulation of explicit culture to achieve their new goal' (1998: 452). In Becker's terms, culture 'worked'.

Some movement scholars, particularly those interested in framing and frame alignment, also view culture as a malleable resource that can be put to work. Taylor and Whittier (1995: 168) argue that 'frames are not only meaning systems but also strategic tools for recruiting participants'. Framing itself is 'an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction' (Benford and Snow, 2000: 614; see also Goffman, 1974; Snow et al., 1986; Steinberg, 1998; Williams, 1995). Alignment theorists generally focus on how frames, as cultural resources, facilitate goal attainment ranging from recruitment to broad-scale social change. Beisel (1997), for example, demonstrates how Anthony Comstock led a successful censorship campaign by drawing on cultural meanings (and images) such as the innocent child and the scandalous nude that evoked concern about the sanctity of the family. Klawiter (1999) similarly demonstrates how breast cancer awareness movements successfully employ symbolic representations of the cause or impact of the disease. These and other scholars argue that frames comprise bundles of ideologies that activists use as cultural resources.

Those who work within the Swidler-Becker tradition generally treat culture as a malleable resource and emphasize its enabling features. Some contend that culture works by satisfying identity, emotional, political or financial needs rooted in different social positions (Alexander, 2003; Bourdieu, 1984; Bryson, 1996; Davis, 1983; Erickson, 1996; Ferree, 1994; Griswold, 1987; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2002; Peterson and Kern, 1996; Radway, 1984; Snow and Anderson, 1993). Others focus on the use of culture for task execution and to reach organizational objectives (Anand and Peterson, 2000; Barley and Kunda, 1992; Creed et al., 2002; Friedland and Alford, 1991; Mohr and Duquenne, 1997; Star and Griesemer, 1989).

The culture-as-resource tradition prompts attention to culture's successful uses and frames agents as rational, utilitarian, and instrumental. Swidler's toolkit metaphor tells us more about how people successfully use culture than its conditions of constraint. But actors may not always be so rational, and they may experience a conflict of interest between their stated (public) and unstated or unacknowledged (private) intentions. Under what conditions can people use culture less effectively? To answer this, scholars have recently argued that a toolkit metaphor that uniformly emphasizes culture's instrumentality may obscure its constraining effects. Schudson takes particular issue with this, observing that for Swidler, 'culture is a resource for social action more than a structure to limit social action' (1989: 155). He elaborates:

Sometimes culture 'works' and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes the media cultivate attitudes, sometimes not; sometimes music transforms or transfixes, sometimes not; sometimes ideas appear to be switchmen, sometimes they seem to make no difference; sometimes a word or a wink or a photograph profoundly changes the way a person sees the world, sometimes not. (1989: 158)

Schudson is interested in 'the conditions that are likely to make the culture or cultural object work more or less', and calls for further exploration of this topic (1989: 160).

Some movement scholars have followed Schudson's lead and attended to culture's *constraints* rather than its strategic and successful *uses*. For example, Downey's (1986) study of the anti-nuclear power movement addresses the relationship between ideology and organizational dilemmas in the Clamshell Alliance. He suggests that ideology can generate internal organizational challenges by 'constraining the set of resources and strategies available to a social movement organization' (1986: 371). Ideology can undermine strategic action. Similarly, Heginbotham's (1975) study of efforts to Westernize or 'modernize' Indian agricultural practices reveals how conflicting cultural traditions (e.g. Dharmic, British colonial, Gandhian, and community development) can produce 'far-reaching' organizational problems (1975: 52). Like Heginbotham, Lichterman (1995) studied how cultural conflict can create organizational problems. His study of multicultural alliance formation in the environmental movement revealed that internal factors such as how movement members define 'community' can impede coalition work despite the existence of facilitative ideologies. Wood (1999) builds on this by explicating the heterogeneity of movement culture and how this can complicate political organizing.

Finally, Polletta (2002) and Wilde (2004) both isolate the effect of consensus decision-making on organizational effectiveness. Wilde argues that the 'progressive outcome' of the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church was rooted in the relationship between organizers' 'cultural understandings' and the environment in which they implemented them (2004: 576). Polletta (2002: 3) proposes outright that 'culture constrains strategy'. She shows how the same organizational form had divergent meanings for different protest groups based on the 'observable social relationships' or 'associational models' (e.g. religious fellowship, tutelage, and friendship) in which they were grounded.

These studies underscore the importance of studying group culture, or 'idioculture' (Fine, 1979; Ghaziani and Fine, 2008), as well as of redirecting the study of culture away from an analysis of its enabling characteristics and instead toward conditions that potentially undermine its successful use.<sup>6</sup> We draw on both culture-as-enabling and culture-as-constraining perspectives to understand why the Dyke March failed to reach its stated goals despite attempts strategically to employ cultural resources (see Becker, 1998; Mansbridge, 1986; Stevens, 2003). We demonstrate how a contradiction between two elements of movement culture – ideology and identity – undermined the successful execution of organizational tasks within a friendship network.

## Methods

Sociological scholarship has generally neglected lesbian or 'dyke' (in our informants' language) political organizing. Our ethnographic study began in April 2003 when we attended a Dyke March fundraiser, spoke with key organizers, and requested permission to attend planning meetings. They invited us to attend a meeting where we explained our interest in observing their planning process, and asked for permission to observe their meetings. The group responded warmly, telling us they had spoken about the need for a study of a Dyke March.

From early April until the end of June when the March took place, we observed planning meetings (weekly, for the most part), which lasted on average two hours each, and fundraisers. We attended the Dyke March and post-March rally. We supplemented observations with formal, one-on-one interviews with all nine organizers of the 2003 March. Interviews were recorded and lasted one to two hours each. Our interview protocol was divided into four components: personal background; history and philosophy of the Dyke March; organizing; and comparing the Dyke March with Gay Pride.

We transcribed and coded each interview along four themes: identity, ideology, mobilization tasks (organizing, recruitment, and framing), and references that linked cultural elements to the mobilization tasks. We used a 'retroductive' coding scheme that alternated between a priori (i.e. theoretically established) and inductive codes (Ragin, 1994) to balance concerns of reliability and validity (Stemler, 2001). Following principles of cultural analysis, our inductive codes relied on study participants' language rather than codes 'superimposed by the analyst' (Griswold, 1987: 1096).

In addition to ethnographic observations and interviews, we collected newspaper clippings for two weeks prior to the March from the local and national gay presses. We also gathered fundraising materials distributed at events, outreach fliers posted in neighborhood establishments, and followed the organization's on-line group and listserv, which totalled over one hundred messages. We triangulated this latter data source with on-line conversations from previous years (which similarly totalled over one hundred messages) and material from 'the binder' (as organizers called it): a four-inch binder containing information pertaining to the group's history, finances, philosophy, and media appearances. After the March we conducted informal, follow-up conversations with key organizers in which they reflected on the March's successes and failures.

We turn now to a discussion of the origins of the March, paying special attention to ideology and identity. We demonstrate that contradictions between these elements of culture undermined organizers' ability to successfully accomplish three mobilization tasks, and prompted them to unwittingly replicate the very practices of exclusion that incited the Dyke March.

## Results

### The Dyke March

The Lesbian Avengers, a national organization founded in 1992 and dedicated to 'lesbian survival and visibility', launched the first Dyke March during the 1993 National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation (see also Ghaziani, 2008). The Avengers 'conduct letter writing campaigns, visibility actions, and guerrilla publicity campaigns all the while flaunting [their] lesbionic outrageousness'. They are renowned for fire eating at protests accompanied by the chant, 'The fire will not consume us – we take it and make it our own'. Twenty thousand women reportedly participated in the first Dyke March. Annual Marches subsequently materialized in US cities, typically organized by chapters of the Avengers and held the Saturday before Pride. Today, Marches take place in 55 US cities. Claims of lesbian exclusion from the gay rights movement and complaints of Pride as uniformly composed of white, affluent men whose radical politics have given way to a consumerist, party mentality fuelled the Marches' emergence.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the birth of the Dyke March, as well as organizers' concern with inclusion, reflects the unsettled field of gay and lesbian politics at a macro level (cf. Swidler, 1986, 2001).

Criticisms of Gay Pride have driven the Chicago March since its inception in 1996.<sup>8</sup> Organizers seek to succeed where they believe Pride failed, namely by modelling inclusiveness. However, they also wish to celebrate dyke identity. As we will show, their explicit inclusion ideology and implicit and private desire to celebrate their dyke identity – two integral components of Dyke March culture – often conflicted and created unanticipated organizing challenges. To set the stage, we first provide an overview of these two cultural elements.

### An Ideology of Inclusion

Dyke March organizers embraced an ideology of inclusion, that is, 'a set of interconnected beliefs and their associated attitudes [with] an explicit evaluative and implicit behavioral component' (Fine and Sandstrom, 1993: 24; see also Geertz, 1973). This ideology served as a corrective response to perceptions of Pride's exclusions of dykes and a host of others. The Lesbian Avengers created Dyke March specifically as an inclusive alternative to Pride. One interviewee told us that the Lesbian Avengers created Dyke March specifically as an inclusive alternative to pride:

[They] were sickened by the way Gay Pride was going as far as this very corporate, very male focused, very white, very large city prides ... It's men, for the most part, white for the most part, and all the floats are corporate.

Chicago organizers argue that Pride 'doesn't address racism in the queer community. It doesn't address people who have different abilities in the queer community.' They argue that 'in the Pride Parade there's been a history of bisexuality and transgender invisibility'. Dyke March organizers told us that

in an ideal world [Pride] would be a good mix of not only gay men and lesbians, but all different races, cultures, and you know different aspects of the whole world because that's the one thing about the gay community: we cut across all segments of society, and it's not represented in the parade.

Concerns about Pride's exclusion of multiple groups are essential to the existence of the March and to organizers' vision of creating a broadly inclusive queer event.

March organizers publicly promote an expansive definition of what it means to be a non-heterosexual woman that is in stark contrast to their *private* differentiation between dykes and lesbians. A flier for the 2002 March stated, 'Our mission is to make visible and celebrate lesbian, bisexual, and women-identified transgendered women's existence in the city by a public demonstration.' They speak of including 'women-loving women. Like if you love women, if you love them either platonically or what not, or you have sexual relations with them. Everyone's welcome.' The organizers seek to include women of 'all shapes and sizes and colours and belief systems and abilities', which they hope will expand diversity: 'The goal is to continue increasing and to build diversity ethnically, racially, gender-wise.' In an exemplary instance, when two Spanish-speaking organizers sought to translate a flier into Spanish they selected the most open phrase available. They chose "diverse women of sexuality" ... we kind of put the word diverse in there because we couldn't use the word "lesbian" because that isn't everyone.' According to the organizers, 'diverse women of sexuality' includes bisexuals, transgender people, lesbians, and dykes, as well as female participants of a broad age range. 'It is like a big family,' one organizer said.

Organizers specifically seek to include women of color – a goal of many contemporary social movements from environmental (Lichterman, 1995) to gay rights (Armstrong, 2002), AIDS (Stockdill, 2002), and women's movements (Ferree, 1994; Poster, 1995). They are aware that many organizers are white, using their own identity as a reference point when talking about diversity and inclusion. One said, 'You know we're doing what we can to not make it a big white dyke event. If we say that [inclusion is] what it's about and then it is just a bunch of white college girls then we're not successful.' They seek participants *unlike* themselves: 'From what I experienced last year I saw that most people, most women who were there were mostly white and I'd like to see more representation. More people of color.'<sup>9</sup> Organizers also strive for geographic diversity, aiming to include women from throughout the Chicago area: 'More people from different areas, not just from the North Side or the suburbs. Different parts of the city.' They wish to include not only women of color, but working class and poor women, who are more likely to live on Chicago's South or West Sides (where few organizers live).

Organizers' commitment to an ideology of inclusion, seen in their expansive targeting of 'women-loving women' who are unlike themselves, is at odds with their personal interest in celebrating their narrower 'dyke' identity, which they frequently reference in private settings, such as organizing meetings, social venues,

and during interviews. Said differently, organizers seek publicly to include those *unlike* themselves yet privately celebrate *their own* identity. As we will continue to see, this is one way that contradictions in movement culture are sustained. Having explored ideology, we turn to identity, a second element of movement culture.

### Celebrating Dyke Identity

Organizers implicitly wish to use the March to celebrate their dyke identity. Their identity coalesces around an understanding of themselves as ‘dykes’ in a way that links their individual and group identity (cf. Stryker et al., 2000; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). This type of identity construction facilitates membership in an ‘imagined’ and ‘concrete community’ (Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 299) while affirming ‘the social roles they enact’ (Ghaziani, 2004: 277).<sup>10</sup> Organizers’ commitment to their dyke identity sometimes contradicts their ideology of inclusion. The desire to celebrate dyke identity emerged from organizers’ ‘open reaction [to] the sexism in the Pride Parade’. While meeting agendas and other documents suggest efforts to redress Pride’s exclusion of *multiple groups*, interviews and observation of meetings revealed that organizers remain attentive to Pride’s *particular* exclusion of dykes: ‘[Pride’s] a celebration of mostly boys. I mean, it *is* in Boystown [the colloquial name for Chicago’s gay neighbourhood], and there are a bunch of naked white boys on floats.’ Another echoed, ‘It’s really boy-based.’ Organizers of the 2003 March expressed discomfort with ‘the male domination of [Pride] – the women not being recognized in Pride events as much as the male contingent.’ They criticize Pride for being ‘very male oriented and male dominated and patriarchal’ specifically for limiting ‘dyke visibility’.

Organizers simultaneously wish to be inclusive and to see themselves represented in the March. One interviewee captured this sentiment with an almost Biblical undertone: ‘[Dyke March] was ... something we wanted to create in our image. Pride is created in other peoples’ images.’ Another interviewee remarked, ‘[Dykes] want to be visible. They want to be seen. They want to be counted. They want to have their voices heard.’ Yet another said, ‘I believe in what Dyke March is about ... I believe in [dyke] visibility on its own ... visibility is wonderful.’ According to informants, Pride marginalizes dykes. In response, Dyke March seeks to make visible and celebrate dykes.

This begs the question of what organizers intend to celebrate when they refer to ‘dyke identity’. Who, in other words, is a ‘dyke’? While organizers publicly define ‘dyke’ in expansive terms consistent with their vision of producing an inclusive event, they privately reveal a narrower definition. They articulate a dichotomous relationship between dykes and lesbians at odds with their mission statement. The organizers, most of whom live in Chicago, associate *lesbians* with the suburbs: ‘There are these suburban lesbians that don’t consider themselves dykes, who only consider themselves lesbians.’ For organizers, ‘suburban’ indicates values distinct from their own: ‘Lesbian I usually associate with suburban, kind of more traditional ... When I think of lesbian, I think of this

sporty suburban woman who drives SUVs and [is] otherwise pretty socially conservative.' In this way, they view 'dykes' as more politically active: 'Dyke is more political. It's more out there.' Another added, 'I like when women are bad ass, when they go out there and [are] like "Yeah, we're women" you know, "Check us out." And they're using a tough word for it. It's a tough phrase. I like that ... It's politically very like "arrrrr"!'

According to our informants, dykes are also either masculine or androgynous in appearance: 'Dykes are usually more gender queer themselves ... like you can have very butch looking lesbians, but you know they have ironed shirts and maybe at work their hair can still be considered feminine.' Dykes are also younger than lesbians: one referenced 'a generation before us who are very lesbian identified'. Another said, 'When I think of lesbian I think of someone older ... [who wears] fanny packs and has a partner ... Dyke is younger, more of my generation.'<sup>11</sup> In this way, organizers celebrate a dyke identity that reflects their *own* identity as politically radical, young, urban women who appear androgynous or masculine. This, of course, contradicts with their ideological commitment to inclusion.

In the private sphere (e.g. personal interviews and organizing meetings) March organizers frame the event as an opportunity to celebrate and strengthen their dyke community: '[to] see just how big and strong and great our community is.' Another said, 'It's really amazing when you get down there and there are so many women in one spot.' An organizer explained how the March *reinforces* local friendship networks:

[Y]ou can feel comfortable knowing it's just about a bunch of dykes getting together ... and shows a real community ... [I]t shows me that there is a community, and I feel like I'm actually part of the community being part of the Dyke March. And I think that a lot of people who feel that way are in attendance: that wow, there is this community out there. We do exist ... And so to see *several thousands of thousands* of women marching together is a great thing. (Emphasis added.)

The organizer's words about 'several thousands of thousands of women' underline the significance for her of celebrating a seemingly expansive dyke identity. In fact, a substantially smaller number of women attend the March than she estimates: in 2003, approximately 500 people marched, and organizers reported that this was a larger turnout than in previous years.

### The Constraints of Culture

Above we documented organizers' ideology and identity, the two elements of movement culture on which we focus. We have shown that organizers have two primary goals: their public ideological commitment to inclusion and their personal interest in celebrating a narrower dyke identity. We now turn to how these elements contradicted one another as organizers embarked on three mobilization tasks: constructing an organizing structure, establishing recruitment and outreach procedures, and framing.

### Organizing Structure

Dyke March activists mobilize a early feminist rhetoric of egalitarianism (Taylor and Rupp, 1993; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Whittier, 1995) and seek to use a non-hierarchical, participatory democratic organizing structure described by one as ‘a grassroots organization. It’s a feminist-type organization. It’s anti-patriarchal. There’s no leader. Everyone has a voice.’ This vision is at odds with a second impulse: to use what many organizers view as a more efficient, hierarchical organizing structure that they believe would better help them reach their goal of inclusion. Their friendships – rooted in common identification as dykes and mostly as white, middle class, women – prevented others *unlike* them from participating in the organizing process. This is consistent with Polletta’s (2002: 4) finding that ‘Friendship’s tendency to exclusivity and its aversion to difference’ can make it difficult for ‘activists to expand their group beyond an original core’ (see also Freeman, 1972–3). In contrast to what others have found, however, friendship impeded the adoption of a more efficient hierarchical structure (cf. Clemens, 1994). Specifically, a narrow dyke identity supported by an insular friendship network undermined the adoption of an organizing structure that informants believed would facilitate inclusion by supporting more expansive and efficient outreach efforts.

One organizer commented on the tension between adopting an ‘efficient’ hierarchical structure and relying on consensus:

There seems to be a hierarchy. I think one of the organizers has said as much. She’s like, ‘If you’re gonna get anything done, you have to take charge and tell people what to do and there has to be a couple people in charge and other people who just kind of you, you delegate to.’ And I was like, ‘It’s not very empowering!’ People don’t really learn so much from that.

To balance these competing drives, organizers adopted a ‘modified egalitarian structure’ that utilized ‘point persons’ to facilitate meetings and coordinate information. Organizers used this strategy to balance dual desires of egalitarianism and hierarchy: ‘We kinda realized that all having your own view, and all having your own word and no real leader just wasn’t working. It could be very frustrating. Trying to be inclusive of every single idea is very, very frustrating.’ Another organizer concurred, ‘Sometimes there’s an idealism, a theoretical like feminist operative, like everything’s egalitarian and everything’s equality, like, sort of like idealistic – non-real world type stuff.’ Friends who share an identity can become caught between an organizing structure they believe will meet their ideological goals, and one that complements the norms of their friendship group.

Another organizer provided a more extensive explanation for the tension between egalitarianism (which complemented their feminist commitments) and efficiency (which they believed they needed to enact their ideology of inclusion):

The organizing initially was very the *theory of inclusion*, like theories of how to do things – and no discussion about exactly what needed to be done by each member

of the group to accomplish this goal – when you’re actually trying to plan a huge event, it wasn’t a very effective way to be doing things – there’s a lot of like pow-wowing and a lot of throwing things around the table and brainstorming. But there’s just not a lot of action. (Emphasis added.)

Others agreed, ‘We can’t be doing a lot of like – theories of inclusion and whatever. We practically have to plan an event with 3000 women plus on a city street, shutting down the city, taking the street, taking over the lake.’ Another said, ‘I get very frustrated very easily with the intellectualism of organizing things with lesbians – everyone has their own idea about what they want – everyone ends up fighting about that until two weeks before the event and then everyone’s like, “Oh my God! What do we need to do?”’

Dyke March organizers’ homophily, friendship networks, and shared identity also excluded those *unlike* them from the organizing process. In 2003, most organizers were white, 20-something, college educated women, many were also students at a Chicago-area private university. In brainstorming sessions, organizers often invoked criticisms of the feminist movement’s exclusionary practices they had studied in women’s studies classes. The group did include two Latinas, one of whom regularly attended meetings, although she did not ‘feel very comfortable coming or very welcome’, and one Asian-American woman.

Some who were *not* part of the organizing committee perceived the organizers as a homogeneous group of insular friends who did not wish for others to participate. Despite their insistence that anyone could participate, one organizer wondered how ‘open’ the committee was since ‘all of our friends are organizing’. Inadvertently, the organizing committee reproduced itself and its identity, thereby exacerbating the distance between their ideological commitment to inclusion and the celebration of a narrower dyke identity. Commenting on a conversation she had with planning group members, an organizer told us:

A friend of mine had said, ‘I don’t feel comfortable here as a woman of color speaking. I don’t feel like my voice is heard.’ And they [the other organizers] were like, ‘What are you talking about? Your voice is heard.’ They weren’t really listening to her. And that’s when everything kind of came up, and people were like, ‘It’s not our community. It’s not representing everyone. People don’t feel comfortable contributing.’

It is not uncommon for activists to reproduce group boundaries, although they often do so unconsciously (Lichterman, 1995). This example illustrates that organizers’ homophily can undermine task execution even when they are aware of it.

The few dykes of color on the planning committee felt pressure to be nodes of representation. One organizer of color remarked, ‘My voice is a voice that’s lacking.’ She elaborated, ‘Like, being brown, being poor – and sometimes identifying as trans[gender]. I think there needs to be more exposure with all those identities.’ The issue of color is acute for all organizers. One captured this by saying, ‘It worries me that Dyke March is the alternative to Pride, but in the white woman tradition ... You have your occasional anomaly, which would be me, mainly, who would pop in and be like, “What about color?” And everybody’s like, “That’s nice. You organize it.”’

Despite much talk about holding Dyke March meetings in varied Chicago locations to make the March accessible to more diverse women, organizers held all meetings either on Chicago's North Side in Andersonville (the city's most 'lesbian-friendly' neighbourhood, whose residents are predominately white and middle class), or at their private university in a prosperous area. This impeded the inclusion of Latinas and African-Americans, whose populations cluster in the city's West and South Sides. It also reduced the likelihood of working class or poor women participating in planning meetings, given the affluence of the neighbourhoods in which organizers met, and limited public transportation between Andersonville and parts of Chicago with higher concentrations of poor and working class people of color (the West and South Sides). This may have sacrificed bridges to the very women they sought to include. One organizer said, 'We keep saying: "Well, this is where we're having our meeting and this one place in the city could *keep people away* who are not geographically near that place in the city.'" (Emphasis added.)

The above section highlighted the tension between Dyke March organizers' ideology of inclusion and their identity – a tension that an insular friendship network reinforced. On the one hand, organizers wished to include those unlike themselves and adopt an efficient (in their minds, hierarchical) organizing structure to ensure effective outreach. On the other hand, a group of friends with a common feminist commitment to egalitarianism assembled the event, which made hierarchy uncomfortable. Although organizers sought to be inclusive, their feminist commitment to egalitarianism and their friendship network – predicated on their shared dyke identity – impeded their ability to achieve this goal.

### *Recruitment and Outreach Procedures*

Organizers viewed outreach as a key strategy for creating an inclusive event. However, as this section shows, their homophily again conflicted with their desire to be inclusive. Organizers' primary outreach strategy was to attend lesbian bars in parts of the region they do not typically visit, such as the South Side and the suburbs. At the bar, organizers would distribute fliers and talk with women about the March. While outreach had the potential to attract new participants, organizers were aware of two weaknesses. First, they conducted most of the outreach at bars rather than through overtures to other organizations, compromising the formation of formal networks and alliances that could help them produce an inclusive event. Second, some were uncomfortable or unenthusiastic about spending evenings at suburban or South Side bars where they were unlikely to encounter others who shared a similar dyke identity. Given organizers' differentiation between 'urban dykes' and 'suburban lesbians', many outreach endeavours required socializing with those they regarded as dissimilar. The perceived differences between organizers and their 'others' may have discouraged an acknowledgement of commonalities required for coalition building.

Organizers were aware that their ideology-identity conflict undermined outreach and in response took remedial steps. For example, they translated fliers into

Spanish to draw more women of color. Some organizers, however, thought this was not enough: '[There] needs to be a more year-round process of inclusion. We should have been reaching out to Amigas Latinas the entire year – we need to, throughout the year, send people – not even organizers, but our friends, white lesbians, should go to Amigas Latinas events.' This suggests that last-minute overtures at bars may make potential recruits question their sincerity. The strategy is also unlikely to produce enduring personal relationships that might augment their friendship network and encourage attendance of the very groups their ideology directs them to include. Another argued that recruitment required organizational affiliation: 'What it needed to be like was, "Two of you are going to go to an Amigas Latinas event and talk to them." Or, "You guys are going to go to an Affinity [Black Pride] event and talk to them." None of that was happening.' Organizers made few excursions to South Side lesbian bars popular with African Americans. Instead, much outreach was at lesbian bars in the suburbs since organizers were keenly aware of 'suburban lesbians' as distinct and as absent from the March. Again, the tension between ideology and identity undermined the successful execution of recruitment efforts, a critical mobilization task.

The group's homophily also produced logistical problems. Dyke March traditionally occurs the Saturday before Pride. While this timing is symbolically significant and likely creates an important public memory, the 2003 March was held on the same day as a Chicago African-American Pride event, minimizing the likelihood of a substantial number of African-American participants. None of the March organizers was aware of this over-lap or even the existence of a large African-American Pride celebration. An organizer told us of another scheduling conflict:

Tonight, there's a queer Black Pride [event] at Stargaze [one of the few lesbian bars in the city of Chicago] for lesbians and we have an event. Dyke March has a fundraiser. What does that say to the community that we scheduled a fundraiser event on the same night as their Pride thing? Like you can talk a good game about wanting to include, but then you schedule a benefit the same night as a black event. That's not appropriate.

Unconsciously reproduced by the homophily of their social network, even Dyke March fundraisers celebrated organizers' dyke identity at the expense of inclusion (see Green, 1997: 43).

The Dyke March is held in Andersonville, the same neighbourhood where most organizing meetings and fundraisers are held, a neighbourhood known as a bastion for lesbians.<sup>12</sup> Because most organizers live in or near Andersonville, they enjoy the feeling of 'speaking' to their neighbourhood through the March, of making their everyday presence known. 'It makes this neighbourhood aware every year of its large queer contingency,' one organizer told us. Another echoed this as well. 'I think its purpose is still to celebrate our community, and I think that obviously it makes sense for it to be in Andersonville where you know that's sort of like the high concentration of ... our community.' Holding the March in Andersonville reduces the exposure of other neighbourhoods and potential

marchers to the event – emphasizing the presence of lesbians in a neighbourhood already familiar with them. The effect is the same as holding the event at the same time as a Black Pride fundraiser: networks that could broaden inclusion are jeopardized while a more parochial dyke identity is celebrated.<sup>13</sup>

### *Framing*

The most vivid example of the constraints of culture comes from organizers' struggles with the name of the event. They worried that 'Dyke March' suggested a narrow event at odds with an ideology of inclusion. Some were concerned about what 'dyke' symbolizes in the minds of non-heterosexual women outside their peer group. One organizer told us, 'As soon as you put a name on anything, it starts to become – the name means it's for this person and not that.' The label 'Dyke March' creates a sense that the event is for a particular type of person and not for others. Despite talk about including 'diverse women of sexuality', an organizer suggested that 'by being there and walking', one was telling the world, 'Yes I'm a dyke', or 'I'm part of this.' These are narrow identity claims that contradict an ideology of inclusion.

What does the term dyke suggest, and how is it related to the name of the event? As we have argued, 'dyke' evokes a particular sexual identity or gender performance. One organizer observed:

It's funny to hear how different people see dyke, because I was talking to an older friend of mine and she was like, 'I don't know why – why would I go to a Dyke March? I'm a dyke. I don't want to meet dykes. I want to meet lesbians.' I was like, 'What do you mean?' She was like, 'You know, I'm butch. I want to meet femme girls.'

'Dyke' evokes a generational difference which also delimits the March's diversity. One organizer mused, 'We keep trying to get the March to be bigger – but I think that there are people who don't identify as dyke, and I think they see dyke as really reactionary, and I don't know how to change that. Like, I think there are older women who would never identify as a dyke and therefore are alienated by that.'

The tension between using the Dyke March to celebrate dyke identity versus including a broad cross-section of women-loving women manifested during planning meetings in which organizers debated the nature of the event. One recounted an illustrative exchange: 'We were talking about t-shirt designs, and I said that I have a friend, an ex-girlfriend actually, who is a costume designer, and I've seen her drawings. I said she could make a wicked t-shirt, you know. And one of the group members was like, "This is a *Dyke* March; we don't need to do anything that fancy.'" Marchers selected a design depicting a black boot print, an image that stereotypes dykes as androgynous or masculine, politically radical women. In this instance organizers chose to celebrate their identity – embodied in the boot print – rather than exploring the possibility of an image that might have welcomed others. This instance indicates that during moments of conflict some organizers would draw on their ideology of inclusion while

others would evoke their shared identity, exacerbating the contradiction between cultural elements (see Green, 1997).

Drawing on their concern for inclusion, some organizers worried that an identity name – ‘dyke’, in this case – welcomes some while deflecting others. ‘Identification,’ one organizer noted, ‘is so limiting.’ Yet the organizers did not change the name of the March. To make the March more inclusive, organizers would have to recraft the image of the event. This is an exceedingly difficult task that requires the conciliation of a contradiction that emerges in every mobilization task. Organizers could rename the event, potentially attracting new constituents. But this raises new concerns: ‘The only problem [with renaming] is because it’s so known as that – it’s been that for so long – you lose that association and so that can be challenging.’ Naming is a double bind: it can attract new adherents while losing the association that sustained the event. It can also threaten the meaning of the event that drew organizers in the first place. To change the name would undermine organizers’ *implicit* desire to celebrate dyke identity.

The question of whether the image of the March can be separated from organizers’ identity extends to concerns over the event’s size and growth. ‘There’s just been an underlying desire to make it bigger,’ one organizer observed, ‘but the threat is also that if you make it too big, it will eventually become like everything else, become like other pride stuff.’ Another shared her feelings about the inclusion of gay men and straight people. She worried that ‘once there’s too many people it just stops being about the main community’. Organizers’ goal is to prevent the March from becoming ‘like everything else’. Of course, this contradicts their objective of increasing diversity. Inclusion and event size traverse a fine line. An organizer shared her feelings about the inclusion of gay men and straight people, worrying that ‘once there’s too many people it just stops being about the main community.’

Popular cultural images of dykes and of the March may be the greatest impediment to an inclusive event. Despite their ideology, organizers take great pleasure in celebrating popular conceptions of what it means to be a dyke – especially those images of dykes as politically radical. In Durkheimian (1915) fashion, they at once celebrate, reflect, and instantiate themselves. They are women who ‘have a word for dyke’, and who are enmeshed within an insular network of educated, leftist, middle class, white, lesbians who live in the same area. While they recognize multiple strategies to ensure inclusion in their organizing structure and outreach procedures, they are less certain how to proceed with the image of the event.

In sum, although broadening the Dyke March is consonant with organizers’ ideology of inclusion, it threatens their narrower dyke identity. Retaining the name prevents some from participating in the March because they do not identify as ‘dykes’ or they are uncomfortable with the implied politics. Inclusion and identity are in contradiction. Changing the name to include a broader constituency threatens the organizers’ identity. Retaining the name permits this celebration, but compromises inclusion. Organizers are paralyzed by this contradiction, and the net effect is the undermining of their goal of inclusion.

## Conclusion: How Culture Works (or Fails) in Social Movements

Despite their best intentions, Chicago Dyke March organizers replicated the same practices of exclusion that spawned the March's inception due to a contradiction that inhered in its movement culture. Organizers' pursuit of an explicit (public) ideology of inclusion conflicted with their implicit (private) celebration of a narrower dyke identity. This created challenges in their organizing structure, recruitment and outreach procedures, and framing processes.

It is not inevitable that elements of movement culture will contradict. Four factors account for why this happened during the 2003 Chicago Dyke March. First, organizers publicly defined inclusion as the representation of those *unlike* them, i.e. those they imagined to be most socially distinct from themselves.<sup>14</sup> This definition emphasized the divide between their desire to include all 'women-loving women' (as a corrective response to Gay Pride) and their self-perception of being vanguards of their group (rooted in their friendship network). Second, organizers seldom communicate with one another their desire to celebrate dyke identity in the context of the March. The implicit nature of this narrower identity celebration prevented organizers from unifying celebration and inclusion. Third, organizers' uncomfortable realization that their identity and ideology conflicted, promoted paralysis and diverted energies away from reconciliation strategies. Finally, the organizing group's homophily ensured that members unconsciously reproduced in-group boundaries. Any one of these individual factors may not have created the organizational problems the Dyke March faced. In concert, however, they provide one mechanism for how culture can constrain organizational tasks.

Our data suggest that organizers, while largely unaware of the origins of their problems, are nonetheless aware that they exist. They recognize they should meet outside Andersonville and that fundraisers should not conflict with events of groups they wish to include. Contra Lichterman's findings, Dyke March organizers did create 'organizational mandates' (1995: 525) to redress their concerns – yet often failed to follow through. This indicates the power of cultural contradictions, and raises questions about the malleability and strategic deployment of culture.

These results speak theoretically to how culture works, that is, how people use systems of meaning to accomplish their objectives (see also Ghaziani, 2008; Ghaziani and Fine, 2008). According to Schudson (1989: 155–6), scholars typically characterize culture in one of two ways. Some argue that people use culture to accomplish their objectives (e.g. Swidler, 1986, 2001), while others see it in less instrumental, strategic, voluntaristic, and rational terms. This debate captures one of 'the biggest unanswered question[s] in the sociology of culture,' namely, 'whether and how some cultural elements control, anchor, or organize others' (Swidler, 2001: 206). Our research suggests culture can at once be a resource and a constraint and that it is internally heterogeneous (see also Ghaziani and Ventresca, 2005; Sewell, 1999). Culture may not always *work* (cf. Becker, 1998; Downey, 1986; Heginbotham, 1975; Lichterman, 1995; Polletta, 2002; Schudson, 1989; Wilde, 2004). Contradictions between elements of

movement culture – between Dyke Marchers' identity and ideology of inclusion, for example – can undermine the successful execution of organizational tasks and produce conditions for what we may provocatively call 'culture failure'.

Other movement organizations may confront similar dilemmas. Groups of men committed to ending violence against women have recently emerged and sought partnerships with battered women's shelters and rape crisis centres. Cultural contradictions may produce organizational challenges for such shelters and crisis centres as male allies seek to form partnerships with them. Women may ideologically regard men's anti-violence support as an important tool for the reduction or elimination of domestic violence, and so they may wish to include them in their organizations. However, female gender identity, as well as feminist identity, may simultaneously encourage resistance to the inclusion of men, perhaps out of a desire to protect 'women-only space'. As with the Dyke March, an (anti-violence) ideology that encourages inclusion may contradict an identity-based desire to resist inclusion. This anecdote illustrates the theoretical generality of our findings, and we present it to encourage others to explore the contradictory and sometimes constraining elements of culture.

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## Notes

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- 2 Scholars across sociology, psychology, anthropology and literary studies have evoked the general term 'constraints of culture' (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993; Schwartz, 2000; Sokefeld, 1999). We use it here in conversation with theories about the variable effectiveness of how culture works.
- 3 As Griswold (1994: 29) notes, Marx's argument can be read as an acknowledgement that culture is a product of economy and class, or as suggesting a less deterministic relationship between culture and structure. Similarly, Wuthnow regards the classical theorists' approach to culture as 'subjective' – as relating culture to the 'objective features of social structure' (1987: 34), rather than as a fundamentally independent entity. We do not wish to advocate for either view here. Rather, we point to the ways some students of culture, and subsequently those who approach social movements with a cultural framework, have adopted a reading of early sociologists that attends to the constraining and enabling capacities of culture.
- 4 Schudson (1989) acknowledges that asking how culture 'works' or 'fails' may be a question some find 'bizarre, one that by the asking reveals a fundamental

- misunderstanding'. However, if we conceive of culture as the 'symbolic dimension of human activity' and link it to organizational aspects of social life as opposed to conceiving of it as a 'context', 'then the question of what work culture does and how it does it is not self-evidently foolish. Indeed, it can then be understood as a key question in sociology' (1989: 153).
- 5 While Swidler is primarily concerned with how culture *enables* action, or how individuals strategically use culture, she does acknowledge that culture may either 'constrain or facilitate patterns of action' (1986: 284).
  - 6 Data included in Ghaziani and Fine (2008) were collected by Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani. The article by Ghaziani and Fine (2008) was written after this article was completed and accepted for publication.
  - 7 Sources include interviews with Chicago organizers, <http://www-lib.usc.edu/~retter/dm.html> and <http://home.earthlink.net/~achace/avenger.html> (5/19/05); <http://www.lesbian.org/chicago-avengers/>; and <http://www.lesbianavengers.org/> (5/19/05). The phrase, 'a national organization' may be misleading. Individual Lesbian Avenger groups exist across the USA, but they do not have a formal national leadership. The organization is composed of loosely networked chapters.
  - 8 For instance, Chicago organizers report that they started the event 'in response to overt sexism as displayed in the male dominated, corporate sponsored Chicago Gay Pride Parade'.
  - 9 While these principles are a response to perceived failures of Pride, they also borrow from the values and practices of other movements, a tendency that typifies most American movements (Meyer and Whittier, 1994). Specifically, the feminist, gay rights, and transgender movements inform the goals of the Chicago March. Attention to the celebration of dyke identity also borrows from a legacy of identity movements, such as the civil rights, gay and feminist movements, and ACT UP, which sought publicly to reclaim previously stigmatized identities, and otherwise celebrate social difference (see Bernstein, 1997; Polletta, 2002; Seidman, 1993).
  - 10 On identities that coalesce around shared attributes see Cerulo (1997).
  - 11 See Whittier (1995) on cultural differences between generations of feminists.
  - 12 A 2001 Frommer's guide refers to Andersonville as a 'burgeoning colony for gays and lesbians' (Keller, 2001: 58). Similarly, the authors of *The Girls Next Door* name it as one of a handful of neighbourhoods renowned for their concentration of lesbians (Van Gelder and Brandt, 1997: 18). See also Brown-Saracino (2004, 2007, forthcoming).
  - 13 A similar conflict occurred over the inclusion of transgender women at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Organizers excluded transgender women because they did not regard them as 'women-born-women', and felt they should protect 'women-only space'. See Gamson (1997).
  - 14 On defining the 'other' in contradistinction to one's self, see Brown-Saracino (2007).

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