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Editor's Introduction

What is ethnography and why is it important? These questions are revisited and answered anew in the current issue of *The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography*. In this third issue, our undergraduate authors examine a variety of people in their lived setting focusing on diversity and tensions within gay nightclub life, religious identity in a diasporic setting, the role of an NGO in education, and contemporary radical student politics. While the topics are diverse and the research takes place across the United States, in Canada and Ghana, the observations in the field are methodologically compatible. Together these papers make visible a map of dynamic human activity and thereby expand the field of ethnography.

At the 2012 American Anthropological Association's meeting in San Francisco, members of the JUE Senior Board presented on the topic of open-access publications. We highlighted our position that innovation in disseminating research is crucial; ethnography is relevant only if it is accessible. We feel strongly that as a journal we need to make research freely available and easily available to readers. This entails independence from for-profit publishers and easy access via a PDF format that allows a static copy to be read, downloaded and printed. The journal also reserves rights to authors for their work, and readers can readily locate and read the journal since it is open-access. Most importantly, we hope many of the JUE's authors will build on their papers' findings and insights for future projects, continuing to grow the field of ethnography.

In an era of Big Data it is as urgent as ever to move past raw social categorization. The papers in this issue show how preconceived notions about social groups are challenged in daily interactions. Simultaneously, the author's papers show there is joy in ethnographic research and discovery.

See you in the field.



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Gender Differences in the Use of Gay Clubs: *A Place to Resist Gender Norms for Gay Men and a Place of Diffusion for Lesbian Women*

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on an ethnographic study of the gay dance club subculture at Flames, a popular gay dance club in a Northwest city. I spent approximately 18 hours in the field making observations and interacting with subculturalists. Utilizing the known researcher role and the participant observer role on different occasions, I conducted informal interviews using the guided conversation method. Through observing the behavior of gay men, expressed mainly through dance, I tried to understand the ways in which gay males perform gender. By engaging in feminine forms of dance to female pop music artists and openly expressing their sexuality, gay men in the dance club subculture resist hegemonic masculinity norms of the dominant culture. Gay dance clubs function as important spaces of acceptance for gay men and lesbian women. However, female heterosexual diffusion has helped push lesbian women to the periphery of the subculture, leaving them with little space of their own. This aspect of my study branches out from previous literature in the United States, which has mainly focused on gay men's experiences in gay clubs.

Keywords: Ethnography, Gender, Cultural diffusion, Gay dance clubs, Subculture

INTRODUCTION

I first became interested in the gay dance club culture when I was introduced to the scene by two of my gay friends. On Halloween night 2011, we went to a gay dance club in the Northwest that also features Drag Queen shows. Having been to a few straight dance clubs, I was pleasantly surprised with the gay club. My experience with straight dance clubs has been less than desirable. I have found that gender roles are inflexible and females are reduced solely to sex objects. At the gay club, however, I felt comfortable and accepted. I could dance and have a good time with my friends without feeling pressured to conform to stereotypical behaviors associated with femininity. Gay and lesbian couples could openly display their sexuality without worrying about homophobic insults. Following my introduction into the scene, I decided that I would study the gay dance club subculture to better understand how gay men perform gender in this space and how they interact with lesbian subculturalists.

Gay men and women have not always had access to space specifically, and explicitly, designated for homosexual get-togethers and encounters. From the early 1900s to the 1960s, police arrested and prosecuted individuals who frequented gay bars in the United States. In 1965, Northwest Oregon bar owners began hiring attorneys because law enforcement was trying to shut down their establishments (Oregon Encyclopedia 2008). New York's Stonewall Riots in 1969 marked the first time in history that gay men and lesbians fought back violently against police discrimination (Peterson 2011). This sparked a new era of gay liberation throughout the country. Gay men and lesbians started organizing in Northwest Oregon in March of 1970, following the riots (Oregon Encyclopedia 2008).

Accompanying a newly emerging freedom to express one's sexuality was the invention of disco music by Black DJs. Disco was the perfect catalyst to all night dance parties. The upbeat, soulful records featuring female vocalists encouraged gay men to feminize their dance moves (Peterson 2011, 613). Disco culture provided a safe space for gay men to express their sexual desires for one another. Toward the end of the 1970s, however, disco began to diffuse into mainstream culture, losing its value among marginalized populations. Disco was popular among heterosexuals until 1979 when it was criticized for its homosexual connotations (Peterson 2011). The backlash against disco and its link to homosexual deviancy prompted more than 50,000 individuals to gather at a Chicago baseball stadium to participate in the detonation of their disco records while chanting "disco sucks!" (Peterson 2011, 614; Blazak 2012).

After disco was laid to rest by heterosexual conservatives in 1979, and following the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, there was a cultural shift toward masculine ideals. With HIV and AIDS coming to the forefront in the 1980s, stigma of the gay male population greatly increased. The social stigma contributed to a system of hegemonic masculinity and gender norms still present in our society today. Effeminate gay men were specifically stigmatized and thought to be HIV positive. Muscular, straight-looking gay men were conceptualized as being HIV negative. (Peterson 2011).

The impact of this stigma on the gay male population changed the way gay men presented themselves. In response to homophobia, many gay men began to masculinize their dance moves and act in line with hegemonic masculinity norms of the dominant culture. Accompanying these ideals was a switch from 1970s disco dance clubs to gay male circuit clubs featuring electronica music, which were popular throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Peterson 2011, 617). The gay circuit dancer is generally muscular and has rigid, pulsing dance moves. Strict self-regulated gender codes coupled with electronica music prevent gay circuit dancers from performing feminized compositions, including sexualized dancing with a partner (Peterson 2011, 618). The gay dance club *Flames*, where I conducted most of my research, was established in the early 1980s, during the conservative era. It opened as a gay country western bar where mustached men wore Wranglers jeans and cowboy boots while line-dancing to Billy Ray Cyrus. Although it provided a different scene than the gay circuit dance clubs in the “Pink Triangle” section (see Appendix A) of the city, it was a far cry from the once feminized disco culture of the early 1970s (Oregon Encyclopedia, 2008). In fact, the club kept its country theme throughout the 1990s, appealing to the culturally closeted gay population.

In the early 2000s, after HIV and AIDS had reached heterosexual populations, fewer people directly associated the virus with gay men. During this time, there was a gradual cultural shift in attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. Gay and lesbian populations were granted more rights, such as protection against employment discrimination. Hate-crime laws were enacted to provide more punitive sanctions for individuals who committed crimes against others based on their sexual orientation (Oregon Encyclopedia 2008). Lesbians and gay men were more positively presented in the media than they had been prior to the 2000s (Peterson 2011).

Also during the early 2000s was the explosion of pop culture. Many dance club DJs traded electronica music for top 40 hits. Top 40 hits, featuring many female vocalists, seemed to complement the cultural decrease in homophobia and allowed for more feminized dance in gay clubs (Peterson 2011). By 2003, *Flames* had also changed to accommodate the new pop music culture. The hay bales and wagon wheels were traded in for a dance floor surrounded by mirrors and a 22,000 watt sound system. It currently operates as one of the city’s most popular LG-BTQ dance clubs (see Appendix A).

My original theory was informed by the notion that gay men in the dance club subculture “do gender” differently than do heterosexual males in the dominant culture. To understand this subculture further, I organized my study around four specific elements: gender roles, lifestyle, settlements, and social world (Lofland and Lofland 1995). By focusing on gender roles, I could understand how gay males in the dance club subculture perform gender. Lifestyle analysis includes the music, clothes, and dance associated with the subculture, along with the values and norms accompanying them (Blazak 2012). Studying the settlements of the gay dance club culture allowed me to understand what was important about gay dance club space and what attracted individuals to it. I also wanted to find out more about the social world of gay dance clubbers, including the ways in which they interact with lesbian dance clubbers and heterosexuals who also utilize gay dance clubs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

R.W. Connell (1992) studied how gay men either embraced or negated hegemonic masculinity. The concept of hegemony, originated by Gramsci (1971), refers to the exertion of power by subtle means (Williams 2011, 89-91). Rather than dominating someone by force, hegemonic power is achieved through consensus. Consensus is developed by our cultural institutions; schools, family, media, church, and others. The dominant culture exerts power over individuals by getting them to conform, without questioning the social order. Hegemonic masculinity can be understood as the way in which mainstream culture defines masculinity and gets individuals to adhere to this definition, not by coercion, but rather through their own consent. Individuals come to believe that things are the way they are and accept gender norms as the natural order (Williams 2011).

Connell's (1992) article mainly focuses on masculinity and gender roles among gay men. Connell states that masculinity in the dominant culture is marked by homophobia and a hostile attitude toward homosexuals in general. Homophobia is a tool that heterosexual males use to "police" each other's gender roles (Connell 1992; Peterson 2011). Lauraine LeBlanc (1999) conceptualizes masculinity in the dominant culture as the repudiation of femininity, with masculinity seen as superior to femininity (LeBlanc 1999). Thus, according to hegemonic masculinity norms, homosexual men who possess feminine attributes are seen as less masculine and therefore inferior.

Using the life-history method for his study, Connell sought to understand the personal trajectories of gay men in Sydney, Australia and how they negotiated masculinity. Connell found that in childhood, there was little evidence of gender nonconformity. Most of the men were socialized in "typical" masculine ways; they played sports, such as rugby and football, and most of them had previous sexual relationships with women (Connell 1992). However, many of the men began to have sexual attractions to other men during adolescence, which separated them from heterosexual male peers.

Around the age of 20, some of the men came to the conclusion that they were gay. In the process of "coming out," one of the men in Connell's study went to a gay dance club and another resisted hegemonic masculinity by wearing hipster jeans, painting his nails, and knitting. A few of the men embraced their gay identity as a way to freely express their sexuality. Connell concluded that overall, most of the men in his study were ambivalent to hegemonic masculinity and did not challenge the gender order. However, he acknowledged that by engaging in nonconformist sexual behavior, there is a possibility for social change in the way that gender is structured (Connell 1992).

Grant Tyler Peterson (2011) conducted a study on gay men's dance styles at the club *TigerHeat* in Los Angeles, California. I chose this article because of his focus on gay male dance choreographies in gay clubs. In fact, this was the only article I found that specifically explored the feminization of gay men's dance compositions. Music at *TigerHeat* features female vocalists, top 40 hits, and dance remixes. Performing as a go-go dancer at *TigerHeat* allowed Peterson to closely observe dance choreographies and gender expressions of gay male dancers. He conducted fieldwork in 2002; a year after *TigerHeat* first opened its doors (Peterson 2011).

Peterson found that by dancing to pop music that would generally appeal to heterosexual teeny-boppers, male dance clubbers at *TigerHeat* take heteronormative associations and

change them into gay expressions (Peterson 2011, 621). Thus, instead of seeing a teen girl dancing to Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, at *TigerHeat*, one would find gay men and Drag Queens engaged in feminine forms of dance with their gay partners. At the beginning of his study, Peterson mocked the music. However, as a gay go-go dancer, Peterson gradually found himself enjoying the pop rhythms and reclaiming the music as an important form of self-expression for gay men (Peterson 2011, 621).

Unlike the electronica music of the circuit clubs, pop music allows dancers to move more fluidly and engage with other dancers. Peterson found that gay men at *TigerHeat* performed sexual dance choreographies to pop song lyrics with other male dancers. He concluded that as society gradually shifts away from homophobia, gay men's dance choreographies become more feminized (Peterson 2011, 622). Thus, men are not restricted to perform hegemonic masculinity roles on the dance floor. Instead, they are able to express sexuality through dance in a more exposed and less stereotypically masculine way (Peterson 2011).

In order to understand more about the importance of gay dance clubs, I reviewed an article by Martin Holt and Christine Griffin (2003) that focused on identity and authenticity in the gay scene. Holt and Griffin's study was conducted in Birmingham, United Kingdom between 1998 and 2002. They interviewed 61 young adults between the ages of 17-34 and included heterosexual men and women in their sample. The purpose of the study was to understand how leisure spaces, such as bars and clubs, gave lesbians and gay men the opportunity to express their identities. They also wanted to find out how heterosexuals used these spaces (Holt and Griffin 2003).

Public space is assumed to be heterosexual space, unless otherwise specified. In these spaces, individuals are expected to conform to heterosexual norms. The result is that LGBTQ individuals often feel "out of place" in everyday life and there may be consequences if she or he deviates from heterosexual norms (Holt and Griffin 2003, 409). Thus, there is an inherent importance in creating one's own space. Lesbians and gay men have established communities and venues, such as bars and dance clubs, where they can safely be "out" (Holt and Griffin 2003; Casey 2004). In the United Kingdom, these areas are sometimes referred to as "gay villages" (Casey 2004, 447) and in the United States, as well as London, they are occasionally referred to as "Pink Triangle Districts" (Oregon Encyclopedia 2008; Casey 2004).

“LESBIANS AND GAY MEN HAVE ESTABLISHED COMMUNITIES AND VENUES, SUCH AS BARS AND DANCE CLUBS, WHERE THEY CAN SAFELY BE ‘OUT’.” (HOLT AND GRIFFIN 2003; CASEY 2004)

Holt and Griffin (2003) point out that gay bars and clubs are commonly the only public places in which lesbians and gay men can openly express their sexuality (Holt and Griffin 2003, 409). Their findings suggest that gay bars and dance clubs are perceived as places of acceptance and are utilized as an escape from the heteronormative dominant culture. However, gay bars and dance clubs are not without their own sets of codes, although these codes may differ from the ones found in mainstream culture. Two of the lesbian women in the study said that wearing ‘femme’ clothing in certain clubs elicited judgmental stares from other lesbian patrons (Holt and Griffin 2003, 412). Similarly, some of the gay men in the study stated that failing to dress up to go out to the clubs resulted in feeling like they did not belong (Holt and Griffin 2003). In other words, these are spaces of acceptance for gay men and lesbians as long as they follow gay and lesbian cultural norms.

Holt and Griffin (2003) found that many of their heterosexual participants also enjoyed ‘gay space’ and that an increasing number of heterosexual women were frequenting gay clubs. The researchers termed this concept “heterosexual tourism” (Holt and Griffin 2003, 414), in which heterosexual women and men go to view the “exotic other” (Casey 2004, 448). Mark Casey’s (2004) study focused on the ways in which queer space has diffused into mainstream culture to include a growing number of heterosexual women who frequent gay bars and clubs. Casey conducted interviews in London between 2001 and 2002 with 12 lesbians and 11 gay men (Casey 2004).

Many of the lesbians in his study stated that gay clubs have become trendy places for heterosexual women to hang out with their gay male companions (Casey 2004, 450). Heterosexual women may seek relief from the objectifying heterosexual “male gaze” that is constantly present in straight bars and dance clubs (Casey 2004, 448; Holt and Griffin, 2003, 414). Gay clubs allow heterosexual women to escape rigid femininity roles. In fact, the desire to avoid the objectifying “male gaze” for heterosexual females generally outweighs any anxiety about a potential lesbian gaze (Holt and Griffin 2003, 414).

Holt and Griffin (2003) and Casey (2004) discuss the innate problems with the diffusion of gay space. The researchers point out that it may not be as problematic for gay men, as they often are the ones who bring heterosexual female companions

into the bars and dance clubs (Holt and Griffin 2003; Casey 2004). However, it can be quite problematic for lesbians, as they become excluded from a space that was once theirs (Holt and Griffin 2003). Lesbian women may feel as though they are no longer able to express their sexuality in a way that will not be judged. Some of the lesbians in Casey’s study discussed their discomfort with the presence of heterosexual women in gay clubs and bars, stating that they were afraid straight women would think they were flirting with them (Casey 2004, 454).

Very few “lesbian only” clubs exist in the United Kingdom, London, or in the United States (Casey 2004; Holt and Griffin 2003). In my search of gay and lesbian night clubs in Northwest Oregon, I found that there are no clubs specifically for lesbians. There was a lesbian dance club years ago that shut down and re-opened recently under a different name, marketing itself as a “mixed” (LGBTQ and straight-friendly) club. Male domination of subcultural space is not a new concept. For example, LeBlanc discusses the male numerical domination in the punk subculture (LeBlanc 1999, 105-106). Female subculturalists are often pushed out to the periphery of male dominated subcultures. They are allowed to participate, but only if they adhere to norms and values defined by males (Blazak 2012).

Lesbian women in Casey’s (2004) study explained that gay dance clubs and bars are set up as male spaces. Everything from the music to the bouncers is catered toward gay men’s preferences (Casey 2004, 455). As heterosexual women began frequenting the dance clubs and bars, many lesbian women were pushed out of the subculture even further. Some of the lesbian women felt that they had been completely excluded from these establishments (Casey 2004; Holt and Griffin 2003). Casey suggests that because gay men and heterosexual women both sexually desire men, it creates a commonality and shared experience that separates them from lesbian women (Casey 2004, 453).

Although there are many articles written on studies that have been conducted with gay and lesbian populations, there are few that focus specifically on the gay dance club subculture. Peterson’s (2011) study was the only article I found that focused on gay male dance choreographies. Much of the research on gay and lesbian space, as well as the diffusion of gay clubs into mainstream heterosexual culture has been conducted in Birmingham, United Kingdom (Holt and Griffin 2003) or in London, UK (Casey 2004). My goal is to fill the gap in the research, by focusing on gender roles in the gay dance club culture and the importance of gay dance clubs to subcultural participants. My study also reveals the effects of heterosexual diffusion on lesbian dance clubbers in the Northwest.

METHODS

I chose to conduct my research at *Flames* because of its popularity among LGBTQ individuals. Prior to beginning my research, I frequented a number of gay dance clubs in the area. Some of the other clubs I visited had much fewer individuals on the dance floor. Many patrons were sitting at the bar or talking amongst themselves. At *Flames*, however, there were a much larger number of individuals in the establishment and on the dance floor. This club had also been recommended to me by a lesbian friend as a place where the younger LGBTQ crowd hangs out.

My relationship to the site was somewhere between a blank slate and a convert. Although I had been in four LGBTQ clubs prior to this one, I had no experience in this particular club. Being a blank slate allowed me to carefully observe detail, without overlooking aspects I may have taken for granted if I had visited the club prior to my research. However, having been in gay clubs before helped me “fit in.”

As a 26-year-old white female, my ascriptive characteristics were similar to those of individuals in the gay dance clubs. I was within the median age range; some individuals were younger than I and others were older. Gay dance club culture is a predominantly white subculture, as pointed out by multiple researchers (Holt and Griffin 2003; Casey 2004). As a female, I was outnumbered by men at the dance clubs. Previous research has also noted that this is a male-dominated subculture (Holt and Griffin 2003; Casey 2004; Peterson 2011). Being bisexual helped me interact with gay men as well as lesbian women because I could relate to both. While conducting research at this particular club, there were not any moments where I felt out of place.

The data site I chose was easy to get into, but was also secure. *Flames* does not charge a cover fee 363 days out of the year, which may be one of the reasons it is popular with the younger crowd. Muscular, bald headed bouncers stand outside the front door and check IDs and purses before letting people into the club. They also make sure that no one attempts to take their alcoholic beverage outside of the club. Due to the fact that the restrooms are coed, a bouncer frequently monitors both bathrooms to make sure no one is sharing a stall, as this would raise safety concerns for some patrons. At no time in my fieldwork did I witness any violence or bar fights, nor did I feel unsafe at *Flames*.

My contacts for this research were two gay male friends who are also part of the gay dance club subculture. They helped introduce me to the culture, went out with me on many nights, and were subsequently part of my sample. With these contacts, I was able to develop a rich understanding of gay masculinity and the importance of gay dance clubs for subculturalists. Entering the scene with these contacts also helped me “fit in,” as some of the other gay men at the club also brought their female friends.

I used multiple research roles throughout my fieldwork. Although I was a known researcher to my contacts and one of my bisexual female friends, I remained a participant observer or a complete observer to the rest of my participants. Utilizing the known researcher role with my contacts, I was able to ask more questions using the guided conversation method. The guided conversation method is an informal interview, which involves asking open-ended questions and allowing the participant to respond without restrictions. My contacts did not know why I was conducting research, but because my role as a researcher was known, it may have affected my internal validity. On evenings that I focused on style, dance choreographies, and music, I used a complete observer research role. I sometimes sat at the tables to the side of the dance floor at or next to the bar in order to observe participants from a distance.

The final research role that I used on some evenings was the participant observer. I danced, drank, and interacted with participants in order to make close observations. This also allowed me the opportunity of self-reflexivity, blurring the line between myself and my participants (Tunnell 1998, 214-215). By understanding my subjective enjoyment produced by participating in this subculture, I could better understand how subculturalists experienced a sense of enjoyment, as well. Through participant observation, I was able to utilize the guided conversation method to ask lesbian participants about their views on the subculture and how they felt about heterosexual diffusion (see Image A).

I entered the field initially with one of my contacts. This gave me time to make some observations about the club in general and ask him questions about his subcultural participation. On nights that I entered the club without my contacts, I brought other friends. In this setting, it was important to enter the field with at least one other person. Had I frequented the

dance club by myself, I most certainly would have stuck out, and participants may have altered their behavior, suspecting I was there for other reasons than dancing and drinking. This would have negatively affected my internal validity.

In order to accurately log data, I wrote dialogue and other observations down immediately. I kept blank paper and a pen in my purse and excused myself to the restroom throughout the evening in order to transcribe dialogue (Blazak 2012). While making other observations regarding music, style, and dance choreographies, I texted myself the information. In order to keep guided conversations natural, I wrote down questions prior to entering the field, but asked them nonchalantly and only when appropriate. I kept a field notes journal in my car so I could easily transfer notes and dialogue after leaving the dance club. In order to maintain confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for my participants and my primary and secondary data sites (Blazak 2012).

The sampling technique I employed was convenience sampling. I included subjects in my sample who were close at hand and readily available. This method allowed me to gather data from subjects nearby at my convenience. Convenience sampling is less expensive than other research methods and it is less time consuming. However, it is not without limitations. There are inherent problems with generalizability and replication. Convenience sampling is also subject to researcher bias (Babbie 2005). To minimize some of these limitations, I attempted to include subjects who I felt represented the subculture overall. For example, after multiple nights conducting research, I began to see some of the same faces. I made sure to include these individuals in my sample, as they seemed to be “regulars” in the gay dance club subculture and more representative than someone who only participates once a month.

The characteristics which informed how I made sense of my observations, and for which I coded for, involved conceptualizing data through elements such as: gender roles, lifestyle, settlements, and social world. I grouped themes of data based on these elements. At the end of my field research, I went through my field journal and color-coded each entry by its corresponding element of focus. I also included an “other” category in order to be exhaustive. After coding for these components, themes emerged from my research that helped form my grounded theories (Lofland and Lofland 1995; Blazak 2012).

Image A: Guided Conversation Questions

Gay Men

1. What do you like/dislike about gay clubs?
2. Do you like the music they play?
3. Do you have any lesbian friends?
4. How do you feel about lesbians at the gay clubs?
5. How do you feel about straight women at the gay clubs?
6. How do you feel about straight men at the gay clubs?

Lesbian and Bisexual women

1. Do you know of any clubs around here for women?
2. What do you like/dislike about gay clubs?
3. Are there always this few women here?
(asked on nights when women were greatly outnumbered by men)
4. How do you feel about straight women being at the gay clubs?
5. How do you feel about gay men at the clubs?

Heterosexual women

1. What do you like about the gay clubs?
2. Why do you go to them?

FINDINGS

My sample size included 24 individuals (approximately 14 gay males, 6 lesbian females, 2 bisexual females, and 2 heterosexual females). Their ages ranged from approximately 21 to 35 years old. The majority of my sample was middle class and 79 percent white, 13 percent black, and 8 percent Hispanic. This reflected the overall demographics of the subculture. I spent six Friday and/or Saturday nights at my primary data site, for a total of approximately 18 hours. In addition to frequenting the dance club, I also spent time at secondary data sites, such as gay bars, other gay dance clubs, and the home of my two contacts.

Gender Roles and Lifestyle: The beginning of my study was focused on observing gay men and the ways in which they perform gender. On my first night in the field, I entered with one of my contacts, a white 27-year-old gay male wearing a bright yellow zip-down sweater, a fitted dark gray t-shirt with dark denim pants and black dress shoes. We found a place to stand next to the bathrooms, just behind the dance floor. This space was ideal for observing subculturalists, as it was located in between both bars and it gave me a direct view of the dance floor. While sipping Heineken with my contact, we engaged in a guided conversation (see Image A).

Gay men in the dance club subculture perform gender differently than do heterosexual men in the dominant culture. Gay men in the dance club subculture were actively engaged in conversation with other gay men and some straight women when they were not dancing. Their body language was generally open; arms uncrossed, feet apart. At times, many of the men became theatrical, with animated movements and hand gestures. Some of the men I observed arched their backs, accentuating their backside with their hand on their hip while talking to other men.

I also observed the ways in which gay men interacted with each other. Many gave flirtatious looks out of the corner of their eyes, gazing at their partner or another patron at the dance club. Gay men who were not interacting with the dance floor often stood close together, sometimes caressing each other sensually or touching each other's chests with a gentle playfulness (see Image C). Gay men who were there with a partner engaged in public displays of affection, including deep kissing. Gender performance was much more fluid and less macho among gay men in the dance club culture.



Image B: Gay partners in the club

“Relationships are more equal. We can’t do the same thing as straight couples—we don’t have anything to go off of,” stated Eddie, a subcultural participant. This avowal implies that gay men are not confined to strict gender role performance in relationships the same way that heterosexual couples are. Gender roles for gay men in relationships tend to be more egalitarian and allow for the emergence of “feminine” traits. One similarity, between straight masculinity in the dominant culture and gay men in the dance club culture that I observed, is that both are often outgoing and competitive. Gay men in the dance club culture tend to be forward about what they want. For example, as I was sitting at a table conversing with Eddie, a young blonde haired man in a tight V-neck t-shirt walked by, tapped him on the chest, and said, “You’re cute!”

Gay men in the dance club culture are also style innovators. Many demonstrate Hebdige’s concept of bricologie (Blazak 2012), which is the repositioning of raw materials from the environment in order to change their values. On numerous occasions, I observed gay men with either low-cut or self-cut V-neck t-shirts to show off what I call pec-cleavage, which is the space between a man’s pectoral muscles. One of the gay

men I observed fashioned a white bandana into a short necktie and another cut vertical slashes into the front of his black t-shirt. One of the men in my sample wore tan colored overalls with one strap undone, no shirt underneath, and a blue bandana hanging out of his back pocket. A few of the men in my sample cuffed the bottom of their pants and paired them with black dress shoes.

Most of the clothing in the gay dance club culture is well-fitted, including stressed jeans, muscle t-shirts, polo shirts, and bright colored button-downs. Eddie stated, “Everything is tight to show off assets. It’s the same reason women wear tight clothes.” Gay men in the dance club culture wear skintight clothes to show off their bodies to other men in order to attract a potential mate or simply to get attention. All of the men in my sample had short hair; some wore it spiked, others had faux hawks, and some wore their hair with bangs pushed off to the side of their foreheads. None of the gay men I observed had visible tattoos and only one had gauged earrings. Some of the white men in my sample appeared to have a tan and one subject had a large cream-colored purse over his shoulder and wore eyeliner.

Trying out new styles and experimenting with different looks seemed to be popular among my sample. Some of the styles were criticized and others were commended. Jayson, a 30 year old Black gay male, stated, “They need to let the faux hawk go,” referring to this hairstyle being outdated. Commenting about the clothing style of gay club culture in general, Jayson stated, “People put the weirdest clothes together just to try it out and some people will catch on to it.” This helps demonstrate the importance of style in gay club culture and the innovation process.

Flames dance club played mostly top 40 hits from female pop artists. Some of these artists included Lady Gaga, Britney Spears, Nicki Minaj, and Katy Perry. The gay male DJ who mixes these hits in a booth above the dance floor played a male pop artist remix every once in a while. I spent an hour focusing on the music during which I counted one male artist; Flo Rida’s (2012) hit “Wild One,” that also features Sia (a female pop artist).

Music at the club was upbeat and remixed for dancing. Many of the lyrics were sexualized. For example, lyrics from one of the Britney Spears songs that played were: “If I said I

want your body now, would you hold it against me?” Songs were also heteronormative, with female artists singing to their male lovers. Gay men in the dance club subculture align themselves with the music, reverse the heteronormative connotation, and direct their sexuality toward their male lovers. Although many gay men enjoy dancing to this music, some wish the club incorporated a few slower songs to give them a chance to try other forms of dancing. “I wish there was more of a mixture. Gay guys don’t get to slow dance anymore. I would have some slow jams playing if I had a club,” Jayson explained.

With the music fast and the lyrics sexual, gay men in the dance club subculture perform dance choreographies often involving other men. Dance choreographies tend to be fluid and feminized with sensual hip movements in a figure-eight pattern. Dancers focus on the beat of the music and adjust their dance choreographies to fit the rhythm. Two of the men in my sample that I observed acted out their sexual fantasies on the dance floor. A blonde-haired man wearing tight jeans and a muscle shirt pushed his dance partner up against the long row of mirrors that line the dance floor and kissed him deeply. He then slid down to his partner’s knees and came back up while looking into his partner’s eyes, similar to the way a female erotic dancer would entice her male client.

I asked one of my participants about the dance choreographies of gay men and he responded: “I’m not sure why movement becomes more feminized. It may be due to gay socializa-

tion or it may be natural.” Gay men, upon entering the dance club subculture, might observe others dancing and adopt a similar style; or it may be a natural performance in which the dance club provides the outlet.

Gay men’s dance choreographies are quite different than most heterosexual men’s dance choreographies in straight nightclubs. To make a general comparison between *Flames* and a straight dance club, a gay participant and I ventured a few blocks down from *Flames* to a straight dance club I will call *Vanity*. Eddie commented on straight men’s dancing at the club, stating, “Straight men look like they’re being electrocuted.” Straight men’s dance follows the rules of hegemonic masculinity. It tends to be rigid, rough, and lacks the fluidity and creativity that gay men’s dance choreographies generally contain.

Music at *Vanity* was male dominated, with hip hop remixes and derogatory lyrics toward women. Wearing casual attire—a knee length skirt and a black, long sleeve button-down shirt, I was immensely under-dressed for the straight club. Most of the women there wore bright colored strapless dresses that ended just below their buttocks. They elongated their tan legs with four inch heels and danced with each other on top of picnic tables to Sir Mix-A-Lot’s “Baby Got Back” while men in jeans and t-shirts watched them from below. Eddie and I wanted to leave the club as quickly as we had entered. Straight women and men at *Vanity* performed gender much differently than did gay men and lesbians at *Flames*.

“ EVERYTHING IS TIGHT TO SHOW OFF ASSETS. IT’S THE SAME REASON WOMEN WEAR TIGHT CLOTHES.” -EDDIE



Image C: A gay subculturalist with a faux hawk

Settlements: Before entering *Flames*, one can tell it is primarily an LGBTQ dance club because of the rainbow flag hanging high outside the front doors. Along the sidewalk out front is a table with a cream colored awning designated for dance clubbers who smoke cigarettes and desire to escape the rain while doing so. Large, tattooed male bouncers check identification at the front door. Directly inside the club is a tall wooden rack with cubbyholes where patrons can set their drinks before going outside. Two black circular tables big enough for groups of five each are in the front next to big bay windows. Upon entering the club, the main bar has anywhere from three to five shirtless male bartenders pouring stiff cocktails and serving beer in glass bottles. Gay dance clubbers either sit at bar stools or congregate around the counter waiting for drinks or socializing with friends (see Image C).

To the right side of the bar are long leather booth-style seats against the wall paired with tall tables and chairs. Behind the main bar is the dance floor, which is full most Friday and Saturday nights between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. On the side of the dance floor is a long area of black lights with a ledge where clubbers can set down their drinks. The coed restrooms are next to this area beside the second bar in the back of the club. The women's restroom has a large sign hanging on the entrance wall stating that this space is for "women...and men who wish to sit." The sign on the men's bathroom indicates that this space is for "men...and women who wish to stand." After making observations on multiple nights regarding the general traffic in and out of these restrooms, I realized that vastly more men use the women's restroom than women use the men's restroom.

The bar in the back of the club by the dance floor is smaller than the main bar in the front. It has two television monitors, one of which allows clubbers to send text messages to a certain phone number which will then appear on the screen for everyone to see. At this smaller bar, there are usually only two bartenders serving drinks. Also, to the left of the bar, there is a small area with two tables and chairs. The dance club is attached to a lounge where individuals can sit at cushioned bar stools and metal tables and order drinks and food throughout the night.

Loud pop music blasts through 22,000 watt speakers as the male DJ in a booth above the dance floor remixes top 40 hits by predominantly female vocalists. On the dance floor, it is nearly impossible to hear someone unless she or he is shouting.

To the sides of the dance floor and by the front of the club, it is a little easier to hear one another, although the music is still blaring in these locations. Lights are dim throughout the main club and on the dance floor, but are brighter in the lounge/restaurant area. Low-hanging neon lights give a colorful ambiance to each of the bars.

Gay dance clubs are important for gay men and lesbian women for many reasons; one being that public space is still seen as heterosexual space. Although gay men and lesbians are granted more rights now than in the past (Oregon Encyclopedia, 2008), mainstream society is far from accepting gay couples displaying their love for one another in public settings. "It's difficult to go out in public and hold hands the way that straight couples do. People look at you weird." One of my participants told me about a time when he and his boyfriend went to take outdoor photos as a couple. As they were posing for a photo, people drove by honking and shouting at them out of their car windows. He also added with a sigh, "Sometimes, we just don't hold hands in public because we don't want to deal with the scrutiny." Straight individuals take these things for granted; they can hold hands and kiss in public without being judged and verbally attacked.

Gay dance clubs provide a safe space for gay men to express their sexuality. At these places, there is a general feeling of acceptance and authenticity. Gay men can be themselves, embracing their true identities without the fear of judgment. It is also a space where gay men can meet and/or "hook up" with other gay men. Jayson states, "It's our last frontier for meeting people-besides online." Eddie also talked about meeting people at gay clubs versus meeting people in public settings: "This is the only place where people know for sure [that someone is gay]. You see someone at Barnes and Noble and have to guess." Gay men can "hit on" men at gay dance clubs and know that they are gay. In public settings, it can often be a guessing game, in which a straight man may get angry if approached by a gay man.

One of my participants discussed the changes he has noticed recently with the Northwest city's gay dance clubs. He states, "[the dance clubs] here have become cliquey. People go with groups of friends. It's like that in New York too. But at the gay bars in Austin, [Texas] and Louisiana people are more open to talking even if they're strangers." I asked him why he thought this was occurring and he replied, "There's not as much need for

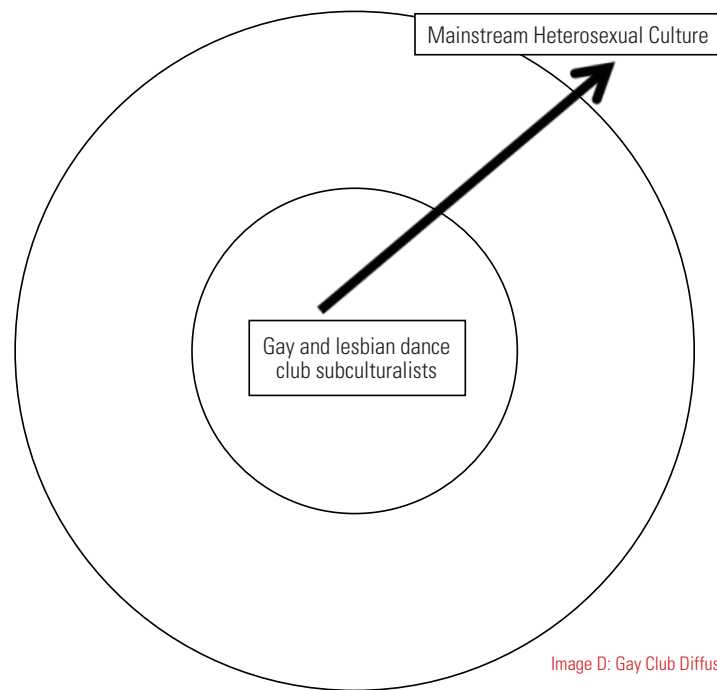


Image D: Gay Club Diffusion

it in [this city]. In the South it's necessary to have a 'gayborhood.' I've seen couples walking around here. Here it's okay to hit on someone outside [the dance club] because they aren't going to feel as awkward." He suggests that residents of liberal cities are more accepting of gay couples than are residents of conservative Southern states. Gay clubbers in Southern states may seek refuge from mainstream heterosexual culture by utilizing the gay clubs as a way to meet others. Although the Northwest city where I conducted research is more progressive than some other cities in the United States, there is still a need for gay space, as gay and lesbian couples still are not afforded the same rights as heterosexual couples.

Social World: I wanted to better understand lesbian participation in gay dance clubs and how gay male subculturalists interact with them. Throughout my research, however, I noticed there was not much interaction going on. The first night I walked into the field, I wondered, *where are the lesbians?* There was an undeniable male numerical dominance and this was a finding I noted in my field journal on multiple occasions. Gay men vastly outnumbered lesbian women on the dance floor and in the club. In fact, there was only one night out of six that I observed lesbian women outnumbering gay men on the dance floor. It was on a Saturday night around 10 p.m. and the gay men were crowded around the bar preparing to make their dance floor debut. I mentioned my observation to one of my gay male participants and he replied, "I think most lesbians don't dance. They probably like bars better." I asked two of my gay male participants if they were friends with any lesbians and they both responded "no." One of them expanded on his answer by

stating, "They're cool, but they scare me a little." "Why?" I questioned. "...Because they are abrasive. I've never had a lesbian friend before."

The more time I spent in the field, the more I noticed the ways in which lesbian women were subtly excluded from the gay dance club culture. Every shirtless bartender and bar back I encountered was male. Conducting an informal analysis online, I counted the number of days per week that *Flames* catered to gay men and lesbian women. Gay men were given eight time slots during the week in which the club was designated as their space. This included peak nights, such as Fridays and Saturdays from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. Lesbian females were limited to one night a week in which *Flames* catered to their needs. This was an off-peak night (Tuesdays) from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. I also conducted an informal analysis online of employees at this club and found that there were 12 male bartenders and bar backs and only one female bartender. There was one other female employee, working as coat check. This so-called "mixed" club was male dominated numerically, even among its employees.

I also observed a large number of straight women who frequented the dance club with their gay male companions. Around 11 p.m. most Friday and Saturday nights, the dance floor would fill up with gay men and their male or heterosexual female dance partners. One of the gay men I included in my sample looked like he had recently turned 21 and was out to have fun with a group of straight female friends. They danced together in a loose circle free from any sexual tension, while he glanced at men dancing nearby. Most of the lesbian women were on the periphery of the club—either standing near the back

by the restrooms or sitting at tables by the front door. The gay men in my sample did not seem to be bothered by the amount of straight women in the club, as many of them brought their straight female friends “for support,” as one of them stated.

A Latina lesbian female I met named Yvette with shoulder length wavy brown hair said that she liked the club because “there are a lot of people to talk to.” Yvette came from a small rural town in Washington and had only been living in the Northwest city for a few months. Another lesbian I talked with who grew up in the area had different sentiments. Lisa wore a black muscle tank top with ripped jeans and had short brown hair styled into a faux hawk. Although she had two friends at the club (black lesbian female and a trendy gay male), she came by herself and was looking to meet other lesbian women since she had broken up with her female fiancé a couple of months prior.

I approached Lisa with one of my female friends and asked if there were any clubs around for females. She responded: “Guys are everywhere. You’re not going to find a club with just [lesbian] women.” After stepping outside to make more observations, I ran into Lisa again and asked her for a cigarette to re-initiate conversation. She decided to accompany us to a more low-key bar, which was when I used guided conversation to find out her perspective on the gay dance clubs (see Image A).

In response to my question regarding how she felt about straight women at the club, she stated: “There are lots of heels and blonde hair tonight. It kinda sucks because we [lesbian women] already don’t have a space for just us and they’re taking over this too when there are lots of straight clubs they could go to.” I asked why so many straight women were going to gay clubs and she said, “It’s like they’re finding out that dancing at gay clubs is a lot better than dancing with douche bags [at straight clubs].” As we walked by multiple straight clubs on our way to the low-key gay bar, I could visually see, based upon the way males were interacting with females inside these clubs, why straight women might prefer gay dance clubs.

The straight dance clubs in close proximity to my primary data site were similar to the straight club I had recently visited with one of my gay participants. Standing outside were excessively tanned women with large breasts and mini-skirts and their tall, muscular boyfriends with spiked hair and impassive facial expressions; each of them exuding hegemonic gender norms. At the gay dance clubs, heterosexual women could dance with gay

men who were not going to exploit them or render them little more than sex objects. Heterosexual women did not have to perform the femininity game at gay dance clubs (see LeBlanc, 1999.)

The problem with heterosexual women’s use of gay dance clubs, however, is that it further pushes out lesbian women from a space that is already male dominated. While heterosexual women escape the objectifying male gaze at gay dance clubs, lesbian women wonder if there is a place left where they can feel comfortable and accepted. Lisa stated, “There are lots of straight women. I feel uncomfortable because I don’t want to hit on one and have them get upset. You just don’t know here because it’s such a mixed crowd.” Lesbians who are looking for a partner or someone to “hook up” with are finding it increasingly difficult to do in a space where it once was possible. One of my bisexual female friends had a similar problem at another gay club. She explained, “I was at [name of other club] hitting on this girl only to find out she was there with her boyfriend. I was like, ‘what the fuck are you doing at a gay club?’”

Lesbian subculturalists are experiencing the negative effects of subcultural diffusion (see Image D). Heterosexual women are discovering gay clubs as trendy places to drink and dance with gay men. During this process, the original values and meanings behind gay club culture are defused, especially for lesbian women who are not able to claim a space and feel accepted. Heterosexual men are not using the space as frequently as are heterosexual women; thus, most gay men are still able to participate in the subculture without feeling ostracized or outnumbered by their heterosexual counterparts. I asked my gay male participants about straight men at the clubs and one responded: “There is always one straight guy, but it doesn’t bother me. They think they’re gonna get hit on, but we’ll probably just make fun of what he’s wearing.” When I asked about straight women, he stated, “It doesn’t bother me [having straight women at the club]. I do get a little weirded out when I see a straight couple kissing. I’m like ‘really?’ You could do that anywhere!” This helps show some of the negative effects cultural diffusion can have on gay men when heterosexual couples enter the scene. Not surprisingly, gay men are not bothered much by heterosexual women at the clubs and many enjoy having them as dance partners.

ANALYSIS

One of the ethical concerns I had while conducting this research was misrepresentation. I spent most of my time participating in the subculture, without revealing myself as a researcher. One of my lesbian participants may have thought that I was interested in “hooking up” with her, as we spent over an hour conversing at a secondary data site. The way I dealt with these misrepresentations is that I tried to refrain from building long-term relationships with my participants. I focused on gathering the data I needed without leading anyone to believe I was interested in anything more than friendship.

My two gay male contacts are friends who knew I was conducting research, although they did not know the specifics. However, knowing my researcher status may have led them to behave differently or answer questions based on what they thought I wanted to hear. Participants in my study may have acted differently because I am a female. Gay men that I talked to may have felt less comfortable answering some of my questions about females specifically. They may have refrained from saying anything unfavorable about females, thinking that I would respond negatively. To reduce these concerns, I tried to remain neutral throughout the research. I refrained from outwardly disagreeing with any of my participants’ statements or giving my personal opinion.

Going into research such as this, there is always the issue of confidentiality. Some individuals who participate in the gay dance club subculture do not want public others to know their sexual orientation. Being “outed” can cause some gay men and lesbians to lose their families or jobs, for example. In order to respect participants’ privacy, I made sure to protect the identity of the individuals so no one could be traced back to my study. I used pseudonyms for my participants and for the primary and secondary data sites in my journals, field notes, and research paper (Blazak 2012).

During this research, I did not witness any illegal behavior, nor did I have to participate in any illegal behavior. I did, however, engage in drinking and on one occasion, I smoked a cigarette in order to initiate conversation with a lesbian woman who was smoking. Participating in these activities helped me “fit in” with the subculture and obtain data. Due to the fact that most individuals were drinking at the club, I would have looked like an outsider if I had not consumed alcohol, as well.

Similar to the gay dance club *Tigerheat*, where Peterson (2011) conducted his research, I found that the gay dance club where I conducted my research played predominantly female pop music artists. Gay men performed dance choreographies to heteronormative lyrics, therefore reversing the meaning of the song and reclaiming it for their own sexual expression (Peterson 2011, 621). Gay men’s dance choreographies also became more feminized, with fluid dance styles, rhythmic movement of the hips, and engagement with a partner (Peterson 2011). Unlike most of the gay men in Connell’s (1992) study, I found that gay men in the dance club subculture resist hegemonic masculinity in more ways than simply being gay. Connell (1992) states that homosexuality is the negation of hegemonic masculinity. I argue that gay men in the dance club subculture resist hegemonic masculinity through feminized forms of dance to female pop artists, while overtly expressing their sexuality with other gay men. They do this, however, in a space that is male dominated and sectioned off from mainstream society.

Throughout my research, I observed the ways in which gay men perform gender differently than do heterosexual men in the dominant culture. Not only are gay men in the dance club culture style innovators, they also exhibit Hebdige’s concept of bricolage. Gay male dance clubbers express feminine forms of body language, actively engage in conversation with other gay men, and exchange flirtatious glances with each other. Gender performance is much more fluid and involves sensual and playful touching on and off the dance floor. Dance styles often include acting out sexual fantasies and sexual seduction (Peterson 2011, 622). Gay men in this subculture wear well-fitted, revealing clothing to display their bodies sexually for other men. Styles of clothing become more feminized with low-cut V-neck t-shirts to show off pec-cleavage, for example.

Similar to Holt and Griffin’s (2003) study and Casey’s (2004) study, the gay dance club subculture I observed was predominantly white and middle-class. Although there were Hispanic and black participants, these ethnicities were underrepresented in the gay dance club subculture. This may reflect a general trend of gay dance clubs in Western culture, as Holt and Griffin conducted their study in Birmingham, UK and Casey conducted his study in London, UK and both presented similar demographics (Holt and Griffin 2003; Casey 2004).

I also found that gay dance clubs are important places for gay men. They utilize gay dance clubs as a way to be themselves and embrace their sexual identities. The more homophobic a dominant culture, the greater the need for gay clubs to provide an escape from heteronormative associations within public space (Peterson 2011; Holt and Griffin 2003). Similar to Holt and Griffin's (2003) findings, I also noted instances in which style in the gay club culture was used either to "police" gay identities or distinguish homosexual identity from heterosexual identity. Lisa, one of the lesbian participants in my study distinguished herself from straight 'femme' women based on differing styles and reacted negatively toward them. This was similar to how lesbians in Holt and Griffin's study reacted toward 'femme' women (Holt and Griffin 2003, 411-413). Gay male participants in my study also distinguished themselves from straight men based on clothing, defining what was fashionable or outdated.

As more heterosexual females frequent gay clubs, lesbian women are further pushed out of the scene. Results from Casey's (2004) study and Holt and Griffin's (2003) study indicate that gay men dominate the gay dance club scene, and the increasing number of heterosexual women leaves lesbians with little space in the subculture. My study at *Flames* yielded similar findings. Gay men outnumbered lesbian women in the club, on the dance floor, and even as employees at the club. Guided conversations with lesbian women uncovered negative feelings toward heterosexual diffusion in my study and in the studies conducted by Casey (2004) and Holt and Griffin (2003). My grounded theory is that gay men in the dance club subculture resist hegemonic masculinity norms of the dominant culture by engaging in feminine forms of dance to pop music produced by female vocalists, and by openly expressing their sexuality with other gay men. This resistance occurs within the confines of male dominated space and may or may not continue outside of the clubs. Gay dance clubs are important places in which gay men and lesbians can escape the heteronormative dominant culture. However, with the diffusion of heterosexual women into the subculture, lesbian women are further pushed out of an already male dominated space, leaving them with little space to claim as their own.

LIMITATIONS

I was able to achieve internal validity by painting an accurate picture of the gay dance club subculture. Utilizing participant observer and complete observer roles on some occasions limited the scope and depth of my research; whereas performing my role as a known researcher, enabled me to collect more detailed information. Using the known researcher role, however, is not without limitations. Participants may have altered their behavior or answered questions based on what they thought I wanted to hear. Being female and studying male participants may have also affected my internal validity. Male participants may feel more comfortable with a male researcher and thus more likely to reveal thoughts that they presume would offend a female. Due to time constraints, I was only in the field for six nights (approximately 18 hours). I was also limited to conducting research on Friday and Saturday evenings, which may have yielded different results than research carried out on weekdays.

The problems with external validity, or generalizability, in conducting this research were that I had a small sample size, used a non-probability sampling method, and my research was conducted in a unique geographic location. Small sample sizes are often not generalizable to the subculture as a whole. Convenience sampling is subject to researcher bias, as the participants I chose were not based on a random sample. There are also some differences between the Northwest city where I conducted research and other cities, which may render the study non-generalizable to the larger population. The progressive city where I conducted research is more accepting of gay and lesbian individuals than other cities in the United States. It is also a predominantly white and middle class city, which is reflected in the demographics I observed.

This study could be expanded to specifically focus on lesbian participation in the gay dance club subculture and whether they also resist hegemonic gender norms. The study should also seek to understand whether gay men continue to resist hegemonic masculinity norms outside of the dance clubs. Subsequent studies could also focus more on black or Hispanic gay dance club subculturalists, as these populations have been underrepresented in many studies. It would be interesting to find out whether other gay clubs in the United States are experiencing heterosexual diffusion, especially those in the South, where heterosexual and homosexual spaces tend to be more segregated than in the city where I conducted my research.

Appendix A: Glossary

Bricolage: A concept originated by Dick Hebdige, referring to style innovators taking raw materials from the environment and repositioning them to give things a new value (Blazak 2012).

Diffusion: Spreading of the subculture into mainstream culture (Williams 2011, 84) leads to defusion of the original values and meaning (Blazak 2012).

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer

Pec-cleavage: The space between a man's pectoral muscles, often accentuated by gay men in the dance club culture by wearing low-cut, V-neck t-shirts.

"Pink Triangle District": An area in some large cities that can be claimed as "gay space," usually featuring a number of gay bars, clubs, and shops (Oregon Encyclopedia 2008).

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Jainism's Intersection with Contemporary Ethical Movements: *An Ethnographic Examination of a Diaspora Jain Community*

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ABSTRACT

As the second generation of Jain immigrants in the United States transition from youth to full-fledged adults, significant changes to the interpretation and practice of Jainism in diaspora have begun to emerge. Relying on participant observation at the Jain Study Center of North Carolina community and eight interviews with members of this community, my research investigates the critical shift present between the younger generation and the older generation of this population and examines its potential causes. I argue that the absence of religious authority in diaspora and the increase of Western influence have redirected emphasis from ritual to ethical practice, particularly within the younger generation. This increased focus on ethical practice has presented itself through the incorporation of elements from contemporary Western environmental and animal rights movements. Additionally, it has increased the prominence of the core Jain values of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-attachment or non-possessiveness), and *anekantavada* (non-one-sidedness), as well as their corresponding day-to-day actions, at the expense of traditional ritual practices such as *puja* (worship).

Keywords: Jainism, Diaspora, Religion, Environmentalism, Veganism

I HAVE BEEN HERE IN THIS COUNTRY FOR THE LAST 42 YEARS. I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN INDIA. I got married at the age of 23, and then I came here. So, I have lived more here than in India. Of course, in India, I am Jain. I go to the temple; I worship the god, [Mahavira]; don't eat these things [—animals, eggs, root and many-seeded vegetables, honey, alcohol]; get in by dark; eat before sunset. Those things—the rituals—I knew them. But what is Jainism? Who is *arhat*¹? Who is *siddha*²? I had no idea. The prayer we do every day, I used to do it when I was five years old—when I was very little, okay? And, everybody is supposed to know that 'hey, you started eating, first pray god'. So, I was doing it, but I didn't know what it means. Maybe, at that time, I was not mature enough; I was too young. But, here [in the United States], I started putting two and two together. I learned so many things after coming here to this country... So, in that way, yes, it is better here. But, I am missing so many things in India that I am not getting here: some moral support; some motivation; if he, [my husband], doesn't do it, suppose then my sister is there, or my sister-in-law, or mother-in-law, suppose today they are fasting or they are going to perform some ceremony. I say 'Oh, you are doing [that]? Let me do it also'... In the initial stage, you need support, or company, or motivation. We get it over there [in India]. Here, no. We don't get it. Once a month, we go [to the temple], pray together, [and say], 'Hi. How are you doing? Goodbye.' That is not motivation. But, remember one thing: religion is not in a group. A person should be doing by himself or herself. It is not a group activity, but in this initial stage, we need company, because we have not reached to that stage where we don't need anybody. [Eventually], we have to do that. - Arati (Interview, 2010)³

INTRODUCTION

On opposite couches in Arati's living room, we drank delicious, homemade chai tea. This was not the chai tea that I was used to encountering: this was made with spices from India and soy milk. It had a rich flavor, stronger than any I had tried before. More importantly for me, I did not need to question the ingredients, because a vegan made it. This home felt like a sanctuary for me. I was with others who shared some of my most important and personal beliefs and practices. For a little while, while I conducted this interview, I could remain among like-minded friends.

As an individual who strongly believes in non-violence, similar to that which is espoused by core Jain doctrines⁴, I found it easy to empathize with Arati's experiences of insufficient community and desire for external support. Just as runners spur each other on in a physical race, community members spur spiritual progression in their fellows. I would soon leave her home, ending our companionship and forcing me to become the outsider again. In this same way, Arati felt that the monthly meetings of the Jain Study Center of North Carolina (JSCNC) were brief and far too infrequent, leaving her once again as an outsider each time one ended. These gatherings were no replacement for the community she had left behind many years ago in India.

In coming to the United States, immigrant Jains left behind more than friends, family, and other lay members: these individuals were also unable to take their monks and nuns with them. These honored and respected religious leaders, who have renounced their worldly possessions and dedicated their lives to their practices, are largely absent in diaspora.⁵ Due to monastic vows which restrict their ability to travel, very few monks and nuns are willing to journey abroad. Monastics serve as the tradition's primary exemplars, who all other Jains strive to emulate. Moreover, much of Jainism as it exists in India is centered on these leaders, with the lay population worshipping and supporting the sacred lives and dedication of ascetics (Babb 1996). Lay Jains in diaspora are cut off from these role models and their teachings, which effectively creates a significant gap in religious authority and ritual practice. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork and scholarly literature, this paper demonstrates ways in which American Jains have sought to fill this gap with decentralized lay leadership and lay agendas that shift community focus from renunciation and traditional practices to ethical and social actions, particularly those associated with contemporary environmental and animal rights movements.

LOCATION, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPANTS

As I first attempted to assess the feasibility of an ethnographic project which would investigate diaspora Jainism’s relationship with contemporary environmental and animal rights philosophies, I was relieved to locate a Jain community an hour’s driving distance from my university. This community is centered in Cary, North Carolina, a wealthy, residential suburb of Raleigh. Situated in the middle of what is known as the Research Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill), a region which is notable for its high concentration of universities and engineering and technology firms, it has a sizable South Asian immigrant population, including a number of Jains. Many more Jains live in the surrounding region, enough to justify the creation of a formal Jain community—the JSCNC. Though this community has several hundred members, an average of 50 attends the scheduled monthly meetings. Due to its membership size, among other factors, it has chosen to share temple space with Cary’s Hindu Society of North Carolina, rather than purchase its own building. While not a sectarian organization, the JSCNC’s membership is predominantly of Svetambara lineage, which is the majority sect of Jainism.

In order to contextualize the narratives they presented, some background about my research participants is necessary. All of them were middle- to upper-class individuals living within the Research Triangle. While I attempted to achieve gender balance among those I interviewed, I managed to secure interviews with only two females out of eight total participants. I believe because I am a male undergraduate student, female community members were less willing to interact with me outside of meetings than males. This disparity is unfortunate. Yet, due to time constraints, it was unavoidable. Of the six participants born in India, all were originally from North India, most commonly Gujarat, and they immigrated for education and employment opportunities. As the table below demonstrates, the majority of those I interviewed were working in medical, engineering, and business fields, and most of adults were well educated, with graduate degrees as the norm. Three of the adults who participated in this research were actively involved with JSCNC as members of its executive committee.

Research Participants:

Name	Estimated Age	Occupation	Country of Birth
Nirmal	Mid 20s	Graduate Student	USA
Pranav	Mid 20s	Graduate Student	USA
Piyush	Early 40s	Engineer	India
Sujash	Early 40s	Engineer	India
Rajmati	Mid 40s	Homemaker	India
Suchit	Mid 50s	Business Consultant	India
Purav	Late 60s	Engineer	India
Arati	Early 70s	Homemaker	India

METHODS

Initial contact with the JSCNC was made in August, 2010, through email correspondence with the respected lay Jain scholar Pravin Shah, a leader of both this community and national North American Jain organizations. Pravin and I arranged to meet at his home to discuss my research, and he generously agreed to introduce me to the JSCNC community and invited me to observe their monthly meetings, which take place at the Hindu Society of North Carolina in Cary. His introduction was important in that it established my role and purpose within the community, resulting in warm acceptance and offers of assistance and participation from its members.

I observed one annual retreat held in a local National Park that consisted of a mix of lectures and socializing; two monthly meetings which included lectures, *puja* (worship), and *pathshalas* (youth educational program); and I completed eight interviews. These interviews took place in a variety of locations, at the participant's discretion, including public spaces, libraries, and homes, and were an average of one hour in duration. Each interview was loosely based around a prepared set of questions, but the conversation was intentionally organic and not rigidly focused. To ensure anonymity, participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms in this paper. Specific requests for interviews were made privately, through email and phone, and I did not inform participants and other community members of who else had been or would be interviewed. While eight formal interviews is a small sample of a community numbering in the low hundreds and therefore may be claimed to have limited utility, I argue that the depth possible in this sample size was more valuable than breadth.

ARGUMENTS

It is a mistake to view any religious tradition as static or uniform. Traditional practices and beliefs are always confronted with the challenge of adapting to or rejecting contemporary pressures. Religious practitioners often do not agree on which response should be given to this challenge, leading to disagreements and divides, even within indigenous contexts. One of Jainism's most evident splits is found between its two major sects Svetambara and Digambara. While each group differs in many notable ways, the sectarian names themselves attempt to distinguish each group from the other by indicating differing beliefs about acceptable monastic dress. Svetambaras (literally, "white-clad") allow monastics to wear simple cotton dress, while Digambaras (literally, "sky-clad") maintain

that male monastics should be nude (Jaini 1991, xix). Beyond these differing interpretations of monastic dress, there are many other articulated and prominent divisions among Jains. One such further example can be found in the opposed Jain categories of *St-hanakvasis*—those who believe that constructing temples involves unacceptable violence and do not worship images (*murtis*)—and *Deravasis*—those who find temples acceptable to construct and use and do worship images (Cort 1991, 652).

In orthodox Jainism, the ultimate goal is to remove oneself from the world of violence and suffering by achieving liberation (*moksha*) of one's soul from the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*). One's mere existence in the world causes violence—from inhaling microscopic particles in the air to eating plants—and it is, therefore, a Jain's priority to mitigate this violence to the best of his or her ability. Practicing *ahimsa* (non-violence) is the preeminent path for mitigating the violence of worldly existence. Andrea Jain and Jeffrey Kripal note that "[orthodox] Jain ideology is... *nonethical*, in that the practices it requires of the adept are meant to remove him from structures that render social ethics of any sort possible" (Jain and Kripal 2009, 200). Seen in this way, *ahimsa* is not done so much out of compassion, but rather out of a desire to remove oneself from implication in worldly violence. Tracing this logic to its conclusion, a small number of Jains, both lay people and monastics, commit themselves to fasting to death (*sallekanah*) in an attempt at ultimate renunciation (Laidlaw 2005, 181).

Yet, as religions move into new geographic and cultural spaces, different interpretations, emphases, and enactments are common. In her essay *From "Liberation to Ecology,"* Anne Vallely argues that in contemporary diaspora Jainism there is currently a "shift in ethical consideration away from a traditional orthodox liberation-centric ethos to a sociocentric or 'ecological' one" (Vallely 2002, 193). In other words, the inward focus that has long characterized the Jain tradition has recently begun to yield to an outward, social perspective, particularly in the diaspora. The growing understanding among diaspora Jains of *ahimsa* as an ethical priority, rather than a renunciatory tactic, is one important way in which this can be seen. Furthermore, the decentering of the traditional focus on achieving *moksha* is particularly noteworthy.

My participants were unanimous in emphasizing, in much detail and often unprompted, this great shift which is occurring in diaspora communities between the first generation of Indian Jain immigrants and the second. The ramifications of such a change in understanding and practice are quite profound. This shift may

well be of the same magnitude as the divides concerning monastic dress, temple-building, and image worship that are previously mentioned. It is my contention that as sources of religious authority declined and Western influence increased in diaspora, the emphases on removing oneself from the world and utilizing traditional ritual practices have diminished, while the concepts of non-violence, non-attachment (*aparigraha*), and non-one-sidedness (*anekantavada*) have taken on a central and ethical role which draws elements not only from within the Jain traditions but also from other contemporary ethical movements, especially those relating to the environment and animals.

LOSS OF RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

Whether or not there are Jain monks and nuns outside of India depends on who is asked. Some maintain the traditional view that, because of specific monastic vows relating to the violence entailed by travel, there can be no monks and nuns outside of India; these individuals view anyone who was a monk or nun in India as merely a scholar once they have traveled to the United States (Dundas 1992, 224). Others do not see the issue so decisively, and they are grateful for whatever spiritual leadership they are able to access outside of India. Piyush, as well as others I interviewed, saw intention as the key factor in his willingness to accept monks and nuns who travel. He argued that, “They come here—it is not for their benefit but for the benefit of others; so I still believe that they are monks and nuns because they have devoted their lives.” Yet, he did clarify that he still did not think they were “completely” monks and nuns, because they have to live in houses and practice differently than they would in India. These views suggest that the quasi-monastics who travel beyond India lose a measure of authority and status. Because of this, even those rare monks and nuns who come to the United States cannot fill the same role they served traditionally in India.

Of those who were born in India, multiple participants described the experience of going to temple every morning in their home contexts. These temples were within walking distance from their homes, and monks and nuns were very much present in the lives of lay Jains who regularly visited these religious sites. James Laidlaw writes that in India “virtually all forms of lay religious practice are enactments of lay Jains’ relationships with [monks and nuns]—praising and venerating renouncers, receiving blessings from them, hearing their sermons...” (Laidlaw 2010, 62). These ascetics played the roles of leaders, educators, and role models. In

the United States, these crucial forms of lay Jain practice are no longer possible, leaving American Jains in search of replacements.

Due in part to the decreased importance and occurrence of meetings and in part to the small community sizes, many American Jain communities have chosen to share space with larger Hindu temples (Long 2009, 27). This results in not only the sharing of physical locations, but in the sharing of community. All participants told me that the increased size of the community focused around shared culture was very important to them and that they saw it in an overall positive light. This experience of a meshed community can result in the sharing of practices. Many Jains with whom I spoke had performed *puja* honoring a Hindu deity and did not see this as conflicting with their own beliefs. In this context, where practices and community are shared between Hindus and Jains, traditional Jain sectarian divides also seemed to be muted. Dogmatic differences were unimportant to every participant. As mentioned above, the JSCNC community is predominantly Svetambara, which is the majority Jain sect and includes 80 percent of all Jains worldwide. However, no participant classified him or herself as Svetambara in practice. In fact, several participants specifically qualified their answers regarding which sect they belonged to. A woman named Rajmati, for example, hesitated before saying “I belong to the Svetambara sect, but I don’t like to differentiate.” This loss of significance formerly associated with sects seems to further delineate American Jainism from historical power structures in India. The sectarian leadership and politics that the first-generation remembers well from their youth in India are notably absent in the United States.

The insufficient number of monks, nuns, and dedicated Jain temples has not only allowed for a more independent and self-led Jain laity, but also has prevented Jain youth from aspiring to join a monastic order. No participant was aware of any Jain who had become a monk or a nun in the United States. Rajmati told me that she had heard of a boy in Michigan who had “always wanted to go to the monks and nuns and listen to them more,” so his parents decided to move back to India. In the United States, there are few ascetic role models and no structure in place for lay Jains to train to become monks or nuns. The absence of these models undergirds a diaspora shift from the old model of ritual practice towards a new one that includes a diminished role for ascetics.

This move away from traditional rituals is a watershed moment with regard to the shift of religious authority in diaspora Jainism. However, the power vacuum left behind by the ascetics

has not remained indefinitely. Lay leaders have assumed some of the monks' and nuns' roles. These leaders maintain the community, organize events and meetings, and ensure that the youths' Jain education is not left solely to their parents. In some cases, they attempt to prevent the loss of traditional practices by translating valued rituals and performances into English and providing needed context. They often see their leadership as a temporary solution that will carry the diaspora communities to a more permanent one. One older lay leader, Purav, asserted that a permanent solution would be to establish a new monastic system that could work effectively and appropriately in diaspora contexts. He explained, "It will happen slowly... The religion is not going to die, okay? But it is not going to be the same way that we practiced it in India. It is going to be totally distinct, in its own form for America." Purav did not believe that this new monastic system would be created in his lifetime, but he was confident that it was necessary and would happen eventually.

SHIFT FROM RITUAL TO ETHICAL PRACTICE

Vegetarianism, compassion, and non-violence: these were the practices that my participants told me characterized Jainism. Participants referred to embodied principles far more often than they did to specific rituals. Instead of hearing about different forms of *puja*, I was told that refraining from gossip was an important practice. Another participant discussed not using insecticides in his home. Nirmal, a PhD candidate at a nearby university, was among those who characterized described Jain practices broadly as "anything that promotes Jain values." He specified, "If walking in nature makes you think positive thoughts, then to me that's an act of Jainism. If helping your neighbor, if being in the community... anything that leads to *ahimsa*, *aparigraha*, or *anekantavada* to me is promoting Jainism." Responses that referred to day-to-day and ethical practices were a significant departure from what my textbooks had prepared me for; instead, the expected discussions of more ritualistic practices—such as fasting, meditation, and *puja*—came later, after more focused discussion and elicitation.

This is not to suggest that other more traditional practices are not still utilized, but rather to note that the range of ways in which Jains, particularly second-generation diaspora Jains, can interact with Jainism has been greatly expanded. *Puja*—the practice of worshipping an image of a sacred being, often the important leader Mahavira, with the intent of cultivating those qualities in oneself

that the image represents—is still common at monthly meetings. Multiple participants had *puja* rooms in their homes, as well, but *puja* is not as prevalent as it is in India or as it was when the first generation immigrated. Suchit estimated that half of the JSCNC community does *puja* on a regular basis and that the others only do so once or twice a year on special occasions. The older members of the community were much more likely to perform *puja* frequently and to have favorable opinions of the practice, while the second-generation expressed more neutral views. Nirmal, one of the second-generation participants, understood and agreed with the goals of *puja*, but he does not continue the practice in his private life. He did not have any qualms about others practicing in this way, though. He commented, "If that is an effective means of reminding you [about qualities you want in yourself], then great. For me, it is not." As the second-generation teach their children about Jain practices, it seems plausible that certain traditional rituals, such as *puja*, will continue to diminish in importance in diaspora. In their place, Jains in America appear to be selectively adopting Western values and increasingly favoring meditation and ethical practices. The direct implication of this shift is that new practices will be adopted; my research suggests that these may well be informed and shaped by environmental and animal rights movements.

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INCORPORATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS

Religious influence relating to environmental concerns and nature often is argued to be a negative force. In Lynn White's seminal paper, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," he describes Christian beliefs as a direct cause of humanity's disregard for the planet. He states, "[The Christian] God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes" (White 1967, 1205). By establishing humanity as above and distinct from the natural world, White sees Christianity as sowing the seeds for anthropocentrism and a use-relationship between humans and the environment. In addition to this and similar critiques of Christianity, many scholars have expressed related concerns about the world's other religious traditions, as well.

Within Jainism, there has been a strong movement in recent years to promote itself as providing a different and better narrative. In 1990, the Institute of Jainology published "The Jain Declaration on Nature." Through it, the authors sought to establish Jainism as a religion that offers an inherently ecological philosophy. This document highlighted Jain principles such as non-violence, compassion for animals, and non-possessiveness, and underscored the ways in which this tradition's core beliefs are distinct from those of many Western religions. Importantly, these beliefs include an everlasting universe with no creator and the existence of souls within all worldly entities from a human to a rock. In a more applied manner, it also made striking environmental claims, such as "the Jain faith goes one radical step further and declares unequivocally that waste and creating pollution are acts of violence" (Singhvi 1990).

The relationship between Jainism and environmentalism was a common theme in all of my research discussions with participants. Some respondents were quite enthusiastic and represented Jainism as inherently "green," while others were discouraged and frustrated at what they perceived to be a lack of sensitivity to these issues. Irrespective of their positive or negative assessments of Jainism's current environmentalist culture, all participants agreed that Jains were progressively becoming more environmentally aware and active and that this trend was strongest among the youth. In the past decade, western scholarship on Jainism has begun to address this intersection of philosophies. John Cort's essay "Green Jainism?" notes that "any Jain environmental ethic at present is at best nascent and largely unconscious and implicit" (Cort 2002, 66). Cort sees Jainism as still in the beginning stages of developing a true en-

vironmental ethic. According to him, much of what already exists of this ethic is found in daily practices and as extensions of core Jain tenets, such as *ahimsa* and *aparigraha*.

However, Suchit figured among the participants who identified a firm basis for an environmental ethic within Jainism. He noted that "Scripturally, [environmentalism] has always been supported. '*Parasparopagraho Jivanam*', [an important Jain teaching], means that all life is bound together in mutual cooperation." Yet, he also believed that there currently is not enough environmental effort and consideration within Jainism. He said, "Yes, the roots are there [and] very strong. In practice, [though], there has not been that much environmentalism." Providing a much more positive outlook on Jainism's "green credentials," Sujash told me that Jainism was the most environmentally friendly religion, due to the principle of *aparigraha*. On a number of occasions, others reiterated this view to me.

As for environmental ethics being stronger amongst the youth, many reasons were given. Nirmal told me that this was the case because of the benefit of growing up in the United States. "It doesn't just stem from the Jain principles alone, but also from growing up in a society where external actions and not just internal improvements are taken into account." He also pointed to the active environmental movements in the United States as an influence on American Jain youth. These organizations represent the well-developed activist culture of the United States that first-generation Jains did not experience during their formative years in India. He and others noted that when the first-generation immigrated, their concerns related to employment, education, and establishing themselves within a new country. Seen in this way, it may be understandable why environmental ethics were not primary priorities, as they are today among many second-generation Jains.

SHIFTS IN DIETARY PRACTICES

Traditionally, a Jain diet has not included meat, eggs, honey, many-seeded and root vegetables (considered to contain many single-celled life forms), or alcohol (considered a violent drink both because of the fermentation involved and the perceived harm it causes to the body). Dairy has been acceptable, as it has traditionally been considered a holy substance (Dundas 1992, 152). This modified lacto-vegetarian diet is considered possible to maintain by all Jains—both lay and ascetic—and to be an imperative of the core principle of *ahimsa*. None of the adult participants in this

research eat meat, eggs, or honey, but they do eat root vegetables and consume alcohol very occasionally. In these ways, the two youth participants eat and drink similarly to the adults, with the exception of honey; neither Nirmal nor Pranav avoid honey. My research suggests that there very well could be a new context for understanding honey which is forming within the youth, where honey has become no longer a Jain avoidance, but a vegan one. To the majority of Jain youth who are not vegans, honey may have ceased to be wholly objectionable. With regards to root vegetables, Sujash told me that while the older adult population still strictly avoids them, at a certain point “a break happened, when the older generation had their kids—[my generation]—and from that point forward these things got loose.”

Veganism, the practice of avoiding the use of all non-human animals and their derived products, emerged in the United Kingdom in the middle of the nineteenth century. In historical terms, it is a very modern phenomenon, and within the Jain context, veganism has been introduced even more recently (Vegan Society 2010). Purav, a vegan, told me that he became vegan in 1993 after visiting a dairy farm (an experience and reaction which other Jain vegans also described to me), yet he thought that it wasn't until around 2000 that many Jains even became aware of veganism.

Despite the novelty of the practice, it has already attracted serious discussion and debate within diaspora Jain communities. Similar to my arguments concerning environmentalism above, participants all noted that veganism has been adopted in much larger numbers by second-generation Jains than it has by the first-generation. As Valley notes, while the population of Jain vegans appears to still be small, it is significant and on the rise (Valley 2002, 214-15). An informal survey of 1000 American Jains conducted in 2009 by Yogen Jain found that 2 percent of the first-generation and 11 percent of the second-generation were vegan (Pravin Shah, personal communication). While this may not constitute a scholarly quantitative survey, it does provide a rough idea of the current landscape of American Jain veganism.

At the first JSCNC event I attended, an annual campout at a local park, I ate a sandwich on my drive over. I knew that a small percentage of Jains were vegan, but I did not expect there to be anything for me to eat. Yet, about half of the dishes provided for dinner were, in fact, vegan, and the volunteers serving the food knew exactly which dishes were and weren't suitable. I also learned that vegan options were intentionally offered at every JSCNC monthly

meeting. Importantly, this level of thought and accommodation for vegans lends credence to the notion that Jain veganism is a stance adopted by more than just a few lone individuals. Moreover, this consideration for the growing population of Jain vegans appears across North America. Pranav, who has served in leadership capacities with Young Jains of America (YJA), told me that out of the roughly 800 second-generation Jains who attended the YJA conference in July 2010, over 100 identified as fully vegan. Furthermore, he said there was enough support at the weekend conference to warrant that the majority of the desserts are dairy-free and two meals are completely vegan.

Those vegan Jains who discussed their motivations for this ethical choice offered two kinds of explanations: the first appeared to come straight from Western animal rights literature, and the second directly related to core Jain values, such as *ahimsa*. Importantly, incorporating veganism seems to be linked to somewhat different reasons than other historical Jain dietary practices. Anne Valley argues that “the logic [behind Jains avoiding dairy and additional animal derived foods]...is not self-control but compassion; not renunciation of the abstract and reified ‘worldly experience,’ but the renunciation of very tangible forms of animal exploitation” (Valley 2004, 17). In our discussions, Rajmati provided a clear example of this. Her dietary choices were made through her own critical interpretation of Jainism, not based upon a list prescribed for her. She and her husband chose to become vegan because of the violence done to cows (a five-sensed being), but they now eat root vegetables (a one-sense being) because the relative harm is, in their view, significantly less. This opinion was standard amongst all of the vegan participants; the shift to veganism was always supported by a questioning attitude toward (rather than a wholesale acceptance of) traditional Jain dietary practices.

The trend towards veganism, while widely accepted or at least tolerated, has been a point of contention and a flashpoint for disagreement between members of Jain communities. Before moving to North Carolina and joining the JSCNC, Suchit, a vegan, was the coordinator for the *pathshala* in another American Jain community. While he was coordinator, he decided to show the students a film on silk production.⁹ This provoked a decisively negative reaction from the majority of his community members. He told me that he received “a lot of complaints from mothers that their children were asking them whether they wore silk” and “that [these sorts of films and discussions created a] negative en-

vironment in the families.” This backlash against vegan critiques appears to be commonplace. The few participants who have attempted to persuade other Jains to become vegan often expressed the sense that they were on the fringe or ignored. These feelings have led outspoken vegans such as Suchit and Purav to tone down their rhetoric, but neither has stopped trying. Purav often joked about others not listening to him, but he told me that “when the opportunity comes up, I always explain it to them...I am not going to hammer on it, [though], because people are not going to listen to it.”

**“TODAY, [THEY]
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JUST CHANGE MY
FAMILY.” - Purav**

DIRECTIONS

As the second-generation ages, the trend towards veganism and the incorporation of elements of environmental and animal rights movements seems destined to continue. However, the extent to which this transformation will occur is currently unclear. While the role of traditional rituals such as *puja* appears to be declining in diaspora, Purav warned against expecting too great a shift in practices. He agreed that major changes were underway, but thought that the questioning attitudes of the second-generation would not always be as strong. Laughing, he speculated, “Today, [they] want to change the world. At 40, I wished that I could just change my family.” These new discourses will likely face challenges once the second-generation becomes involved with careers and has families. As other priorities begin to demand more time and attention, more conservative and traditional views may regain some hold.

The lay diaspora leadership who today has assumed much power will continue to influence these important issues. In addition to leading their respective communities, these leaders also produce English-language literature. This literature can include leaders’ personal views related to environmentalism, animal-rights, and veganism. For example, works written by lay scholar Pravin Shah frequently include lengthy discussions of veganism that state that it is a moral imperative for Jains.¹⁰ In this way, veganism is positioned as a tenet of Jainism in educational materials that are utilized by the English speaking second-generation. The degree of influence that diaspora Jain leaders have over the representation of Jainism is currently quite strong. Yet, if a re-envisioned monastic order is established in diaspora in the future, competing power structures will likely exist. That is, if formally initiated monks and nuns start to be a part of the diaspora Jain landscape, it is unclear what role the current lay leadership would play and how much influence they would still exert. The redistribution of power could have a serious impact on the current incorporation of non-traditional practices and philosophies.

What is less clear is whether or not current diaspora changes will have an impact on practices in India. It is possible that these new practices and authority structures will remain a diaspora phenomenon, but it seems more likely that similar discourses are already underway and will continue to develop in India, as well. As a natural extension of this research, I intend to further investigate these themes within India.

- ¹ One of the twenty-four enlightened teachers of Jainism, also known as a Tirthankara or Jina.
- ² An enlightened soul other than an arhat
- ³ To ensure anonymity, participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms in this paper.
- ⁴ Jainism is an Indian religion that presented a serious challenge to Vedic Hinduism during the middle of the first millennium BCE. It offered incisive critiques of traditional Hindu practices relating to animal sacrifice and consumption of non-vegetarian food. In contrast, Jainism promoted ahimsa (non-violence) and detailed dietary proscriptions that, among other things, forbade flesh and eggs. Its founders were the 24 tirthankaras (literally, "ford-makers"), the twenty-fourth and most recent of which was the historical figure Mahavira who lived around the same time as the Buddha.
- ⁵ In this paper, diaspora refers to Jains living outside of India, where the religion originated and most followers still live.
- ⁶ In this paper, I am using the term "youth" to represent both younger first-generation (below the age of 30) and second-generation Jains.
- ⁷ Jainism classifies life within a hierarchy based upon number of senses (i.e., complexity and ability to perceive pain). Single-sensed beings are those with the sense of touch, whereas five-sensed beings are those who can touch, taste, smell, hear, and see.
- ⁸ This data indicates the relative rarity of even second-generation vegan Jains, yet four of the six first-generation participants in this research were vegan, while both second-generation participants were vegetarian. It is important to note that I did not actively seek out vegan participants. It is my belief that there may be a correlation between holding a lay leadership position and identifying as vegan. Further research would be required to investigate this.
- ⁹ In captivity, once silkworms have been allowed to produce their silk cocoons, farmers "stifle"—that is, kill—the developing silk moth with prolonged exposure to temperatures of at least 110 degree Celsius, in order to prevent the moth from emerging and harming the cocoons (Franck 2001, 17).
- ¹⁰ A representative appeal, written by Pravin Shah, can be found on the JAINA (Jain Associations in North America) website: <http://www.jaina.org/blogpost/258456/109257/A-Thought-for-Paryushan-by-Pravin-Shah>

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Imagining a Classroom: *Negotiating Diverse Interests of Educational NGOs in Northern Ghana*

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ABSTRACT

Non-Governmental Organizations ('NGOs') compliment imperfect educational models with creative and flexible community-based programs. In Northern Ghana, children in poverty often face diminished educational outcomes, and organizations use various strategies to seek justice for these children. NGOs negotiate an uneasy existence as mediators between the spheres of structural bureaucracy and local poverty. NGOs must maintain a delicate balance between serving the cultural and structural challenges facing education in resource-poor communities. Solely focusing on either aspect robs the organization of local legitimacy NGOs appropriately apply complex social context to their simplified program goals when staff relationships with local communities inform what tools oppressed Ghanians need to live flourishing lives. Structural interviews in Tamale, Ghana, illustrate that NGOs achieve their goal of improved educational outcomes for poor children when they identify as members of the community where they work.

Keywords: Development, Education, NGO management, Community Rapport

FIELD NOTES, NOVEMBER 16, 2010

Visiting a classroom outside Tamale, Ghana, it is difficult to tell that none of the children sitting in desks have been enrolled in formal school.

A young adult from the community is leading around twenty students through a reading exercise. He was trained to teach by the NGO

Literacy Support, which operates afternoon programs for children who help with farm chores during formal school hours. These students are speaking their native tongue, Dagbani, rather than speaking English, the language taught to middle-grade students in the formal system. The children follow along in their books (the NGO has provided a book for each child), and children raise their hands to answer when the teacher asks a question or calls on them by name. A few students are called to the front to demonstrate on the board. The class is divided into a large group activity, a small group activity, and independent reading. I sit in the back of the classroom with a program field manager who provides context and asks me to sign a guest book.

INTRODUCTION

Education is commonly a part of the agenda to reduce poverty (Apple 1982: xvii). I seek to closely examine how Non-Governmental Organizations (I will use the abbreviation NGO) seek to support subsistence farmers in Ghana towards succeeding in formal school systems. I find NGOs are appropriately incorporated into local communities when staff members place their community identity before their organizational identity. By incorporating civic obligation into their business model, NGO staff members are able to provide an educational environment that fosters the empowerment of children in Tamale through a worldview that is relevant and real to them. This paper seeks to illustrate how NGO education programs establish rapport with families and translate quantified strategic goals to complicated social context.

In the fall of 2010, I participated in the School for International Training's study abroad program in Ghana called, "Social Transformation and Cultural Expression." I worked with NGOs involved in education in the Northern city of Tamale for a four-week independent study period. Tamale is the hub of NGO activity—grassroots, multilateral and bilateral—in Ghana, making it an excellent case study. I explored how NGO staff imagine positive change in the disadvantaged communities where they work and why they value education as a step towards development. NGOs are prolific in Tamale, Ghana, and all must mediate between rural Ghanaian communities' needs and desires as well as international institutional communities' missions and goals. (Field notes 11/10/2011).

During a month of fieldwork in Tamale I focused on eight organizations aiming to expand the access and quality of education in the North. Some of these groups chose to make education their only focus, while for other groups, education was part of a larger vision, and in addition to education programs, others were also implemented, in areas like agriculture, public health, climate change, and women's rights. Each NGO was approaching the challenge of development through education in a slightly different way. Organizational offices in Tamale distanced from rural villages where programs were being implemented. However, they were closer to grassroots social issues than their international donors. As an intermediary between the two, offices in Tamale translate the realities of education in underdeveloped communities into the economic and social scientific context of a developed community.

Rather than marking NGO programs as successes or failures, I hope to articulate how they work and why they work the way they do (Mosse 2002: 646; Crewe and Harrison 2002: 7). I admit my inability to prescribe perfectly from a distance, and proclaim the ability of Ghanians students to tell their own story. My development perspective “places developers and the developed, self and other, within a common framework” (Van Ufford *et al.* 2005: 5). It is key to examine the influence of community members compared to funders in NGO management (Kisanne and Gingerich 2004: 312). NGOs carry out collaborative and appropriate education agendas in poor communities when the staff sees themselves as part of the local community. As perpetual middle-men, NGO staff constantly work to translate the needs of the community to funders and board members (Crewe and Harrison 2000: 89). In this process, the organizations’ rhetoric, assumptions, goals, and views of success all influence the staff’s perspective of the community. In addition to theory, NGO websites, brochures, and interactions with community members will be interpreted.

Several terms specific to development and NGO institutions will be used throughout this article. “NGO” will be defined as independently funded institutions that aim to improve public access to social services. All NGO’s will specifically focus on the issue of public education. “Development” is the same economically motivated process of national improvement commonly used in literature (Lewis 2005; Ferguson 1994: 55) I contest the assumptions implicit in this definition. The term “funder” will refer to the individuals, institutions, companies, or governments that provide monetary support to NGOs. The names of organizations I partnered with and the names of my informants have been changed or shortened to initials throughout the paper for their privacy.

The populations served by these educational NGOs would commonly be designated as “poor” by development organizations, academics, and the citizens’ own governments (Escobar 1992). I find the term poverty in the English language simplifies the many ways an individual can be described and highlights their deficiency of economic and material resources. An economic definition discounts intrinsic cultural values associated with communities that lack wealth in the economic sense. Students and families who participate in educational NGO programs will often be termed “the oppressed” throughout the paper.

Naming economically poor populations as oppressed speaks to the power exerted in the process of creating poverty (Freire 1970: 48). The NGOs studied in this project are working against many types of oppressors: biased policies, racism, capitalistic goals, and stereotypes. Poverty does not exist passively: it is the byproduct of the active decisions of oppressors. Legitimized national school agendas have the power to encourage social conformity through discourse. NGOs must work to understand and relate to the conflicting norms of the oppressed and the oppressors.

My research is based on formal interviews with NGO staff at several organizations in Tamale. The offices I visited in Tamale were often management hubs for anti-poverty programs implemented in rural areas outside the city. Aside from a visit to a Literacy Support program site (a forty-five minute motorcycle ride outside the city), I remained in Tamale. My findings in Tamale were focused on the rhetoric of staff. Though informative, usually their interviews couldn’t easily be juxtaposed with their actions. I did not get extensive time in the field to observe the relationship between how my informants discussed education and how they enacted education daily. I was distanced from individuals experiencing the poverty each NGO was combating.

My fieldwork illustrates the constant negotiation between power relationships and human agency in community-based education. In Ghana I learned about empowerment. I learned about raising individuals up and giving them means to shape their own world towards community. What if the NGO’s goal of improving literacy rates or government testing scores simultaneously degrades students’ reliance on valuable neighborhood kinship networks? Who am I to say whether a formal education can take a child, whether in the city or on a farm, and penetrate her soul and engage her mind? Certainly NGOs must admit their own biases regarding school curriculum, kinship relations, and “right” citizenship. But overemphasizing the influence of institutional management in community change furthers a framework of injustice (Van Ufford *et al.* 2003: 9). I find NGOs’ understandings of social justice are subjective to the locality they are in.

Justice for the oppressed is not directly correlated to a strategic plan, but involves the NGO and the government, the NGO and the family, the NGO and the community, the NGO and the school. “Stability in the world of action does not come from coherent policy, but from effective relationships” (Mosse 2005: 130).

I am interested in NGOs as institutions because they are incubators for creative ideas about social change. Fair collaboration with the oppressed is a problematic challenge, but it is possible, and it is necessary. The theoretical debate between structure and agency applies to both development and education.

THE MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION IN GHANA

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT: NGOS IN TAMALE

Today, Tamale is a city with a population of 360,579 where the primary language besides English is Dagbani (Mongabay.com 4/5/2012). I sat down with my advisor and primary informant my first week working on this project. The Executive Secretariat of a local NGO, a Muslim, and a Northerner; he provided context for the region based on his organization's research and his own personal experience. Around 15 percent of the country identifies as Muslim; the majority of the Muslim community resides in the Northern region where Tamale is located (Personal Interview 11/10/2011). The city is bright and busy, and residents tend to carry themselves with a quiet assurance that is welcoming. The North of the country faces unique challenges regarding economic development due to its culture and particular history, thus today there is a higher concentration of NGOs in Tamale than anywhere else in Ghana.

The first informal school in Ghana opened in Cape Coast in the 1600's (Personal Interview 11/10/2010). Schools blossomed in the south in the ensuing years, concentrating around the more populated areas of Cape Coast and Accra. Missionaries worked to establish many schools during the height of colonialism. The first public school was not established in the North until 1906 (Personal Interview 11/10/2010). Before 1906, literacy in the North would have primarily served the purpose of reading the Qur'an; historically the Northern regions are dominantly Muslim while the South of Ghana was predominantly Christian (Personal Interview 11/10/2010). Wealthier Muslims in the North may have had the opportunity to further their religious education, but their education was not necessary for economic reasons until after colonialism (Roberts 1982: 168). Rather than establishing the individual's role in a local community, public school systems establish the individual's role within the nation as a citizen and a worker (Burbules and Torres 2000: 2-3). As education became nationalized it began to embrace conformity within government boundaries.

Today, the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions of Ghana are working against history as they strive to operate Ghanaian national schools. In 1961, the Ghanaian government made a commitment to provide free compulsory education for all children (Roberts 1982: 168). Prior to 1906, children in the North participated in systems of upbringing in their communities that prepared them appropriately for their roles as farmers, hunters, or housewives (Personal Interview 11/10/2010). Northerners historically have created systems to prepare individuals for life in subsistence farming communities. It was not until the last century that the population began to be educated under a national scheme that would equip individuals as Ghanaian citizens. Students whose culture or livelihood contradicts with the public school's agenda frequently face diminished educational outcomes (Bourdieu 1973: 496). The nationalizing of schools has led to the 'reproduction of class relations' through its agendas related to both economic progress and cultural knowledge (Apple 1995: 38).

Parents in the North are still motivated to have large families based on subsistence farming lifestyles that requires a group of laborers. In 1993, the Ghana Statistical Service found that three percent of children in Ghana were not enrolled in school because they were needed for farm labor, while in the Northern region, eleven percent of children were kept at home to farm (Botchway 2001: 40). According to the Ministry of Education, from 2005-2006 there were at least 1,989,910 children between the ages of six and twelve that were not attending school in Ghana, with up to twenty percent of them residing in the three northern regions (Casley-Hayford 2007: 25). Entering and successfully completing the formal education system in Ghana necessitates some social and economic capital that is not possessed by most subsistence farmers.

This statistical problem translates to a development problem that has been removed from farms, food stands, remote dwellings, and rural communities and placed in grant applications and development benchmark plans. Development standards for education in Ghana trace back to an Anglo-Saxon tradition of formal schooling, and this heritage communicates a problematic message about the culture of a successful citizen (Apple 1995: 38). The statistics above are often coupled with statistics describing economic resources: In 2006, 9.6 percent of the Northern region's population was living at the poverty level

and the poverty gap, which is generally regarded as living on or below \$2 a day. Poverty in Ghana has been reduced from 52 percent to 28 percent in the last ten years. Living at the poverty level is generally defined as living on or below two dollars a day (World Bank 4/5/2012). Is it appropriate to assume education will lead to wealth, and that wealth is the appropriate end goal?

In Tamale, Ghana, one staff member of a multilateral organization scoffed when asked why formal education is important for Ghanaians today: “Why are you asking me?! It is everything. We want to be like America. We want to move to modern society. I should be able to go to the Netherlands, the United States, or Canada and function. [Listening to the] radio, [watching] TV, and community participation require literacy” (Personal Interview 11/16/2010). This informant represented a European organization involved in many different aspects of development, including agriculture, public health and education. Though he was Ghanaian himself, he did not embrace his national identity. He clearly illustrates, “the idea of development promises that one will be able to feel at home everywhere in the world” (Grone-meyer 2001:60). I left his office with a booklet clearly outlining the quantifiable outcomes of his organization’s initiatives in the country. The numbers aligned with his speech—an enormous simplification of social reality on the ground.

According to critics of international development, the informant is saying to Ghanaian youth, “My institution will define ‘the good life’ for you.” The informant assumes a tie between improvement and acquisition of technological knowledge—hinting at social evolution (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 25). Critical development theorists highlight the tendency of NGOs to associate development with modernity and dissociate development with tradition (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 25). The social theorist Foucault argues that when discourses like these regarding a particular lifestyle are made legitimate, individuals conform to the discursive norm rather than questioning the source of its power (Foucault 1979: 11). Rhetoric has been developed surrounding the elimination of poverty, while critics argue the development system has only furthered poverty (Moyo 2009:46).

Importantly, when the NGO’s worldview becomes real to oppressed populations, there is the potential for what Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* calls ‘cultural invasion’ where the standards and goals of the ‘invaders’ become the standards and goals of the ‘invaded’ (Freire 1970: 180). Freire moves be-

yond Foucault’s restrictive power and sees a way for the individual to free herself from the system. Dialogue is key to effective empowerment, and ensures NGO the staff is wary of the consequences of biased leadership (Freire 1970: 180). Pedagogical dialogue between an educator and a student will dissociate dependency and oppression by liberating students to enact their own futures beyond constraining cycles of poverty (Freire 1970: 90, 103). Development is complicated as is any inter-cultural communication. But, interaction between the elite and the oppressed is imperative in order for social justice to occur for the oppressed. NGO projects have the potential to empower the communities they serve.

Upon entering an NGO office in Tamale, one can expect to be greeted in a reception area by a knowledgeable secretary or sometimes by a security officer who keeps a log of visitors and directs individuals to reception. I never had trouble conveying my project at the front desk, and office staff was always informative and helpful. When waiting in the reception areas of offices for the appropriate staff to become available, I often noted that NGOs used wall space in waiting areas to publicly display their mission, goals, and/or accomplishments. The guests anticipated in each waiting room could be gleaned from the information available. Ghana Organization for Education Development (GOED) had a waiting room which housed two bookshelves full of binders—many with the names of education related NGOs on the spine. An emphasis on data collection was made clear from the moment I walked in the door—identifying GOED’s concentration on policy and advocacy rather than field programs. Other organizations, like AVF used wall space to educate—not about the organization itself, but about public health (i.e. HIV protection, women’s rights, safe-sex practices). This use of space indicated that the guests welcomed there could be of multiple identities --both community members who were receiving the services of the organization, or donors coming to learn about an NGO’s field programs.

The office space of each organization felt particularly counter to the crowded markets and scattered neighborhoods of Ghana. I was welcomed to offices with cold rushes of air conditioning—one of the few places in Tamale I’d felt air conditioning. Open waiting areas were attached to comfortable and private offices. Staff reflected and communicated their identity in the organization through dress in a variety of ways. Many dressed

in more traditional batik, while others chose suits with ties. Importantly, every staff person I interviewed was Ghanaian, and I only saw one staff person from Europe and none from the United States in my time visiting eight different organizations. The proliferation of development initiatives in Ghana has led to a varied array of institutions within the city of Tamale, and development institutions are considered reputable employers.

In order to carefully analyze how each group utilized different modes of communication to engage both donor groups and benefiting communities, I have broken five NGOs into three different categories. The first, “International” organizations will be defined as NGOs possessing offices and governing bodies in other countries. Usually their goals and programs all fit under a larger vision of international development. The extent to which international organizations tailored their educational initiatives to local situations varies tremendously. Critics say international organizations are more likely to be motivated by economic improvement (Goldman 2005: 29). These organizations are increasingly interested in understanding local social context. In Tamale, locals often speak highly of the United States. My field notes from November 18, 2010 describe an international NGO.

My mind was swirling as my Merrell sandals padded along a red dirt road in southern Tamale, Ghana. I am determined to make it to my appointment with an NGO without asking for directions... I turn the bend and am greeted by a grand log cabin that sticks out on the hot, flat landscape and contradicts the concrete and metal structures along the road. A flag representing the Western donor's country, and the Ghanaian flag, fly side-by-side in front of the building. The sign proclaims I have found the right place, but first I must pass a security guard in a booth in front of a gated entrance. The guard is friendly and has me sign into a guest book.

GHRW has certainly constructed an image to communicate a certain message, but I am not sure the majority of Ghanaians would resonate with a log cabin.

The three international organizations interviewed were, AVF, UNGIO and GHRW. GHRW is an NGO with its headquarters in Toronto, Canada and field offices in several developing countries. GHRW works in nine out of twenty districts in Ghana. The five focus areas of their programs include education, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, sustainable livelihood, and strengthening institutions. As a linking NGO, GHRW provides support to local NGOs in the form of school supplies, rain harvesting equipment, furniture, school buildings, lunch food, and teacher training (Personal Interview 11/18/2010). GHRW seeks to create a relationship between the Canadian public and children in Northern Ghana through their child sponsorship program.

AVF is headquartered in the Netherlands. AVF also works in West and South Africa, the Balkans, and Latin America. According to their literature, their goals are twofold, for (1) “effective, efficient and increased access to and delivery of basic services and (2) sustainable and equitable production, income and employment for the poor” (AVF). Rather than working with local NGOs to deliver tangible services, AVF provides consulting services to NGOs and uses the three steps of analysis, action, and assessment to guide the process (AVF). While services are being provided, AVF meets with NGOs on a weekly or monthly basis. In terms of education, AVF in Ghana works towards these two goals by supporting the government’s implementation of the School Feeding Program, consulting district-level Ghana Education Service directors, and evaluating how the Ghana Education Service collects data from schools (Personal Interview 11/18/2010).

In Ghana UNGIO is specifically interested in supporting gender parity in school enrollment, the training of teachers, and the quality of teaching in the classroom (Personal Interview 11/16/2010). Rather than working through partners or implementing their own programs, UNGIO focuses on developing policy and following how it is implemented in the formal classroom. The organization signs a contract directly with the government to work in Ghana and spends more time working with district supervisors than individual schools. Though

sometimes they provide grants to NGOs, UNGIO's first priority is to determine the areas where the government needs support implementing policy (Personal Interview 11/16/2010). UNGIO is unique from all other organizations studied because the organization's larger vision is inspired by the United Nations, a politically motivated body. Still, UNGIO incorporates fieldwork as an important part of their planning.

Secondly, Literacy Support will be defined as a "Grassroots" organization. Literacy Support is now independent, but began as a partner program through a grassroots NGO involved in education, job training, and local agriculture. There is an important distinction between Literacy Support and the international NGOs. Literacy Support articulates their origin as the result of a "friendship" between Tamale and their Danish partner, rather than being borne of international goals, development norms, and global politics. Personal relationship has motivated the organization since its origin, and this has led to differences in management. Literacy Support work is by and of the community in a way the international NGOs never will be. Locals were instrumental in forming the programs, and remain a foundational part of the organization's management and strategic planning (Personal Interview 11/10/2010).

Literacy Support provides small literacy classes to out of school children ages eight to fourteen in all five districts in the northern region, with around forty classes in each district (Personal Interview 11/15/2010). The communities where the programs operate change every three to five years, and these communities are targeted based on their population of out of school children. An important aspect of the Literacy Support approach to literacy is teaching children in their mother tongue, so that they can apply their skills daily and gain confidence in their abilities. Literacy Support classes are taught by a local community member who is literate in the local language, and familiar with students' backgrounds. Historically, teachers in Ghanaian schools were not from the area where they taught and did not speak the same language as the community (Roberts 1982: 269). Literacy Support aims to equip children who are not in school in the north to successfully transition to the formal system.

Finally, the Ghana Organization for Education Development will be referred to as an "advocacy" organization:

THE WAITING AREA IN THE GOED HEADQUARTERS CONTAINED BOOKSHELVES PACKED WITH BINDERS DESCRIBING DEMOGRAPHICS AND REPORTS ON LOCAL SCHOOLS. THIS PUBLIC DISPLAY OF SOCIAL ANALYSIS WAS SUPPORTED BY MY CONVERSATION WITH A GOED STAFF PERSON, WHO ARTICULATED THE CHALLENGES FACING EDUCATION IN NORTHERN GHANA WITH BOTH CONCRETE FACTS AND SENSITIVITY TO LIVELIHOODS IN LOCAL VILLAGES. WHEN ASKED WHY FORMAL EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUTH IN NORTHERN GHANA, HE REPLIED: "ONCE [COMMUNITIES BEGIN TO BE MORE] EDUCATED, ISSUES OF POVERTY, DISEASE, [PUBLIC] HEALTH, AND AGRICULTURE, WILL ALL IMPROVE. INDIVIDUALS CAN LEARN HOW TO BUDGET PROPERLY AS A FARMER, LEARN TO THINK CRITICALLY AND ANALYZE ISSUES" (PERSONAL INTERVIEW 11/25/2010).

Though GOED is not directly involved in planning or initiating a development program, it has collected important qualitative and quantitative data regarding the state of education in the North of Ghana. The organization's articulations of local challenges facing education provide insight into the translation process of development partnerships (Crewe and Harrison 1999). Rather than implementing programs, GOED is more interested in tracking the effects of existing programs and analyzing the current state of the school system. Their vantage point as an NGO critiquing the state of the education system is extremely valuable. Today international, grassroots, and advocacy organizations are all informing the educational training of youth in northern Ghana.

NGOS' PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION

Over the course of one month of discussions with NGO program directors, it became obvious that it is important to keep NGOs and their donors aligned under a common goal. Staff are also aware that a shortcoming of the goal is its generalization of program implementation globally: "we need a standard globally, but what is most important is how implementation is translated locally... Not all countries have the same resources so each country's plan for implementation must be different" (Personal Interview 11/10/2010). All NGO staff members were in support of the goal to enroll all students in formal school. This common goal eases communication between NGOs, their partners, their donors, and the government because they are all receiving direction from the same external source, and also heightens healthy competition between organizations.

All of these NGOs in Ghana have institutionalized and normalized international development. Ghana has been the beneficiary of loans and structural readjustment programs through international development agencies like World Bank, UNGIO, USAID and the International Monetary Fund. Improving the productivity of "Third World" economies first became a political priority for the United States during the reconstruction of Europe following World War II (Lewis 2005). By 1965, "Ghana... had received as much as US \$90 million in aid flows" (Moyo 2009: 15). Economic structural adjustment prioritized global trade and economic productivity over developing sustainable economic practices. Thus, for multilateral development organizations in the business of international aid, "successful lending is measured almost entirely by the size of the donors' lending portfolio, and not by how much of the aid is actually used for its intended purpose" (Moyo 2009: 54). Critics advocate economic strategies that emphasize self-sufficiency, rather than furthering dependence (Moyo 2009: 145). Today, these NGOs in Tamale rely on funding from these large governmental and multilateral organizations, and they therefore must often translate and juxtapose their local agenda through global agendas (Goldman 2005: 29).

The Millennium Development Goals are a globally influential set of development standards that NGOs in developing countries often use to shape their own goals. The MDGs were developed by the United Nations, and the goals outline a set of milestones to be met by all developing countries by the year

2015 that work to eradicate poverty. Literacy Support, AVF, and UNGIO all cited the education specific MDG goal-- that all children will be enrolled in primary formal education by 2015—when articulating their management strategies (Personal Interviews 11/2010). International development strategies prioritize raising foreign capital, and can thus systematically undercut the capacity of governments to construct educational policies that enhance educational equality or seek to develop some degree of national anonymity in the context of research and prevent governments from adequately addressing how to make culturally specific education for their citizens accessible to all (Burbules and Torres 2000: 43). Education becomes an economic investment. NGOs like Literacy Support and AVF are dependent on grants from large, powerful agencies like the World Bank, the IMF, and the United Nations. These organizations are focused on global improvements in economic productivity. When distributing funds, they run the danger of prioritizing quantifiable productivity over context-specific and sustainable outcomes (Escobar 2001: 140).

A structure of quantifiable outcomes has become the norm since the meeting of Breton Woods in 1944 when the World Bank was organized to help rebuild Europe after World War II (Goldman 2005: 30). This pivotal political partnership led to a new American agenda of providing international economic development assistance. Supporting 'underdeveloped' countries has thus come to mean assuming the improvement of livelihoods is tied to increasing economic productivity. Many NGOs, in order to maintain funding and an amiable public image, often produce their own reports and statistical data to show the impact of their programs over time. But, this power does not dictate the actions of program participants (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 77). Organizations should be aware of realistically portraying the challenges of Northern Ghana to donors, but donors' policy prescriptions will not restrict the agency of students.

Currently, families in the three northern regions still largely rely on farming as their primary source of subsistence and income. This agricultural tradition combined with the Islamic tradition in the north makes for unique cultural norms that sometimes conflict with the expectations of the nationalⁱⁱⁱ school system. Thus the Ghanaian government has found it challenging to incorporate oppressed farming families into schools.

There is a tradition in some northern communities of an adult brother giving his daughter to his sister's family to be raised and trained as a housewife, a practice called fostering. Such a practice establishes good will between family members, but it in the process neglects the young women fostered and their educational opportunities (Personal Interview 11/15/2010). Historically, the girls who do enroll in school in the northern regions drop out at younger ages to be married. With this cultural practice in mind, one can imagine that northern communities may see the formal education system as distancing children from a way of life seen as valuable (Casely-Hayford 2007: 99). In fact,

families in Northern Ghana are still relatively new at using the [national education] system as a means to human and community development. Communities are therefore still in a process of learning as to what level their own wards can attain and what type of benefit this would have in comparison to the traditional approaches of child upbringing and indigenous education (Casely-Hayford 2007: 99).

NGO staff in Ghana have established education that will improve quality of life for children of the Northern regions, and are work to communicate their reasoning to families.

When NGO directors were asked why formal education is important for the people of Ghana, all mentioned improving the ability of the individual to move Ghana ahead amidst increasing globalization today. Local NGOs, through their international partners and relationships with the formal system, have come to value individual achievement reinforced by the formal system. Ghanaian communities in Africa traditionally uphold "communal values," which poses a potential conflict with NGOs' goals of individual student achievement (Casely-Hayford 2007: 79). NGOs often say they must "sensitize" these rural farming families on the benefits of a formal education. This is not a new hurdle: before NGOs advocated education in northern Ghana, the government and missionaries advocated the same in the south of Ghana and experienced similar resistance to education, which rural farming families viewed as individualism as counter to their own cultural practices (Roberts 1982: 269). Rural areas in the north are still learning how to justify this individualism.

Communicating the benefits of an education is an important challenge facing the education sector in northern Ghana. NGOs have the potential to simultaneously raise the voices and provide the tools for communities to construct their own healthy and sustainable lifestyles (Melkote and Steeves 2001). Educational NGOs provide an important transition guiding subsistence communities into the formal system because they facilitate communication.

The government utilizes the support of NGOs in order to achieve these goals (Clark 1992: 152). Once the issue of school attendance is addressed, the formal system must be able to grow as the school population grows. The system is currently stretched beyond its limits as NGOs and Governmental organizations are successfully enrolling more children in school. Classrooms are becoming overcrowded. One NGO informant recalls seeing sixty students in one classroom (Personal Interview 11/10/2010). There are teacher shortages in the north. Seventy-six percent teachers commute from cities, and so arrive to class late and leave school early. In Ghana teachers are sometimes placed on probation for high absenteeism. If this happens, a teacher is expected to teach without pay, but this only increases the teacher's motivation to miss class (Personal Interview 11/25/2010). NGOs articulate many reasons why teachers are to blame for problems with the school system, but historically, teachers have not felt valued or supported by their communities or district governments (Roberts 1982: 277). Today, lacking supervision of teachers remains a problem (Personal Interview 11/16/2010). One organization in particular, Ghana Organization for Education Development, has done extensive research on the public system. NGOs are not only working to increase access to education, but also on the more complex challenge of increasing the quality of an education.

Overall, these NGOs have all made the decision to advocate for broader political change. They make the important decision to move beyond "permanent service-delivery" and towards active participation in government reform (Clark 1992: 161). They must mediate between the spheres of policy and education. NGO education programs independent of national governments are still influenced by national agendas, whether through funding, testing standards, or multilateral development strategies (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 152-157). NGOs have the potential to create agendas that are more sensitive to local situations.

DISCUSSION: COMPARING ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION

In Ghana, there is a distinct line between NGO management and program implementation. I was only able to delve deeply into the management side of community development. In a transient sphere between the worlds of neoliberal policy and cyclical oppression managers most often quantify complex social situations. Harsh *et al* describes how organizational spheres communicate using “structures of accountability” (Harsh *et al*. 2010: 257), and asserts that neither the instrumental nor the critical perspectives of development accurately portray the relationships between organizational spheres. Though this rhetoric is potentially oppressive itself, having several distinct hierarchical levels within NGOs in Tamale facilitates communication (Ospina *et al*. 2002). Offices in Tamale foster NGO incorporation into communities because organizations know their business minded atmosphere would prohibit educational programs if offices were in rural villages. By moving between Tamale and villages, students are more able to see their education as something they own.

The physical location of NGO offices provides what Harsh *et al* (2006: 259) refers to as a ‘locational advantage, midway between donors and recipients.’ This situation parallels the role NGOs play in facilitating communication between donors and recipients (Melkote and Steeves: 2001), and investing in an advantageous location will allow the organization to more easily create financial capital in local communities (Harsh *et al*. 2010: 260). Because offices and field programs require distinct spaces, mobility is important for organizations. Also, organizations define themselves as boundary crossers through their vehicles labeled with NGO programs that can be seen traveling through Tamale daily. They also must be ready to physically operate different aspects of programs in both urban and rural settings.

Though educational NGOs exist to instill social skills valued by civil society in Tamale, their programs operate more like businesses than schools. Staff should ideally be able to solely cultivate their identity as teachers that belong to a particular community. More often, however, staff must be fluent in the language of the social sector and the private sector, of education and business management. As has been illustrated thus far, these processes of translation provide insight and guidance, but do not determine program effects (Mosse 2005: 647). In Tamale,

program managers have satellite offices separate from the classrooms where NGOs operate, and this physical distance has the potential to magnify the disconnect between pupils and donors.

In 2007, Casley-Hayford completed an impact study for the NGO Literacy Support. The study compiled the ways Literacy Support has impacted students, parents, communities and facilitators since its inception in 1995. Findings were collected based on seventy-seven interviews of participants and their families. Importantly, Casley-Hayford found Literacy Support is culturally appropriate to its northern students. The program provides literacy classes for out-of-school children in all three northern regions, meets in the afternoons, allowing children to attend after completing the chores and farm work that keep them from attending school. The program also reinforced community values like respect for elders (Casley-Hayford 2007: 49). The government attributes at least 2-3% of increase in school enrollment to the Literacy Support program, which encourages participants to enter formal school after a year of literacy classes (Casley-Hayford 2007: 17). It is important to note the differences that Literacy Support participants cited between the Literacy Support program and their later experiences in the formal system, which included: “methods and commitment of teachers, free books, ability to take books home to read, absence of school uniforms, flexible timing of classes, and the medium of instruction” (Casley-Hayford 2007: 18). Literacy Support is currently exploring how best to streamline their program so that it can be expanded to other NGOs and as a complementary system employed by the government. The very publication of the impact study is evidence of the NGO office as a translator of an underdeveloped community into the economic and social scientific context of a developed community.

Organizations like Literacy Support and GOED understand the imperative to use contextual adaptability to inform political conversation regarding national school reform in Ghana. Because organizations have the flexibility to respond to local situations, they are well situated to provide recommendations for policy change. In recent years, as NGOs have begun to lobby and the government’s attention has been brought to the state of education in the North, new programs have been launched to help poor families send their children to school. Until the programs gain substantive funding and leadership, they will remain challenges in and of themselves. Two of the main programs are

the Capitalization Grant and the School Feeding Program. The existence of such programs--the former to cut school fees and the latter to provide school lunches--represents the progress of the relationship between NGOs and the Ghanaian Educational Service. Though several officials I spoke with were involved in these partnerships, staff admitted on more than one occasion these program still have many flaws to be worked out. NGOs have the potential to facilitate to ensure changes do not increase state power too much (Ferguson 1994: 256).

The Capitalization Grant scheme was intended to abolish school fees for students by giving each school an allotted amount of money calculated by the number of students attending the school. This lump sum is intended to help contend with maintenance costs for the classroom and purchase of classroom supplies. NGO research has found that the distribution of these funds has been mismanaged, as money has to move from the national to local level. As well, discrepancies in attendance records between the local, district and national level mean that funds may not always be distributed adequately. The School Feeding Program started in 2005 with the hopes of improving "enrollment, attendance, retention, and gender parity in basic education" (AFV booklet). The program supports local farmers by using local food to produce a meal for students. Unforeseen challenges that grew out of the project include inadequate physical infrastructure and an insufficient number of teachers to handle the increase in enrollment. There was also a "huge government influence" in the School Feeding Program whereby the political party in power was distributing more food to its constituents, rather than the population as a whole (Personal Interview 11/18/2010). These two programs have proven to NGOs that the issues of teacher shortages, classroom infrastructure, and quality curriculum must simultaneously be addressed with the issue of enrollment.

Literacy Support is able to digest these policy issues and bring them to local communities where high numbers of children are out of school. In order for Literacy Support to establish a school, it was agreed that the community must: sign a contract, identify out of school children, and hire someone from the local community who is unemployed but trainable as a teacher. Once the Literacy Support classroom opens, a community council is required to support the needs of the teacher and ease parents' hesitations regarding education. "The other kinds of power—

power to, power with, and power from within—may be instrumental in attaining greater power over" (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 36). When NGO staff mingle and build relationships with disadvantaged communities, people from isolated poverty realize another reality is possible. Cultural norms of the poor and the oppressed must be revalued for organizations to truly complete the empowerment they profess.

The director of Literacy Support, whose office is in Tamale, believes it was important to engage student's perspectives rather than changing them, and to work through the local, rather than the national language: "the teaching methods in formal schools needs to be changed to incorporate activity and discussion to keep students engaged. By teaching in the mother tongue, they are also more confident" (Personal Interview 11/15/2010). NGO staff negotiates policies and management strategies in the classroom (Mosse 2005: 2; Crewe and Harrison 2002: 135). Rather than imposing the British model of schooling and assuming it will improve rural students' lives, Literacy Support embraces the cultural reality of communities and incorporates it into their futures.

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FROM THE LITERACY SUPPORT WEBSITE:

“The Ghana Living Standards Survey (2000) reveals that poverty rates are increasing in deprived areas of the country particularly where there is extreme poverty. The Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Central and Western Regions have the highest incidence of poverty where more than 50% of people live below the poverty line (i.e. live on less than 1US Dollar per day) and as many as 30% live below the extreme poverty line (i.e. people living on less than ¼ of a dollar per day). Nineteen of the 40 most deprived Districts in Ghana fall within the 3 northern regions. One clear indicator of this deprivation is the fact that educational development in Northern Ghana lags behind the rest of the country.... In response to the peculiar educational problems in Northern Ghana, the Literacy Support programme was developed...aimed at assisting children attain basic literacy skills and then integrate into the formal educational system.”

ACTION QUANTIFIED?

Literacy Support summarizes their programs on websites, brochures, and in other publications to explain their mission and market their strategy to potential donors and community partners. This rhetoric is not reflective of the daily work NGO teachers put in with students on a daily basis. I have illustrated value must be given to local action that takes place in addition to, or in spite of, organizational policy (Van Ufford, *et al.* 2003: 9). Critical development scholars may discredit organizations based on their narrow definition of development, as illustrated above (Ferguson 1996: 256). Implementation of projects reveals a fuller, more contextual perspective of Tamale than need be shown in these advertising pamphlets. In this final section, I hope to reevaluate the assumed goal of perfecting management, with a moral imperative to give academic value to hope in action (Van Ufford *et al.* 2003: 6).

Teachers at Literacy Support identify with their organization's official articulations of their communities and their work. NGOs use websites, brochures, and data reports to convey situational qualitative social context with simplified quantitative context. This process of simplification is used to communicate management strategies and marketing strategies. Highlighting NGOs' institutional discourse surrounding the communities where they work will be a primary focus of this section. Illustrating communities through numbers, management strategies, and demographic benchmarks has important limitations that should not be overlooked (Goldman 2005:100). This project aims to resituate NGO management goals within the moments of implementation where goals must be justified. I conclude here by discussing the impact of donors in shaping the educational agenda of local Ghanaian communities.

National governments use NGOs to create a social safety net to support low-income populations (Allard 2009: 31). NGOs have adaptability and flexibility that may be antithetical to more structured governments procedures (Michaux 2008:5). Policy makers can easily apply cultural judgments to their legislation and governance; public-private partnerships should seek to enhance the community in which such bureaucrats operate (Michaux 2008: 22). Some would say NGOs should not do the work of the government (Farmer 2003: 249), though NGOs have adaptability and imagination often lacking in the bureaucracy of political offices. To anthropologist James

Ferguson, this alignment of the government's agenda with the NGO's agenda is problematic: "development uses the mask of poverty to increase state power" (Ferguson 1994: 256). In reality, educational NGOs are questioning the cultural assumptions implicit in national education models.

The Literacy Support program has made working with the formal system an important part of their program model. One manager says:

Our services target the out of school population the government is trying to reach. We advocate for improved methodology and are trying to get their methodology to be used in schools. The teaching method in formal schools needs to be changed to incorporate activity and discussion to keep students engaged. The government's plans to incorporate the [Literacy Support] model have progressed a lot. A draft of the policy has been written and on November 30 there will be a meeting to discuss further how this complementary system should be added (Personal Interview 11/15/2010).

Rather than bending to the conforming power that state education agendas may impose on subsistence farming communities, NGOs like Literacy Support are able to analyze and critique the effectiveness of national education from the community level. The Ghanaian Educational Service was working cooperatively with Literacy Support officials to brainstorm educational reform during my month in Tamale. Government officials, like donors, may rely on the NGOs' community lens to consider their intervention in development projects.

NGOs' funding supply is highly volatile and the constant quest for donors and financial support is inherent to any organization's management (Foster *et al.* 2009: 32). NGO staff must be able to meet the demand for social services using a limited supply of donors, who bring a personal, often morally charged, agenda along with their investment of labor or finances (Foster *et al.* 2009: 34). Crewe and Harrison's ethnography, *Whose Development? An Ethnography of Aid*, highlights the contentious issue of NGO partnerships: "Given the good governance agenda, and aid conditionality, the portrayal of partnership as a process of cooperation between equals is inherently problematic" (Crewe

and Harrison 1998: 71).^{iv} But, through their institutional ethnography, the authors find recipients of NGO activity are not limited by the power imbalance present in the funding system (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 77). Organizations must market their cause to individuals, governments, and agencies that can provide financial support (Allard 2009: 31). Staff's ground level-lenses allows them to articulate locally relevant solutions to policy problems, but often they have to spend a disproportionate amount of their time searching for funding rather than implementing their ideas (Personal Interview 11/18/2010). Informants in Tamale regularly referred to funding when asked about current challenges facing their organization.

A manager of the Literacy Support program hints at a disconnect between the organization's and their primary donor's agendas when asked about current challenges to the future of their program. He noted:

The donor does not want to fund service delivery and would prefer to do advocacy. We argue that if we do not have classrooms where data can be collected, advocacy cannot be done. Based on current patterns, by 2014 37,000 children will still be out of school. If donors hear the news that Ghana now qualifies as a middle-income country, they will be less compelled to donate. (Personal Interview 11/15/2010).^v

The manager highlights a constant dilemma of NGO funding: do staff bend to the will of powerful donors, or stand behind their community's program ideas at the risk of losing funding?

Translating the reality of educational injustices in Tamale and Ghana to the world of corporate donors, philanthropists, and the public requires staff to invest time and energy away from their educational programs. "When a nonprofit finds a way to create value for a beneficiary . . . it has not identified its economic engine. That is a separate step" (Foster *et al.* 2009:34). Foster *et al.* identify three parameters for defining ten of the main nonprofit funding models that are relevant here: "source of funds, the types of decision makers, and the motivations of the decision makers" (Foster *et al.* 2009: 35). The ten models they define apply to NGOs in the United States operational since 1970 or later which have grown to a budget at least fifty million dollars

(Foster *et al.* 2009: 34). Literacy Support must either seek donors whose philanthropic motivations align with theirs, or the NGOs must shift their goals to align with available donors.

Two funding types roughly align with NGOs involved in this project. The first, “heartfelt connector,” tries to communicate a social issue to the public that will resonate with a wide variety of people (Foster *et al.* 2009:35). Thus the primary motivation of funders is altruism (Foster *et al.* 2009: 37). The second, “local nationalizer,” is an apt description for the Literacy Support program. Its issue, education, applies to more than one specific location, and the organization must gather funding from national and international sources, rather than just local ones (Foster *et al.* 2009: 37). A few individuals make funding decisions, and these funders are motivated by altruism (Foster *et al.* 2009: 37). Not only must NGOs carve out a particular niche in Tamale, they also must carve out a niche for funding.

Critical scholars argue ethnocentric discursive translation can be carried from fundraising to program implementation (Ferguson 1996, Goldman 2005, Kissane *et al.* 2004). In the institutional ethnography, *Imperial Nature*, Michael Goldman argues that Robert McNamera, long-time President of the World Bank, brought a neoliberal agenda to international development that is now the standard for any NGO development action (Goldman 2005: 98-99). McNamera advocated using education to further the training of poor communities (Goldman 2005: 71). Using the rationale of cultural evolution, McNamera sought the economic goal of productive capitalism to improve impoverished countries globally (Goldman 2005: 71).^{vi} McNamera was interested in remedying poverty with conformity: “his strategy was . . . to measure, analyze, and overcome” (Goldman 2005:77). By highlighting training, productivity, and quantifiable outcomes, the World Bank fostered development rhetoric that says social justice is based on demographics rather than personal experiences. They funded NGO initiatives if their programs could be supported by quantitative data and measures of progress.

My fieldwork shows that prescriptive policy will be imperfectly planned or imperfectly implemented. Academic research cannot expect to form ideal plans for social action (Van Ufford *et al.* 2003: 18). As an ethnographer interested in empowerment, I must constantly evaluate the relationship of my work to the voices of oppressed people so “my thoughtful

prescription for empowerment does not become an imposition of power itself” (Van Ufford *et al.* 2003: 18). Ethnographers cannot expect to inform the conversation on social injustice and NGOs without becoming an agent in processes of change, themselves (Mosse 2005: 18). Organizations must simultaneously reconcile the philanthropic vision of donors while building trust with student and families.

Further ethnographic work regarding NGOs and education is needed in oppressed communities (Bourgois 1996: 15). This project has illustrated that no matter our interest in management and policy, acute understanding of local cultural norms in poor communities is key to providing freedom from oppression (Michaux 2008: 22). NGOs in Tamale face similar challenges while working with oppressed communities. International organizations face a contradiction as they work to apply global policies to local context, while grassroots organizations are to respond dynamically to evolving and interrelated social processes. Policies and mission statements inform these actions, but do not confine or limit them (Mosse 2005:103).

CONCLUSION

Education can be a tool or a cage. It has been perceived as both an imposition of power and a source of empowerment (Freire 1970: 96). Teachers in NGO programs are able to invest as civically active members of the community when NGOs further the identity of their students and their community by prioritizing community networks over marketing the institution’s image. It is difficult to simplify how any particular organization will apply its mission to individuals on any particular day. Being an educator in a Ghanaian community can mean saying “Good Morning!” to Ms. Rosa on her daily walk; communicating with parents; understanding family dynamics; and making academics relevant to each student. The work of NGO teachers becomes community outreach work: it requires reconciling multiple moral and ethical standards on a daily basis.

Today, there is no certain proof that the sustainable engagement of NGOs will strengthen the civic fabric and reduce the poverty of Tamale. Ultimately, I hope a continual process of engagement can inform educational curriculums in oppressed places. No NGO agenda is imposed without being altered by the social situation where it is implemented (Mosse 2004: 641). Assuming no dialogue can take place without improper imposition

will maintain oppression of Tamale residents. Policies are not impenetrable structural forces; their effects are complemented by local cultural reality. Yon concludes, after completing ethnographic work at Canadian schools, “power emerges through these [educational] practices not as zero-sum and hierarchically held but dispersed; not as unidirectional, as might be envisaged, but as multidirectional” (1999: 38). If academic theory increasingly gives value to the role of institutional employees as translators of policy, we will gain a view of community development that negotiates power and admits its own limitations.

A high school counselor in Tamale describes his job as facilitating vocational training and career counseling for students. However, he notes, rather than prescribing paths for students, counselors should attempt to “guide their interests and open up opportunities where they think they are not possible... the choice is in their hands” (Personal Interview 11/12/2010). While managers in Tamale are motivated by overemphasizing economic benchmarks, local teachers are situated to re-localize education to foster the functionality of marginalized communities on their own terms. Rather than neglect the quantifiable agendas of governments and funding agencies, sustainable relationships must be balanced with a sustainable management model to provide stability for service delivery. Through this contested process of development NGOs’ educational agendas must hand communities back to students and allow them to develop their own identity with pride while gaining skills that allow accessibility to social contexts beyond their own.

ⁱ Today there are many terms, applications, and definitions associated with the term ‘development,’ and though many NGOs use the word while keeping in mind what local communities value as a ‘development,’ when using the biological analogy of Darwinian evolution, social development become analogous to Durkheim’s social theory regarding the progression of societies from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern.’ (Lewis 2005; Escobar 1992: 140).

ⁱⁱ “Even the most cursory look at data suggests that as aid has increased over time, Africa’s growth has decreased with an accompanying higher incidence of poverty (Moyo 2009: 46).

ⁱⁱⁱ Bringing formal education to Ghana has been a source of conflict often seen by the political elite as a way to exert power over diverse and fragmented ethnic groups across the country. This is not only the case in the North, but across the country. Roberts’ study of education in Wiawso, Western Ghana found missionaries imposed a Western curriculum on the community around 1900, despite the community’s hesitation and reluctance (1982: 269).

^{iv} Crewe and Harrison (1998: 71) are referring to the World Bank’s interest in partnering with local NGOs to ‘fight poverty’ globally based on their generalized global agenda.

^v In October 2010, news was released that Ghana’s socioeconomic demographics now enable it to qualify as a middle-income country. Some praised the achievement of the country to reach this benchmark, while other questioned the global standards (ghanaweb.com).

^{vi} The social theorist, Durkheim, proposed that societies naturally evolve from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ societies. Dominant anthropology theory has moved away from this modernization theory since the 1970’s (Lewis 2005).

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Radical Campus? *Student Participation in the SFU Left Alternative Club*

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ABSTRACT

A faint memory of the school's turbulent past, Simon Fraser University is home to the club Left Alternative. Although explicitly oriented towards socialist concerns, ethnographic inquiry reveals that member's motivations for participation transcend any simple affinity for socialism. Rather, their involvement in the club speaks to a number of factors that are multifaceted and without overt intent. Through interviews and participant observation, balanced with material analysis and autoethnography, the causes of participation in Left Alternative appear threefold. Member's involvement presupposes an interest in education, both of oneself and others, a desire to correct social ills, and an implicit need to affirm struggling notions of self.

Keywords: Club Participation, Socialism, Identity Affirmation, Education, Activism

INTRODUCTION

Officially a celebration of Simon Fraser University's (SFU) distinctive vision, for many the slogan heading its 40th anniversary, "radical by design" (Stevenson 2005), instead speaks to the early struggle between administration and the student-faculty coalition of the Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology Department (PSA). Culminating in the three-day occupation of the administration building, and the subsequent arrest of 114 activists, the late 1960s were home to a bitter dispute over the status of post-secondary education. The opinion of the PSA, and of the Students for a Democratic University, was that decision-making should be democratized, which meant the transfer of power from the board of governors to students and faculty. By 1969, the school had seen the removal of a president, strikes by faculty, numerous protests, and extra-curricular initiatives to nurture 'left' sentiments, earning SFU the title of "Berkeley North" (Johnston 2005).

Though the PSA has dissolved, and its student leaders have moved on, the memory of the school's turbulent past prevails. Atop the rainy Burnaby Mountain, just east of Vancouver, SFU is heralded as one of western Canada's most prominent leftist universities. In fact, it was precisely this status that prompted me to enroll. While attending a smaller college, it had come to my attention that even the simple pleasure of transferring credits to SFU was influenced by early militant students. I wished to become a part of this tradition. However, the experience did not live up to expectations. Despite there being an abundance of issues, protests seemed few and far between. Of all the clubs on campus, only a handful seemed concerned with student politics, and even these lacked substantial membership. In 2001, in an attempt to understand this anomaly, I sought out one of SFU's most obvious left clubs: Left Alternative.

Although the name of the club carries the political term left, Left Alternative is a club oriented primarily towards socialist concerns. However, this is not to say that the club is dogmatic and intolerant of non-socialist ideas. In my experience as both an active member of the club and an observer, it was apparent that neither the founders of Left Alternative, nor any of its members, were closed to ideas which were not of a socialist leaning. In fact, in the two months I spent researching, it became clear that socialism, while many members saw it as the logical solution to the problems of capitalism, did not dominate discussion. This was surprising

considering the recruitment leaflet for the club states: "We believe that people can change things for the better. A socialist society is possible" (See Figure 1). To my amazement, Left Alternative did not appear to be a club full of die-hard socialists, planning their advance and the ultimate overhaul of society.

Why then do students participate in Left Alternative? In this research I examine this question from the perspective of a sympathetic researcher, an active member of the club, and an insider. By attempting to gauge this question a number of related factors are revealed, including the motivations of members, their objectives for Left Alternative, and the labels they identify themselves with. I argue that student participation in Left Alternative is closely related to educational goals, both in terms of the desire to learn and to educate others. It is further argued that participation is a result of member's desires to involve themselves in activism and find practical solutions to the ongoing social problems they are aware of. Finally, it is demonstrated that members exhibit an implicit need to interact with people who identify themselves in a similar manner, thereby reaffirming their own identity.

LITERATURE ON CLUB PARTICIPATION

Granted that the current literature on club participation is primarily concerned with post-secondary students (Arbodela et al. 2003; Burns et al. 2006; Case 2011; Gilbreath et al. 2011; Knowles and Gardner 2008), it would seem that this research, in having a likewise focus, is limited in its contribution to the literature on club participation. However, the current literature lacks any substantial investigation of the topic with regard to qualitative methodology (Arbodela et al. 2003; Burns et al. 2006; Case 2011; Gilbreath et al. 2011). Even where post-secondary students were not a factor, strictly quantitative techniques still prevailed (Planalp and Trost 2009). These studies all employed closed-answer questionnaires which, given their limitation of responses to impersonal categories, failed to fully apprehend the underlying meaning of participant's experience. An attempt to rectify this problem is found in Knowles and Gardner's (2008) study, where participants were asked to write, in as much detail as possible, their innermost convictions regarding particular social events. To get at the heart of post-secondary student's participation in clubs, it is necessary to expand on Knowles and Gardner's (2008)

LEFT ALTERNATIVE

In the past ten years the costs of a post-secondary education has increased 119% in BC. Canadian troops have fought in Afghanistan for almost a decade, things there are no better, but many Afghans and Canadians have died. Canada has been fighting in Afghanistan for almost ten years with no end in sight. Social and economic inequality is increasing in Canada and worldwide. Big business is damaging the environment to make profits. We believe that people can change things for the better. A socialist society is possible. Find out more and join Left Alternative.

Left Alternative SFU will discussing and campaigning on issues including: against imperialism and discrimination; in support of workers' struggles; and for accessible education, environmental sustainability and socialist democracy. Come and join the discussion!

Our first meeting is on September 21st the topic will be 'What is Socialism?' Subsequent topics are TBA depending on members' interests.

Meet: Wednesdays from 10:30 to 11:30pm

Where: ~~TBA~~ Bennett Study Room 2102

Contact: leftalternative2010@gmail.com

Figure 1

approach, further allowing participant's to express their own meaning. Such an approach guides this research.

A further contribution to the literature on club participation consists in the lack of inquiry into specific post-secondary clubs. The current literature tends to analyze clubs as a general category (Arbodela et al. 2003; Burns et al. 2006; Case 2011; Gilbreath et al. 2011; Knowles & Gardner 2008). Hence, Case's (2011) research demonstrated an interest in collegiate clubs which "represented a broad range of co-curricular activities available to college students" (174). This approach is also apparent in Burn et al.'s (2006) study of undergraduate marketing students, where participants were assessed on the basis of their involvement in a general assortment of clubs and associations. Surely, such generalizations are important to uncovering common causes of club participation, but they are unable to investigate the specific causes inherent to individual clubs. Each club, being distinct from others, inevitably has a different appeal to the student and procures their participation in different ways. Not only does this research explore the dynamics of a single club, but it might provide insight into the causes pertaining to a club type – that of socialist or left clubs.

Concerning club participation in general, three explanations stand out in the current literature. First, there exists a positive relationship between on-campus residency and club participation (Arboleda et al. 2003; Case 2006). While Arboleda et al. (2003) suggests that greater satisfaction with residence life contributes to involvement in clubs, Case (2011) accounts for the relation by concluding that on-campus residency simply affords more opportunities to engage with clubs, and therefore enhances the likelihood of participation. However, each hypothesis only identifies a correlation, yet does not unearth exactly why students participate in the clubs they do. Perhaps the relationship is not causal, but only coincidental, and is reducible to a third, unaccounted element. In this research, I examine the claims of Arbodela et al. (2003) and Case (2011), probing students themselves for any indication of a self-claimed causal relationship between residency and club participation.

Another explanation present in the current literature involves social identity theory, which explores the interaction between one's sense of self and their perceived belonging to the social group (Brym 2008). Gilbreath et al. (2011) found that the extent to which post-secondary students define themselves

according to varsity sports teams, academic majors, or as students of the institution, greatly affects their involvement in campus activity. Their identification with these symbols permits entrance into a community of likewise identified persons, fostering interaction between them. Where their inclusion in the community is threatened, Knowles and Gardner (2008) note that people unwittingly amplify the meaningfulness and personal importance of the group, thereby sustaining a sense of belonging. A threat to their membership becomes a threat to their sense of self. This research explores the possibility of Left Alternative as providing a community to which the identities of students are intimately entwined. If integral to the preservation of certain notions of self, their participation might implicate social identity theory in an understanding of participation in clubs of this type.

Third, employing a rational actor model, Olsen (2009) asserts that an individual's choice to participate in any social activity results from an innate desire to maximize personal benefits and minimize costs. Therefore, to participate in a group that strives for a "public good" (62) would be irrational, as a member of the same group would receive the benefit of the good without helping to attain it. Accordingly, Olsen (2009) stresses the importance of "selective incentives" (64) – benefits offered by a group which are only attributable to individuals. For Olsen (2009), participation in group activity requires the existence of selective incentives. Following this, I examine the degree to which member's participation in Left Alternative is dependent on selective incentives. This research also serves to evaluate Olsen's (2009) notion of people as rational actors, supporting or repudiating its authority in the current literature.

RESEARCH SITE AND METHODS

Every week the Left Alternative club meets in a room located on the SFU campus to discuss issues relevant to socialism. The members of the group are all SFU undergraduate students, with the exception of a Masters student in history. The organizer books the rooms and sends out an email to each member of the group in advance of meetings. Since there was considerable competition for rooms during research, it was not possible to schedule every meeting in the same room. Therefore, weekly discussions took place in either the Education Building, located on the North side of the Academic Quadrangle, or on

the second floor of the Bennett Library. While certain rooms in each region were often used more than once, the rooms themselves were quite similar in appearance and structure. Each had a single table, either square or circular, with chairs placed around it. This was fruitful in terms of creating a space in which all members were comfortable to share their opinions and engage in discussion. Other similarities consisted in the fact that all the rooms were of a rectangular shape, were large enough to hold approximately fifteen people, and had whiteboards which aided in illustrating members points during discussion.

Although I had joined Left Alternative only a month prior to research, my dual presence throughout October and November, as both a member and researcher, was welcomed. In fact, I quickly became friends with a number of the participants and am still currently. This was beneficial in terms of obtaining the consent of members to be observed during meetings. When this concern was brought to their attention, they were incredibly receptive to the research objectives, and even encouraged the project. Since different members frequently showed up to meetings each week, approval of the research was asked for on several occasions, warranting positive responses each time. Their consent was attained verbally, and it was agreed that their identities would remain confidential. In this report, all members are represented with a designated alias.

The methods employed include participant observation, interviews, material analysis, and auto-ethnography. Meetings took place every week at 10:30 am on Wednesday. I attended eight of a total nine meetings during research, observing and participating in the discussion which took place. The number of members at each meeting ranged from four to seven. Although discussions were frequently high-spirited and jovial, the group would generally discuss topics which focused on the problematic nature of society. These topics included such things as abortion, state authority, imperialism, colonialism, homelessness, poverty, etc. While the data gathered by means of observation helped to find themes to be explored during interviews, such as “meaning of socialism,” “self-identification,” “opinion of global protests,” “first experience of socialism,” “on-campus club involvement,” “homogeneity of perspectives at meetings,” this method was challenging. As a participant-observer, it was difficult to capture every potentially useful interaction, statement, and gesture. However, by sustaining participation in discussions, I

was able to build rapport with the members of Left Alternative. This was beneficial for finding interview respondents, as members were more willing to participate, particularly Luke, a fourth year student who, upon hearing that I intended to conduct interviews, offered himself as the first participant. In addition, this rapport allowed for me to build relationships with members that extended beyond association in Left Alternative. By engaging with members outside of Left Alternative meetings, a deeper understanding of the participants was possible. As a result, interviews were able to gauge the research question in a manner which was more closely related to specific individuals. For example, my friendship with Chris revealed to me that he is an active member of Socialist Alternative Canada, a national socialist organization oriented towards activism. With this understanding, I was able to inquire into his involvement in Socialist Alternative during our semi-structured interview, and how this relates to Left Alternative. If I did not have this knowledge prior to the interview it may have been difficult to gain insight into Chris’s affinity for socialist activism.

Apart from the interview with Chris, three others were conducted, each in a different format. The formats used were semi-structured, structured, and unstructured. Although Luke volunteered himself for an interview, the other three participants were selected on the basis of maximum variation. They were purposefully chosen according to characteristics of interest, such as attendance of meetings, year of studies, gender, and field of studies. For all categories an attempt was made to ascertain individuals who represented a wide range of variability. For instance, although this was not the primary reason for selection, Penelope was chosen because she was in her fourth year of studies, while Sandra was selected because it was her first semester of post-secondary education. Each respondent was asked to participate via email so that both their selection and decision to participate or not would be confidential. Emails included a general outline of the ethical responsibilities of the researcher, what participation entails, and the overall conduct and objectives of the research project. This was explained in greater detail at the beginning of each interview. Since my relationship with the members of Left Alternative was strong, every member who was asked to participate accepted.

Observation and interviews were supplemented by material analysis. Open coding was used to analyze text, as

well as images. Because he founded the club, and is therefore the primary organizer, Chris designed a leaflet to be handed out to interested students during “Clubs Day” in early September. It illustrated a variety of social and economic problems that persist globally and in Canada, following up with an advertisement for the club as a means to discussing and campaigning on these issues. Analysis of this allowed for a greater understanding of Chris’s perspective concerning current society, socialism, and the objectives he has for Left Alternative. Along with Alex, another member of Socialist Alternative who on occasion attends Left Alternative meetings, Chris also produced a leaflet that was distributed at the initial rally for Occupy Vancouver on October 15. It emphasized the hardships involved in the current economic crisis around the world and in British Columbia, how these problems might be solved, and an advertisement for a bi-weekly discussion group in downtown Vancouver. Chris also created a leaflet advertising an October lecture at SFU by a member of the German Left Party, organized by Left Alternative. These were analyzed in order to further elaborate on the relationship between Socialist Alternative and Left Alternative, and how this relationship is represented by Chris and Alex. Other materials included an informational leaflet produced by the Seattle branch of Socialist Alternative for the October lecture. Analysis of this permitted an understanding of the objectives of Socialist Alternative as an organization.

Finally, this data was supplemented by auto-ethnography. Following each observation period, I would spend time writing detailed notes regarding my own experience in the situation. This was included with my regular field notes, allowing for a fully reflexive awareness of my own position in the data, and how it relates to the events occurring during weekly meetings. This is especially important when it is acknowledged that I, like many others in the club, was a new member of Left Alternative. As both a new member and an active participant, the insights gained from my experience are invaluable to the research. Additionally, I spent approximately two hours answering each question in the interview guide, recording my responses prior to conducting interviews with other members. Following open coding of interview transcripts, it was possible to analyze themes from the auto-ethnographic interview in conjunction with the other interviews.

EDUCATION

When I first met Chris, it was on Clubs Day in early September. He was sitting beside Alex at the table for Left Alternative, as a rally carried on behind in support of CUPE in their lockout battle with the SFSS. Lacking a banner, the table was covered by a variety of books and pamphlets representing such themes as the environment, LGBT rights, Malcolm X, imperialism, Marxism, the Russian Revolution of 1917, etc. Having heard of Left Alternative previously, I was aware that the club was oriented towards socialism. But upon seeing the wide array of topics the club concerned itself with, I was intrigued and wished to learn more about socialism. Over the previous summer I had spent a bit of time reading up on socialism. My knowledge of the subject, however, was by no means complete. Left Alternative, then, appeared as an opportunity to learn about something which is so often castigated by mainstream media.

“... YOU ALWAYS SEE THINGS FROM A MAINSTREAM PERSPECTIVE. [THE] MEDIA SAYS THIS ABOUT SOMETHING, BUT I FIGURE IT WOULD BE GOOD TO SEE THINGS FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, TO SEE HOW SOCIALISTS VIEW THINGS, AND WHAT SOCIALISM ACTUALLY IS” – BEN

In our first meeting of the semester, a young second year arts student named Ben, expressed a similar sentiment. At the beginning of the meeting, Chris asked if we could go around the table and introduce ourselves, stating something interesting about ourselves and possibly why we joined Left Alternative. When it was his turn to speak, Ben stated that his interest in Left Alternative was a result of the fact that “you always see things from a mainstream perspective.” For him, ideas about socialism, and of socialists particularly, often went unheard. He went on to say that: “[the] media says this about something, but I figure it would be good to see things from a different perspective, to see how socialists view things, and what socialism actually is.” Although implicitly, Ben suggests that the idea of socialism espoused by mainstream perspectives may not be accurate, and accordingly his knowledge of the subject is insufficient.

This point was emphasized during informal discussions with other members, particularly Linda, a young Chinese student involved with the Society for Arts and Social Sciences (SASS). Exuding enthusiasm and energy, Linda would often ask myself and other members a variety of questions related to socialism and left politics. Unknown to me at the time that she was involved with the SASS, I attended a lecture organized by the group, and ended up encountering Linda there. At the end of the lecture we discussed a variety of things related to our participation in Left Alternative, at which point she questioned me about the difference between anarchism, socialism, and communism. As I attempted to answer her questions, she elaborated on her reasoning by explaining that her lack of knowledge about these ideas was a product of the fact that she “was never really taught about socialism, anarchism, and that stuff.” Emphasizing the point, Linda explained that many of the members of Left Alternative seem to be more knowledgeable of these ideas, particularly Chris and Alex, whom she claims to have learnt the most from.

For Chris, this appears to be precisely the intent he has for the group – to educate others. Since Chris founded the group a little over a year prior to the research, I was able to ask him in our interview why he decided to create Left Alternative. Among the various answers he gave, a prominent one was the desire to educate others about the nature of socialism. This was reflected

in the leaflet Chris handed out on Clubs Day. Two-thirds of the way down the paper, it reads “Our first meeting is September 21st the topic will be ‘What is Socialism?’ Subsequent topics are TBA depending on members’ interests” (See Figure 1). Here, it is apparent that there is an emphasis on teaching others about socialism, as well as catering this education towards people’s interests. Although the primary relation of members to Left Alternative is for educating one’s self, for Chris it is about educating others.

ACTIVISM

However, Chris’s intent for Left Alternative does not end at the education of others concerning socialism. For him, there is a larger purpose closely related to his involvement in Socialist Alternative. Although the organization is not dogmatic, membership implies an interest and dedication to the promotion of socialism over capitalism, and the advancement of this goal by means of active struggle. In an article produced by Socialist Alternative in Seattle, this notion is clearly emphasized. They call upon members and the general population alike to “spread the occupations across the U.S. and into schools and communities,” and to “organize weekend mass demonstrations” (See Figure 2).

While lacking in membership and therefore activists, the Canadian branch strives towards the same goals. In our interview Chris repeated this sentiment, stating that the absence of activism by Socialist Alternative in Vancouver is precisely a problem of membership, not of intent. In fact, Chris and Alex are the only two members of Socialist Alternative in the entire Vancouver region, making any form of activism a complicated task. To curb this hindrance, Chris explains that Left Alternative may serve as a means to recruit people to Socialist Alternative. He says that the ultimate goal for Left Alternative is to “have a small group who will actively involve themselves in alternative and left groups, and who will continue the work of networking and education.” As I questioned if there was anyone in Left Alternative he thought of recruiting, Chris gestured towards me.

Being a sociology major, one is often made aware of the various problems which afflict society. What is often lacking,

End the Dictatorship of Wall Street!

A Socialist Strategy to Build the Movement



All around the world attention has been drawn to the occupation of Wall Street. The protests has captured the imagination of thousands and inspired new occupations which are spreading across the U.S.

The police crackdown in New York, intended to intimidate this movement, completely failed to break our spirit. Now we are more determined than ever to fight. Inspired by the revolutionary upheavals in Egypt and across North Africa, as well as the mass youth occupations in Spain and Greece, protestors have taken to the streets of New York and cities across the U.S. to stand up to the domination of Wall Street and Big Business over our lives.

Below the surface there is deep anger in U.S. society which only seemed to be getting a twisted expression in the right-wing lunatics of the Tea Party. But the mass movement in Wisconsin this spring, and now the occupation of Wall Street provide a glimpse of the enormous potential to turn that anger into a progressive social movement.

How can we take the struggle forward?

Many are occupying to "liberate space" in order to build a new, more equal and just community, hoping it will inspire others to follow. While the Wall Street occupation is an example of a community based on democracy, cooperation and solidarity, unfortunately the occupation alone will not be enough to build a mass movement capable of changing society.

Many have alluded to Egypt saying that a growing occupation with one basic demand is how the dictator was overthrown. But in fact, the situation was more complicated than that. In the week before Egypt's dictator Mubarak was ousted, the

working class entered the scene with decisive strike action paralyzing key parts of the economy.

The occupations in Spain and Greece have been much bigger than Wall Street, but they too need the more powerful forces of the working class to move into action in order to win. In Wisconsin, a huge occupation of the Capitol lasted for over 3 weeks and was at the center of mass demonstrations of the workers and youth. They could have won if that movement had moved toward a general strike of public sector workers to shut the state economy down.

Instead the Wisconsin battle was consciously derailed by the Democratic Party and the top union leadership by diverting the mass movement into a campaign to recall the Republicans from power in order to elect Democrats in their place. However, the Democrats, like the Republicans, are a party of Wall Street and Big Business, and they offer no solutions. We need an independent struggle which seeks to draw in the widest layers of workers and youth. United we have the power to withdraw our labor, stop "business as usual," and hit the banks, corporations and ruling elite where it counts.

We need to build up the confidence to take such bold measures. That's why Occupy Wall Street needs to call for mass demonstrations around key demands that address the burning issues that working people and youth face like jobs, education, healthcare and so on.

System Change

Not only the economy but society as a whole is in a deep crisis. Global capitalism is a failed system that cannot overcome the problems of growing inequality, poverty, mass unemployment, environmental destruction, and war which it creates. The movement has to challenge Wall Street and both parties of big business. We must stand up to their policies where they try to solve their economic crisis on our backs in order to maintain a system which only benefits the elite in the first place.

But we must also provide a clear alternative. We need to fundamentally transform society to one not based on profit

but instead on meeting everyone's basic human needs. The only real alternative to corporate greed and capitalism is democratic socialism where the economy, workplaces, and society as a whole is democratically run by and for the vast majority of people.

Join Socialist Alternative! We say:

- Spread the occupations across the U.S. and into schools and communities. For systematic, mass campaigning to mobilize the widest layer of workers, young people and labor unions into struggle.

- Organize weekend mass demonstrations that call for: No cuts to social services, A massive jobs creation program, Major tax hikes on the super-rich and big business, End the wars, Slash the military budget, and Defend union and democratic rights.

- Build up to the November 16-23 National Week of Action to combat the Congressional Super Committee plan for \$1.5 trillion in cuts to social services. We demand jobs not cuts!

- Prepare to run independent anti-corporate, working-class candidates in 2012 to challenge the policies of the two parties of Wall Street as a first step towards forming a new party of the 99%, a mass workers' party.

- End the dictatorship of Wall Street! Bring the big banks that dominate the U.S. economy into public ownership and run them under the democratic management of elected representatives of their workers and the public. Compensation to be paid on the basis of proven need to small investors, not millionaires.

- Build the movement to replace the rotten system of capitalism with democratic socialism and create a new society based on human need.

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Figure 2

however, is a means towards their correction. “We read a lot of stuff in books, but it’s hard to translate into practice” as Luke so helpfully put it in my interview with him, another sociology student. My involvement, as well as Luke’s, is to some degree an attempt to get involved in activism and begin to engage with these problems in a practical manner. Learning of Chris’s connection to Socialist Alternative, I discussed with him on various occasions the nature of the organization and expressed an interest in joining. Accordingly, when Chris officially asked me to become a member of Socialist Alternative in late November, both mine as well as Chris’s activist goals for Left Alternative were somewhat satisfied. He had gained an ally in the struggle for socialism, and I had discovered an avenue for my activist interests.

Along with myself, Luke was also asked if he would like to join Socialist Alternative. Luke is also very aware of the current state of society, finding in it a great deal of problems. In our interview, Luke was emphatic of the way the education system reproduces misery, stating that “there’s so many people today who because they don’t have enough money they can’t go to university, and therefore they can’t develop new skills.” This restriction stifles the ability to be creative, and if one cannot be creative, “then your life becomes really really miserable.” What is the solution to this problem? For Luke, the answer is to try to change the world. He goes on to say: “and thinking yeah well, if my life is going to be miserable or not, and I don’t want it to be, I think the thing we should do is try to change the world.” One cannot hope for change, but must actively pursue it. From Luke’s perspective, this desire for positive change inevitably leads to socialism – a democratically organized society where the “basic needs of life are not owned privately” and “everything in society is voluntary,” allowing for individuals to achieve their fullest potential and be happy. It is in Left Alternative, as well as the resulting affiliation with members connected to activist networks, that positive change and socialism may be striven for.

IDENTITY

In their influential book *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann (1966) assert that one’s identity can only be maintained if the individual exists in a “milieu that confirms this identity” (155). While certain identity maintaining techniques may be utilized in the absence of actual social interaction, these techniques cannot sustain the identity in question indefinitely (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Knowles & Gardner 2008). Gradually, this sense of self loses its legitimacy and becomes

distorted, as it is subject to social processes which impose and affirm an alternative identity. The self-identified socialist, then, can only maintain their identity if they are to associate themselves with like-minded individuals. While this notion of identity affirmation may not be consciously apparent to the individual, it is clear that there exists an implicit desire for social belonging, as demonstrated by the existing literature on the subject (Gilbreath et al. 2011; Knowles & Gardner 2008).

This sentiment was evident in my interviews with members of Left Alternative. When asked about his reasons for founding the group, Chris stressed the isolation one feels if they associate themselves with alternative perspectives. These perspectives may lead one to become “frustrated with the way things are,” but unless there are other people to share these ideas with, people are left wondering “are there other people out there you can have that conversation with? Or are you sitting in your room being like: am I the only one?” It is this feeling of isolation which restricts the assumption of marginal notions of self. Although each respondent interviewed identified themselves according to a left identify (i.e. socialist, communist, anarchist), some were apprehensive in doing so, and even questioned their response once it was stated.

After stating that she identifies herself as a communist, Sandra, an arts student from Surrey, hastily remarked: “but that just sounds pretty extreme.” While it is possible that my presence provoked her to downplay this identity, I do not think this was the cause. As a friend of Sandra’s, we are particularly comfortable around each other and have often discussed these matters casually outside of Left Alternative. Rather, it seems that Sandra, as a new member of Left Alternative, has only recently begun to engage in relations which confirm this element of her self-concept. Such relations are particularly absent outside of Left Alternative, especially in high school, where she was only introduced to the “facts of Liberalism and Conservatism.” As a first year student, Sandra has only recently been removed of the relations present in high school that impose a particular definition of self and repress others. For this reason, she remains hesitant to fully embrace this identity.

Similarly, when I asked Penelope why she joined Left Alternative, she cited the fact that the only people she has ever known to entertain “socialist and other radical ideas” are her dad and a few friends, going on to admit that her choice to pursue an English degree allows for few opportunities to engage with these ideas. She followed this by explicitly stating that her choice to join was because she wanted “to discuss these things with

“THESE PERSPECTIVES MAY LEAD ONE TO BECOME “FRUSTRATED WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE,” BUT UNLESS THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE TO SHARE THESE IDEAS WITH, PEOPLE ARE LEFT WONDERING “ARE THERE OTHER PEOPLE OUT THERE YOU CAN HAVE THAT CONVERSATION WITH? OR ARE YOU SITTING IN YOUR ROOM BEING LIKE: AM I THE ONLY ONE?” IT IS THIS FEELING OF ISOLATION WHICH RESTRICTS THE ASSUMPTION OF MARGINAL NOTIONS OF SELF. ”

socialists and those sorts of people.” Recognizing her implication that she may be a socialist, I asked her if she identified herself in this manner. After a long pause and considerable self-debate over the meaning of certain positions, Penelope reluctantly identified herself as an anarchist. Like Sandra, Penelope appears to associate herself with alternative ideas, but is still unable to fully embrace an identity which represents these ideas.

Removed of social relations that confirm a particular identity, Berger and Luckmann (1966) assert that an individual will doubt themselves concerning this identity. It is this dissociation which causes doubt in Sandra and Penelope, and subsequently what motivates them to participate in Left Alternative. Through interaction in Left Alternative this sense of self may be reaffirmed. Association in Left Alternative has even necessitated relations which extend beyond weekly meetings, as seen in the friendships that have developed between members, and the involvement of many members in another discussion group which is more inclusive of the larger community.

DISCUSSION

As previously demonstrated, this research supports social identity theory and the hypothesis of Berger and Luckmann (1966). Although some members are uncomfortable vocalizing their left identity, it is apparent that their involvement in Left Alternative is related to an affinity for the alternative ideas associated with the club, as well as an implicit desire to affirm their sense of self. However, the latter theory is not conclusive, as this research is limited in analyzing how one’s stated identity changes with prolonged interaction in relations which may affirm this identity. Extensive longitudinal research on the members of Left Alternative may be able to yield conclusive data regarding Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) notion of identity affirmation.

This research finds conflicting evidence for Olsen’s (2009) notion of selective incentives and the rational actor model it assumes. While Left Alternative offers the opportunity for members to become educated regarding socialist and other alternative ideas, and therefore provides a selective incentive, the rational actor model is challenged by the desire of members to help educate others, as well as by their activist intent. If one is to surmise, however, that the education of others is in their own immediate interest (perhaps they will learn by teaching), then the rational actor model might be upheld. Nevertheless, this does not appear to be the case, as the education of others appears to be interrelated with activist motives oriented towards the resolution of larger social problems, an objective which is inherently altruistic.

Additionally, this research does not support the conclusions of Arboleda et al. (2003) and Case (2006), which suggests that satisfaction with residence life, and on-campus residency itself, prompt further involvement in club activity. Penelope was the only member of Left Alternative who lived in residence housing. As indicated in our interview, however, neither phenomenon had any impact on her decision to participate in Left Alternative. Proximity of residency to campus was also found to be unrelated to participation in regards to those members who live off campus.

CONCLUSION

If SFU is to regain its former prominence as a radical campus, school clubs and leftist sympathizers might benefit to acknowledge the many causes of involvement in left initiatives. Though my inquiry was limited to a single type of association, it is clear that member's involvement in Left Alternative speaks largely to the content of this club. As a club that upholds socialist and otherwise alternative perspectives, the appeal of Left Alternative is, in many ways, coterminous with the appeal of these perspectives. The prevalence of educational motives, at least concerning those members wanting to learn, and the implicit need to affirm struggling notions of self most clearly attests to this. In fact, my own involvement was prompted by the club's emphasis on socialism. For this reason, the findings of this research might plausibly extend to all left initiatives where gaining participants is a concern.

Currently, however, Left Alternative remains one of a minority of left associations at SFU. Still, this does not undermine its importance to the student body. As demonstrated, Left Alternative provides an outlet for certain marginalized sentiments. It is here that students are able to entertain notions of the self that are mostly removed from mainstream society; are able to learn about and, as the club mandate states, "discuss various social, political, economic, and cultural issues of significance to our members"; and to realize activist desires, participating in potentially meaningful change, both within SFU and beyond. Besides the venerable Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group, and the handful of 'action groups' beneath it, no other space is available for these purposes. Left Alternative is a last vestige of SFU's radical past and, as many members hope, a potential base for its return.

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