Infighting and Ideology: How Conflict Informs the Local Culture of the Chicago Dyke March

Amin Ghaziani · Gary Alan Fine

Abstract Although the study of local cultures has become established in American sociology, it often ignores the contested nature of how culture emerges and is negotiated within the context of small groups. To this end, we address the concept of infighting, a subtype of conflict, as it operates within a small group framework. Building on an ethnographic study of the Chicago Dyke March, we demonstrate that infighting highlights competing ideologies that may remain implicit in the absence of such conflict. Infighting treats divergent meaning systems as part of local contention between rival cliques and power centers. These ideological battles both reflect pre-existing differences between subgroups and serve to make explicit and public such differences, both in their background characteristics and in their interests. In the process infighting directs attention away from shared concerns and group building to questions of strategy, transforming the small group into an arena of ideological production and factional rivalry. Infighting recasts a group from a space of consensus to a contested political arena. We elaborate four analytic processes through which infighting connects to ideology and small group culture: infighting emphasizes the multivocality of meaning, cultural heterogeneity, an equilibrium of inclusion and group boundaries, and planning in light of ideologies of power.

"We don't exclude. You know, the point is not to exclude. It's just like, we just want everyone who shares a philosophy of women loving women to come out…It's just more diversity."—Organizer, 2003 Chicago Dyke March

A. Ghaziani (✉)
Society of Fellows, Princeton University, 10 Joseph Henry House, Princeton, NJ 08544, USA
e-mail: ghaziani@princeton.edu

G. A. Fine
Department of Sociology, Northwestern University, 1810 Chicago Avenue, Evanston, IL 60208, USA
e-mail: g-fine@northwestern.edu

"We can't be doing a lot of like…theories of inclusion and whatever…I get very frustrated very easily with the intellectualism of organizing things with lesbians … Everyone has their own idea about what they want…everyone ends up fighting about that until two weeks before the event and then everyone's like, 'Oh my God! What do we need to do?'"—Organizer, 2003 Chicago Dyke March, reflecting on a planning session

Although the image of group culture often assumes the existence of a warm and happy consensus, a domain in which participants share a common perspective and a collective identity (Fine 1979; Sherif and Sherif 1964). Such an image, while applicable to many groups, ignores the reality of internal divisions. We analyze the politics of group culture by focusing on such divides. As a type of conflict, infighting provides an opportunity to explore how group cultures can diverge, despite a seeming commonality of interest, in light of centrifugal forces that threaten to separate participants in terms of their instrumental and expressive goals. The concept of infighting treats divergent meaning systems as centers of local contention between rival cliques in a challenge for power. These ideological battles both reflect pre-existing differences between subgroups (in the character and motivations of participants) and make explicit their ideological and social splits. Infighting privileges differences and directs attention from shared concerns and group building to contested questions of strategy, transforming the group into an arena of ideological production and factional rivalry.

To analyze how infighting informs local culture and group action, we focus on a dramatic case: the Chicago Dyke March, an annual lesbian (or "dyke," in members' language) political demonstration started by a group of women called the Lesbian Avengers. The Avengers formed the Dyke March in reaction and opposition to what they perceived as the unrepresentativeness and exclusiveness of the annual Gay Pride parades held in every major U.S. city. The first Gay Pride parade was held in June 1970 to commemorate the 1969 Stonewall uprisings in New York City that many historians argue "sparked the beginning of the gay liberation movement" (Berube 1990:271). Yet, despite its origins in a liberation movement, some critics perceive Gay Pride as both too corporate and as fundamentally sexist. Pride parades, they allege, marginalize women. Lesbians are rendered invisible, with the event increasingly projecting an image of the gay community as apolitical, hyper-sexed, affluent, white, and male. Organizers such as those quoted in the opening statements believe the Dyke March provides a corrective response, an alternative to perceived exclusions.

A flier for a 2002 demonstration in Chicago articulates the group's ideology of remediation: "Our mission is to make visible and celebrate lesbian, bisexual, and women-identified transgendered women's existence in the city by a public demonstration." When the nine organizers of the 2003 event gathered for planning and brainstorming sessions, they often spoke of the importance of inclusion, especially through efforts to broaden boundaries by incorporating all "women-loving women. Like if you love women, if you love them either platonically or what not, or you have sexual relations with them. Everyone's welcome." The organizers seek to include women of "all shapes and sizes and colors and belief systems and abilities," which they hope will expand definitions of diversity: "The goal is to continue increasing and to build diversity ethnically, racially, gender-wise." In one memorable exchange, when two Spanish-speaking organizers translated a march advertisement into Spanish they selected the most expansive phrase that came to mind. They chose "'diverse women of sexuality'…we kind of put the word diverse in there because we couldn't use the word 'lesbian' because that isn't everyone,"

recounted one of the two organizers. According to other organizers who agreed with this assessment, "diverse women of sexuality" includes bisexuals, transgender people, lesbians, and dykes, as well as a broad age range of female participants. "It is like a big family." Nice words and a positive sentiment, but sociologically problematic when having to make choices of action and to divide resources.

Beneath these happy proclamations of "unity through diversity" (Armstrong 2002) lies significant divergence, personally and in terms of political ideology, that results in infighting, including strategic disagreements about the boundaries of membership (who is part of our group?) and decision-making control (who should be included in the organizing process and with what authority?). Since its creation in 1993 and over its development, the Dyke March in Chicago and elsewhere has become "more fragmented than ever," as reported in the gay press (Queen 2001). Organizers routinely argue bitterly at meetings, expressing deep-seated frustrations, for instance, that "a bunch of white college girls" are at the helm of an event that seeks to project a more inclusive image. Conflicting ideas are transformed into personal animosities, and personal distance, in effect, leads to suspicions about ideas. Infighting can be paralyzing precisely because of such recursive rivalry.

When conflicting ideas are tied to a shared group identity, infighting results. Put another way, infighting is not just about *personal* disagreements; instead it entails on-going, *collective* disputation that is linked to conceptions of group identity and culture. Ironically, the Chicago Dyke March has replicated some of the same practices of exclusion that leaders felt necessitated its inception. These issues of contestation and boundary-work are sociologically essential if an activity is to have a target audience and to create a set of activists, rather than to be an event that is open to all-comers. Much of the culture of the Dyke March is riddled by these and other contradictions that undermine organizers' ability to execute key mobilizing tasks (Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani 2009). If Dyke Marchers are "not trying to define what a lesbian is," and, on the contrary, broadly welcome "any human being who supports dyke visibility" (Boutiller 1993)—including perhaps traditional families out for a pleasant afternoon—then why is it burdened with such infighting? The contention among Dyke March organizers, a typical case of many other small political groups, highlights difficulties associated with managing competing ideologies of diversity (what it means, why it is necessary, what to do with it) in localized interactions. This allows us to address how conflict is integrated into a model of small group culture (or "idioculture") (Fine 1979, 1987), especially how members of such groups meld "meaning and interaction" into ideologies (Fine and Sandstrom 1993). What is the relationship between infighting and ideology as created within a localized context of small groups? How can we integrate the former into a comprehensive framework for the latter?

We contend that infighting enables participants of a social movement to make strategic use of, and enact, political ideologies that may otherwise remain lost in a "muddy river" (Geertz 1973), while simultaneously debating the identity contours of the group. This broadens our understanding of "how individuals and groups *do ideology*" (Fine and Sandstrom 1993:25) to realize their particular interests in politically charged situations and the way that situations drenched with their ideologies define their collective selves. A research program that emphasizes the "rhetorical style of ideologies," especially as that which is "fundamentally relational" (ibid:21, 31) has been gaining momentum in recent years in large part to redress the reputation of ideology as exclusively "macro" and as "the most elusive concept in the whole of social sciences" (McLellan 1986:1). By viewing political ideologies, in particular, through a focused lens of internal dissent, we consider how infighting (1) allows groups to be multivocal; (2) allows members strategically to reconfigure, expand, and demarcate boundaries (cf., Gieryn 1983) in a way that includes

heterogeneity of ideas and people; (3) permits tensions to be organized so as to promote a precarious equilibrium of inclusion and group boundaries; and (4) allows for the preservation of cultural traditions while making space for change and growth. While these analytic categories emphasize how infighting can serve group ends, contrary to its negative reputation, at times the centrifugal force may overwhelm the gravitational pull of the group and its goals. The key advantage in isolating the role of infighting in the production of ideology is that it raises cultural assumptions that may remain otherwise implicit. Integrating infighting into group life through ideology emphasizes conflict rather than cohesion (Fine and Holyfield 1996) and transforms the small group into an arena of strategic praxis.

Infighting and Ideology

The means by which social cohesion is generated stands at the heart of sociology (Moody and White 2003:103). Indeed, the sociological imagination often privileges consensus over conflict. Bourdieu calls this a "principle of coherence" which he argues is a "form of [symbolic] violence" (Bourdieu 2001), elevating harmony in the service of function. Integrating infighting into pre-existing models—what has elsewhere been referred to as the "problem of difference" (Seidman 1997: ix)—is an often anguished exercise because it "disturbs foundational notions of the subject…and politics that give coherence to much social thinking."

    Cultural sociology has developed in light of these disciplinary-wide forces. Although the study of culture has undergone a radical transformation from being eschewed (in favor of "rational" or "structural" approaches), to being embraced (in the "cultural turn"), and finally to being institutionalized, some of its approaches are still "faulted for ignoring power, conflict, and change" (Lamont and Wuthnow 1990; Taylor and Whittier 1995:176). Indeed, Gans (2007: 159–60) has recently and controversially asserted that "culture *per se* is not a useful explanatory tool" given its "antipathy toward structural issues such as hierarchy, inequality, and power."

    In addition to a host of concerns unique to the concept (see McLellan 1986 for review), the study of ideology has had its own challenges, which focus on the ideas in ideology, but neglect the reality that ideologies are demonstrated in group interaction. In analyzing ideology, scholars have traditionally emphasized how it integrates and *resolves* social strains (Johnson 1968; Parsons 1951, 1967; White 1961) or advances the political and economic interests of social segments or economic classes (Mannheim 1936; Marx and Engels [1846] 1976). In reaction to this structural approach, some analysts, such as Geertz (1973) and Gieryn (1983), propose that greater attention needs to be directed toward the rhetorical style of ideologists and how and why they use discursive resources to present ideological beliefs. Yet few scholars have stressed the need to connect ideology to spaces of action, or to examine how groups use and present ideologies as they pursue their everyday activities (Eliasoph 1998). It is this connection, linking ideology with group dynamics and collective action, that recognizes ideology as having effects on the local level.

    We treat ideologies as embedded in a set of dramatic metaphors and images to which people respond based on their shared experience and expectations. Ideologies are not purely cognitive, but depend crucially upon emotional responses. As tools to be used in the construction of shared meaning, ideologies are presented at such times and in such ways as to enhance the public impression of presenters (and justify their claims and resources) and/ or adherents; ideological enactment is therefore fundamentally dramaturgical and tied to

identities. Ideologies are linked to groups and to the relationships between group members and other groups to which they may also be connected

Given these parameters, we view ideologies as dramaturgical, localized, contested claims—making packages that are symbolic, affective, behavioral, and relational. But these matters are theoretically more graspable than they are empirically so. It is here that we make our intervention. Although the study of ideology and local culture has become established in American sociology, it often ignores the contested nature of how culture emerges and is negotiated within the context of small groups. Enter infighting. The analytic advantage of viewing ideology in light of infighting is the latter's capacity to highlight (and thus make empirically accessible) competing meaning systems that may remain implicit in the absence of such conflict. As we show in the remainder of this paper, infighting draws attention to divergent meaning systems as part of local contention between rival cliques and power centers struggling to assemble a collective demonstration. These ideological battles both reflect pre-existing differences among subgroups and make explicit and public their differences. Infighting directs attention away from consensus and toward questions of contestation. The effect is additional theoretical clarity around ideology as a concept and the formation of idioculture.

Methods

Infighting as a Case Conflict is an inevitable part of social life. Early theorists remarked that "only when there is conflict is behavior conscious and self-conscious" (Park and Burgess 1921:578). Not only does conflict "intensify participation in social life," added Lewis Coser, but it also "makes the contenders aware that they belong to the same moral universe" and "community at large" (Coser 1956:127). From the earliest days of sociology, conflict has been regarded as a form of "sociation" (Simmel 1955) without which a group cannot develop self-awareness (Ross 1920; Weber 1949) and in light of which participants articulate, debate, and eventually refine beliefs about the social and political order within which they are immersed.

"Infighting" can be defined as the strategic expression of a difference of opinion or an offering of discrepant views among subgroups or alliances within a broader group or organization with the goal of achieving some end to which others object (Ghaziani 2008). Infighting not only involves a recognition of divergent courses of action rooted in competing worldviews and an awareness that (relatively) stable groups are urging the collective embrace of these actions through whatever explicit or implicit decision making mechanisms that might be available, but also that this division is tied to the construction and validation of identities. It is in this sense that infighting is tied to ideology. For example, women activists used dissent to give voice to intangible cultural questions such as, "What is a woman?" and "What are female values?" (Echols 1989; Rich 1980; Taylor and Rupp 1993:41) which, in the case of the Dyke March, was linked to different courses of action.

Infighting assumes a fundamentally strategic and identity battle, distinct from mere disagreement. It draws attention to contrasts and polarities in which people actively seek advantageous positioning to advance a particular ethos (Geertz 1973), moral order (Wuthnow 1987), or personal authority (Fine and Sandstrom 1993). In organizing a March on Washington, for example, lesbian and gay activists fought lengthy battles over the inclusion of bisexual and transgender people in the title of the demonstration. Should the march be titled, "National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights" or "for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights?" Infighting during small group

brainstorming sessions pitted oppositional ideologies against one another. The fights had implications for boundaries and for the distribution of power and resources (Ghaziani 2008).

Infighting is therefore a subset of general conflict. "People who have many common features," noted Simmel, "often do one another worse or 'worser' wrong than complete strangers" (Simmel 1955:48–49). Simmel counsels sociologists to treat infighting separately:

"[It is a] protective measure of the group, comparable to the warning function of pain in the organism. For it is precisely the keen awareness of dissonance against the prevailing general harmony which at once warns the parties to remove the grounds of conflict lest conflict half-consciously creep on and endanger the basis of the relation itself" (p. 43).

Infighting articulates and emphasizes group character and culture by increasing awareness of the divergence of participants and the issues at stake in group action (Coser 1956: 71). Put differently, infighting captures disputes over the divisions of authority and resources, information, participation, power, and status within a group.

Data and Analytic Strategy The data for this analysis derive from the first author's 2003 ethnographic co-study of the Chicago dyke march. The project includes observations at 12 private, weekly planning meetings (on average 2 hours each), participation at six public, biweekly fundraisers that spanned 2 to 4 hours each, one-on-one interviews with all nine organizers of the 2003 event, attendance at the demonstration, rally, and post-rally speeches, review of newspaper clippings for 2 weeks prior to the march from the local and national gay presses, review of fundraising and outreach documents, and review of transcriptions from organizers' on-line chatrooms and listserv, a total of over 100 messages. For a robustness check, the first author compared these transcripts with on-line conversations from previous years (which similarly totaled over one hundred messages) and material from an official organizational binder that contained information related to the group's history, finances, philosophy, and media appearances. This material was supplemented with informal, follow-up conversations after the march (for detail on the dataset, coding procedures, and reliability/validity concerns, see Brown–Saracino and Ghaziani 2009). The evidence we report here relies heavily on concepts that are grounded in the discourse of participants.

We turn to a discussion of how infighting informs the production and enactment of ideologies in the context of small group political organizing. We emphasize four analytic processes or filters: the multivocality of meaning, challenges of cultural heterogeneity, maintenance of precarious equilibrium, and ideologies of power as techniques of planning. A systematic consideration of infighting moves analysis toward how particular actors (moral entrepreneurs) strategize to shape ideologies and its links to social action in charged ways.

Multivocality of Meaning

Ideologies are a linked set of beliefs and, as such, allow individuals to articulate attitudes about the political order. Debates are an important part of this process, "demarcating ideological boundaries" and "legitimating specific claims to authority and resources" (Fine and Sandstrom 1993:32). But they do more. Drawing boundaries is not entirely about separating an "us" from an external "them" (Gieryn 1983), but also includes contestation

among "thems inside" as subgroups fight to gain or retain "legitimate us standing" (Gamson 1997:179). As Dyke March organizers fight with each other about why women felt compelled to splinter off from the annual Gay Pride Parades and form an oppositional event, they highlight the multivocality of meaning within small groups that presumably have in common the same worldview.

Dyke March organizers share with other lesbians and gay men the annual Gay Pride parades as a communal celebration and commemoration of group history. In cities across the country, the parade proceeds amidst a variety of shared symbols of sexual orientation such as the rainbow flag. As members of an "imagined" national gay community (Anderson 1983), infighting between self-identified "dykes" and "non-dykes" (both of whom are nonetheless "gay people") facilitates a revision of shared history—that is, how the same information can be perceived differently by different people (Shively 1992)—and therefore what will become incorporated into the group's idioculture and ideological repertoire.

In explaining the origins of the Dyke March, one organizer reflected, "They [the Lesbian Avengers] were sickened by the way gay pride was going as far as this very corporate, very male-focused, very white,…you look around and it's men, for the most part, white, for the most part…It's just about…having a big party, and that's it. And they started Dyke March as a, initially like as four women about politics and have it go back to the core of what the original Prides in the 70s were about, which was about visibility, politics, and taking action. So that was their initial goal." Another organizer further explained women's resistance to Gay Pride, "[I]t kinda pushes one image of what's attractive, and…I think…it's kinda sexist. It's really boy-based. I was looking at the organizers and the main people organizing it are men." Thus, although the annual Pride Parades are shared by both lesbians and gay men, infighting within the larger gay community prompted some women to splinter off and do their own thing. Lesbians (or at least some lesbians) know different things about the Pride Parade from gay men, who might be surprised or disturbed by this knowledge. This facilitates the development of dyke-specific attitudes and beliefs and thus legitimates plans for a separate Dyke March. In this capacity, staging the event on the Saturday before Sunday's Pride Parade is a deliberate, symbolic statement of difference.

One might argue that this difference in knowledge communities comprises inter-group conflict (between men and women), rather than infighting, per se. In terms of political organizing, however, the above statements capture an active struggle lesbians and gay men *share* over who is adequately represented within *their* "gay community," however defined. Further, it comes to the fore when the groups have to (or choose to) work together. One organizer summarized this perspective, "I don't think the two communities should fight with each other. Honestly, I mean, *we're all gay*...I don't like all the infighting…That's part of the culture of planning a Dyke March and putting one on. And that's a very big part of it. There is like a lot of dyke anger towards the gay community" (emphasis added). Another organizer said more mildly, "I feel like gay men should be able to relate to gay women and…just kind of empathize and realize that…commonality." Yet another remarked on how lesbians and gay men are part of the same "community" and should "come together" during the annual Gay Pride Parade: "[It's] similar in the fact of the community coming together, and it's visibility for the community, and it is a space to feel comfortable with who you are and comfortable knowing that other people are there feeling the same way you are. So in that, I think they do have similarities." In reflecting on an ideal world (in terms of the relationship between the two events), one organizer commented, "It [the relationship] would be kind of a symbiotic relationship…Neither one would be against the other. It would just be complementary to each other…It would just create more visibility *for the community as a whole, in total*" (emphasis added).

These comments underscore the prevalence of infighting and point to the centrality of emotions in the production of distinct ideologies (Fine and Sandstrom 1993:29–30). More importantly, infighting spawned a separate event (Dyke March splintered off from Gay Pride) and raised the volume of voices some felt were muted by Gay Pride's tendencies toward homogeneity (which some experienced as exclusion). This type of strategic questioning challenges the implicit assumption that an event (such as the Gay Pride Parade) means the same thing to different people who are part of the same group. Seen through the lens of infighting, culture creation becomes a conflictual and thus multivocal process that requires making explicit shared assumptions and then permitting divergence based on internal group diversity.

Cultural Heterogeneity

Sociologists' over-emphasis of social cohesion and solidarity (Moody and White 2003) at the relative expense of questions of infighting—"difference troubles" (Seidman 1997), that is—stems in part from an assumption of cultural coherence in meaning-making processes. As cultural sociology has developed, however, scholars have begun to examine conflict. According to Ann Swidler, one of "the biggest unanswered question[s] in the sociology of culture" is "whether and how some cultural elements control, anchor, or organize others" (Swidler 2001:206). As it brings to the fore the multivocality of meaning, infighting also makes cultural heterogeneity central, that is, the different ways in which people enact shared ideologies, which, like ideology in general, is connected to core concerns of collective identity. This is seen in disputes over members' "theories of inclusion," especially as these boundary systems clash with the practicalities of achieving instrumental ends (such as organizing a march).

The Dyke March was spearheaded by a group of politically leftist women called "the Lesbian Avengers." The Avengers were organized as a national organization in 1992 with the explicit purpose of promoting and defending "lesbian survival and visibility." The group "conducts letter writing campaigns, visibility actions, and guerrilla publicity campaigns all the while flaunting [their] lesbionic outrageousness." Their signature tactics include "fire eating" at protest events while chanting, "The fire will not consume us: we take it and make it our own."[1] This brief description emphasizes the radical origins of the Avengers and the Dyke March. Given these beginnings, Dyke March organizers base much of their philosophies in what they consider consonant with broader feminist principles, especially ideologies of egalitarianism (Whittier 1995). One organizer captured this by describing the Chicago Dyke March as "a feminist-type organization. It's anti-patriarchical. There's no leader. Everyone has a voice" (see also Polletta 2002).

Organizers refer to this principle as their "theory of inclusion," that is, the Dyke March's remedial ideology of including a broader spectrum of people that they believe are not represented in Gay Pride activities. One organizer captured the expansiveness and importance of this principle, "[The Dyke March is for] any person who identifies, really just [as] women-loving-women. Like, if you love women, if you love them either platonically or whatnot, or you have sexual relations with them. Everyone's welcome… That's sort of the core thing. You don't have to be a dyke. You don't even have to identify

---

[1] Sources include interviews with Chicago organizers, http://www-lib.usc.edu/~retter/dm.html and http://home.earthlink.net/~achace/avenger.html (5/19/05); http://www.lesbian.org/chicago-avengers/; and http://www.lesbianavengers.org/ (accessed 5/19/05).

as a dyke. You don't have to do anything, but you're welcome, as long as you love women…We don't exclude. You know, the point is not to exclude…We just want everyone who shares a philosophy of women loving women."

Despite sharing feminist principles, Dyke March organizers still argue about the morality of inclusion, i.e., the particular "clumps and chunks" of meaning that they use to activate particular "contents of consciousness" (Fine and Sandstrom 1993:26). One organizer recognized this as an explicit value of infighting: "We should build communities. We should talk. We should talk about the conflicts of being a dyke and who it doesn't include and who it does and why." Thus, much of the conflict over what to include as part of an omnibus dyke ideology centered on organizers' earlier-referenced theory of inclusion.

But what does inclusion mean in group practice? "We've had lots of discussions about trying to be very inclusive to not just lesbians but allies too," one organizer noted, "whether they're straight women allies or gay male allies, straight male allies, or transgender allies. We try to be really inclusive about any allies." This noble intention exploded when organizers realized a tension between including everyone and celebrating a narrower dyke identity (cf., Brown–Saracino and Ghaziani 2009). One organizer of color remarked, "It worries me that Dyke March is the alternative to Pride, but in the white woman tradition. For the longest time, that was the case. Chicago Lesbian Avengers is very white, very white. You have your occasional anomaly, which would be me, mainly, who would pop in and be like, 'What about the color?' And everybody's like, 'That's nice. You organize it.'" Despite intentions of being broadly inclusive, the Dyke March selectively focuses on some, rather than all, participants, and, as a result, some identity groups feel that they have been marginalized. Without a central focus on the singularity of the group, rather than on its divisions, the march, in time, may be in danger of losing its raison d'être.

In response to this tension, organizers strive "to bring the dyke community together," as one put it. She continued, "There's a very large separation between the Latina community and the African-American community and the white community…and we, you know, the Dyke March has been very white in the past. We're trying to bring the community together and be like, 'Hey. We're all in this together. Let's meet completely different, new people, and see just how big and strong and great our community is.'" Another organizer added, "It's getting less so exclusively white. That's one of our goals. That's one of our emphasis this year is to reach out to other communities and be like, Let's come together. Let's not have Dyke March be that thing that just white girls do." The danger of such a strategy may be to insist women of color, now encouraged to participate, may be forced to do "that thing" that "white girls do."

The fights in organizing the march did not stop at an ideational level. Organizers realized their feminist principles conflicted with practical aspects of event planning. Ideologies are most powerful when they bridge attitudes to salient behaviors. One organizer noted: "I get very frustrated very easily with the intellectualism of organizing things with lesbians. It's very much, everyone has their idea about what they want theoretically and like politically what is their statement and like everyone ends up fighting about that until two weeks before the event and then everyone's like, 'Oh my God! What do we need to do?'" She then qualified her statement, bringing into focus the tension between theory and action. "Technically, it's a democracy and whatever, but practically we've been running it [the event organizing] a little bit more hierarchically, which is better. It gets things done." Another organizer conceded, "We can't be doing a lot of like theory, academic theories of inclusion, and whatever—we practically have to plan an event with 3000 women-plus on a city street, shutting down the city, taking the street, taking over the lake."

As the above examples illustrate, battles over ideologies of inclusion and the practicalities of event planning highlight competition among social meanings and group identity, despite a desire for consensus. Infighting enables individuals to question their place within a moral order, that is, "how things are" and "how they might ought to be" (Rayner 1980). Organizers sometimes welcome these divisions, demonstrating their awareness of the connection between theories and practices of culture: "I anticipate that it will be the same this year [as it has been in the past]. And we will get into debates about it, and fight with each other, and hopefully something productive will come from that." This draws attention to the heterogeneity of cultural elements within groups, enabling sociologists to isolate anchors in the development of ideology and identity.

Precarious Equilibrium of Inclusion and Boundaries

In the section above, we argued that emphasizing social cohesion and solidarity deflects attention from cultural heterogeneity. Here we show an additional consequence of debates over ideologies of inclusion that stress boundaries around the label "dyke." Organizers use the rhetorical power of this word, once a pejorative, to include or exclude participants from the march, creating a network of "allies" and a zone of "others" rejected from involvement. Discussions of group building and strengthening often assume that conflict inevitably breeds social disorganization (and that harmony is possible only under conditions of unity). One analytic benefit of infighting as a concept is to recognize that organization may occur simultaneously with conflict. Within a group's idioculture, infighting can yield unexpected dividends (Ghaziani 2008) by allowing group members to negotiate a *precarious equilibrium* of inclusion and group boundaries.

As both an occasion and a small organization, the Dyke March endeavors to increase the visibility of gay women as its primary mission, although it also seeks to redress the marginality of gay people of color, non-affluent gays, politically motivated gay people, transgenders, and other "gender queers" (Nestle et al. 2002). As we described in the introduction, the 2002 Chicago Dyke March had an expansive mission statement: "Our mission is to make visible and celebrate lesbian, bisexual, and women-identified transgendered women's existence in the city by a public demonstration." This inclusive, "women-loving-women" program conflicted with organizers' narrower desire to make visible and celebrate their own, self-defined social identities as "dykes" (c.f., Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani 2009). One organizer succinctly stated, "[Dyke March] was… something we wanted to create in our image." Added another, "[Dykes] want to be visible. They want to be seen. They want to be counted. They want to have their voices heard." Yet a third expressed, "I think the 'Dyke March' [the name] just says what it is: It's…empowering to dykes. It's for dyke visibility." Rhetorically these are narrower intentions than welcoming all "diverse women of sexuality," which, if taken literally, would include all women.

In practice organizers made nuanced distinctions among dykes and also between "dykes" and other types of gay women (e.g., "lesbians," "female-to-male and male-to-female transgender persons," "queers," etc.). It is not only Chicago organizers who do this. An advertisement for the 2008 Los Angeles Dyke March proclaims:

REMINDER TO ALL homo chicks, marimachas, queers, femmes, girly girls, chulas, dykes on bikes, butches, locas, lipstick lesbians, me, latina lesbos, gay gals, older dykes, swing daddy dykes, young dykes, dykes with purses, girl heroes, big lesbos, bi chicks, mariconas, geeky dykes, clit lickers, bull daggers, bi babes, pc babes, s/m

dykes, punk dykes, baby dykes, butch tops, butch bottoms, corporate dykes, bitch sluts, femme tops, femme bottoms, girl jocks, her, dark and lovely lesbians, post-op dykes, wireless dykes, granola girls, sleazy dykes, trailer trash queers, skate boarding dykes, luscious lesbians, activist dykes, dykes with children, celebrity dykes, mothers, soul sistas, grandmothers, daughters, studs, bee-oh-i's/bois, grrls, lesbianas, you, dyke daddies, cycle dykes, chila, muff divers, gender fuckers, trannies, allies, pervs, and their friends to join us.[2]

But each event needs a label, and so the event is still called the "Dyke March." This "global-local tension" (c.f., Ghaziani and Ventresca 2005), between including everyone and celebrating dyke identity, bubbles beneath the surface at every planning session and in every interview. One organizer commented on the knee-jerk reaction some have to word 'dyke': "Dyke is such a dirty word to a lot of people…It's a really white term [coined] by Lesbian Avengers and by really radical, radical feminists who were lesbians to bring that upon…the language landscape." Another organizer addressed the implications for involving others in the demonstration: "It's funny to hear how different people see dyke, because I was talking to an older friend of mine and she was like, 'I don't know why—why would I go to a Dyke March? I'm a dyke. I don't want to meet dykes. I want to meet lesbians.' I was like, 'What do you mean?' She was like, 'You know, I'm butch. I want to meet femme girls.'" A third organizer mused, "There are these suburban lesbians that don't consider themselves dykes, who only consider themselves lesbians. There's people like me…I'm not really a dyke, you know, I'm more queer myself….This is the big question." Later in the conversation, this same organizer explained implications of the march's name for efforts to grow the event and involve diverse participants: "I saw a trans-man [transgender, female-to-male] friend of mine. I'm like, 'Do you want to help out with Dyke March?' And he's like, 'I'm not a dyke'…As soon as you name—as soon as you put a name on anything, it starts to become—the name means it's for this person and not that."

Questions of "who is a dyke" and "for whom is this event" generated furious debate over identity and meaning-making. One organizer argued that "dyke," as an identity category, "is so limiting" since it excludes potential participants. As Brown–Saracino and Ghaziani (2009) assert, "Naming is a double bind: it can attract new adherents while losing the association that sustained the event. It can also threaten the meaning of the event that drew organizers in the first place. To change the name undermines organizers' *implicit* desire to celebrate dyke identity." This poses a direct threat to organizers "theory of inclusion" and threatens group harmony.

In a sea of women marching in public—some of whom are topless—the site of male allies or transgender persons in the crowd is notable for both organizers and participants. This triggers debates on the role of allies and whether organizers ought to revise the Dyke March's mission statement. In responding to the question, "Is the Dyke March intended to be by and for lesbians only," one organizer replied, "I think that's subject to debate. I don't think so. I think especially in Chicago there's been this spawning movement of lesbians and dykes transitioning as tranny [transgender] boys and tranny [transgender] men…I think that what Dyke March tries to cater to is the queer community, but with a focus on whoever identifies as a dyke. That means trans women. That means, I mean, if it's a bio-male who says he's a dyke that can be subject to debate. But you know, I know a lot of gay men who identify as dykes. So it really depends…I don't want to limit it…to biological women

---

[2] From http://www.dykemarchla.com/index/splash.html, accessed September 10, 2007.

who are lesbians. Again, bisexuals. Again transgendered…What about polyamorous people? What about people who have multiple partners? What about people who are into BDSM? That all needs to be associated."

Organizers also fight over whether to include non-women. One told us, "[M]en and trans-men are absolutely welcome to be marching. We actually want to try to create a unity between different cultures, and like there's a huge emphasis on trying to get different communities in Chicago involved so that there's larger diversity in Dyke March." This response, stretching their theory of inclusion, is unsettling for other organizers. The planning committee for the 2007 San Francisco Dyke March explained who they are and for whom there event is targeted:

> "This march is for DYKES. Dykes gather at the Dyke March to celebrate our love and passion for women and for ALL dykes. We celebrate our queerness in all its manifestations. We understand DYKE IDENTITY to include those of us who are questioning and challenging gender constructs and the social definitions of women, and who are gender fluid. We also welcome all women who want to support dykes to march with us. Celebrate Dyke Diversity!

> We continue to demand that the Dyke March and rally be DYKE-ONLY SPACE. In other words, we ask that men NOT participate, but rather that our brothers support us from the sidelines, cheering us on and helping with finances or other support" (emphasis in original).[3]

The Dyke March in New York City is similar to San Francisco, where local organizers assert, "As always, the dyke march is open to all women, biological or otherwise…Allies are encouraged to support the dyke march by cheering us on from the sidelines."[4] Some Dyke Marches, such as the one staged in New Orleans in 2006, stated that "men and other allies are welcome to attend the rally and march, but we ask that you bring up the rear of the march so as not to interfere with the main premise of the Dyke March, that of dyke visibility."[5]

Unlike San Francisco, New York, and New Orleans, most of the organizers of the Chicago Dyke March are more inclusive of non-female participants. "Gay men do march in the Dyke March [in Chicago]," one organizer informed us. Another stated, "We want to be more expansive as far as…includ[ing] men who are trans-men and other men who are, you know, also feel isolated or not welcome, and there's like usually a connection." A third informed us, "Last year we had several men marching. We have lots of gender-queer-identified bio-men that marched and, you know, allies and trans-men." In this capacity, Chicago's Dyke March is similar to Boston's, whose "top priority is to provide a dynamic and welcoming space for participants of all sexualities, genders, races, ages, ethnicities, sizes, economic backgrounds, and physical abilities."[6] It also resembles Washington, D.C.'s Dyke March, where "all people of all identities are asked to join…to…raise visibility for those who the gay mainstream tries to sweep under the rug."[7] These differences remind us

---

[3] http://www.thedykemarch.org/page16/page16.html, accessed September 11, 2007.

[4] http://www.nycdykemarch.org/, accessed September 11, 2007.

[5] http://www.dykemarchnola.com/faq.htm, accessed September 11, 2007.

[6] http://www.bostondykemarch.com/about.htm, accessed September 11, 2007.

[7] http://www.geocities.com/dcdykemarch/mission.html, accessed September 11, 2007.

of the power of local cultures to take an event that is ostensibly "the same" and provide it with different meanings as locally constituted.

Our single case-study makes it difficult to make conclusive statements about this variation or the conditions under which one philosophy will be adopted over another. It does, however, highlight persisting local options over the question of male allies and transgender participants; the presence of both groups triggers debate among organizers across the country. For whom is this march? What is to be accomplished and how? Infighting compels members to revisit and make explicit these otherwise abstract ideological beliefs.

These and other challenges associated with the cultural politics of the word "dyke" suggest that certain strands of ideology may work against goals of maintaining harmony, consensus, and equilibrium. The result, however, is not necessarily disorganization, given the observation that Dyke Marches continue to be organized across the country by local groups with their own cultures. In each location, organizers maintain a precarious equilibrium of inclusion and group boundaries that demand self-reflection and strategic debate. Infighting provides the emotional energy to ensure that ideological production does not become complacent and stagnant and that outcomes of group decision-making seem consequential to participants.

Planning Amidst Power

The discussion of infighting implicates the role of power. Power is an organic system that, even if it is tacit and hidden, informs interactions through organizing and decision-making structures (Lukes 1974) and the political ideologies that shape them (Foucault 1980). In this process, infighting creates space for the preservation of group rituals (e.g., feminist traditions that incited the march) while enabling members to remain abreast of currents of change (e.g., practical organizing demands).

We have already shown widespread dissent over the "intellectualism of organizing things with lesbians" and their textbook-like feminist principles of egalitarianism they refer to as "academic theories of inclusion." Ideologies sometimes conflict with the practical needs of organizing a large event. This manifests through declarations of using a "non-hierarchical" structure because "we really want people to have that empowerment" (c.f., Polletta 2002). Organizers desire for everyone to be "equal," for there to be "no leader" so that "everyone has a voice," but in practice this causes contention. This conversation is often "very intense," one organizer informed us with a certain amount of wishful thinking, "about like, you know, it's not a pyramid. It's like a circle. There's no hierarchical system. Some people need to be at the center of the circle to just help things operate smoothly, but it's not as though they are running it and other people are helping them. It's not like that at all."

As this organizer alluded, noble intentions often clashed with how meetings were run—or were perceived to be run—and thus produced controversies among the nine-member planning committee as alliances came to take different stances. One organizer reflected, "There seems to be a hierarchy. I think one of the organizers has said as much. She's like, 'If you're gonna get anything done, you have to take charge and tell people what to do and there has to be a couple people in charge and other people who just kind of you, you delegate to.' And I was like, 'It's not very empowering!'" Another organizer noted, "That [non-hierarchy] did not work very well." She complained about persistent "disorganization, especially in the meetings" as her "least favorite part" of being involved with the small

planning committee. She continued, "[W]e kinda realized that all having your own view and all having your own word and no real leader just wasn't working. And it could be very, very frustrating…It's been very frustrating trying to get everybody's opinion heard and included and come to a decision." Another organizer agreed: "[T]he most frustrating thing has been for me sometimes this: there's an idealism, a theoretical like, feminist operative like everything's egalitarian and everything's equality, like, sort of like idealistic, non-real sort of thing, non-real world type stuff. That's been the most difficult for me personally because I'm very practical. I consider myself a realist…I get very frustrated with all talk, no action…[T]here's a lot of powwowing and a lot of, you know, throwing things around the table and brainstorming. But there's just not a lot of action." What is taken as constituting disorganization can be seen instead as alternative ways of achieving similar ends, but the claim of disorganization recognizes that infighting privileges certain forms of action.

Infighting within and beyond group meetings prompted a strategic change in the organizing structure. The group decided to use "point persons" to "facilitate" meetings. By having different people run different meetings (through a system of "rotation"), organizers hoped to actively involve and empower all members. Some expressed discontent with how this revised approach played out: "There's…a big problem with ideas of just political organizing, you know, like can you be an egalitarian structure and honestly be egalitarian unto which I have a problem being a point person, by me and [another woman] knowing everything and everybody else kind…coming to us. That's a big problem to me. I don't think that's an open process." To prevent inflaming the matter any further, this organizer reported that the other point person "doesn't want to say it's hierarchical. She says it's egalitarian. It's representative. It's like a democracy. We're not a true democracy, but we're representative. But depending on how that representative wants to depict what other people have to say [i.e., how she coordinates the meetings], that's a power and privilege." They struggle with how to institute hierarchy within an ideology of equality, which, if accepted, obviates the essential need for infighting.

In practice, the same two women often served as point persons, rendering the rotation system ineffective. Over time, this consolidated a disproportionate amount of information and skills within their hands and, when recognized, exacerbated conflict. One organizer noted, "They were fighting with each other because [one organizer] was like, you know, 'We should have a different person running the meeting each time,' and that's not practical because then everyone has—then, if you have a different person running the meeting each time just to make sure the power is shared, every single person has to know every single thing that's going on, and people get confused about who they're supposed to answer to. You know, it's like, I'm running the meeting next week therefore you have to give me everything, but [another woman] already has that because she already ran it last week. It makes no sense to do that practically, and it took a great deal of heated discussion to convince [one objecting organizer] that the way she wanted to run it was not practical planning for an event."

With the event approaching, the practicalities of planning (which encouraged a fixed point person structure, given their disproportionately greater knowledge base) superseded feminist principles (which encouraged stricter monitoring of rotation). This consolidated an informal status and power system, as the women became increasingly dependant on the two leaders. In the end, Dyke March organizers utilized a fixed point person structure without abandoning, in rhetoric at least, ideologies of inclusion and egalitarianism. Infighting in this case provided a brake on the explicit recognition of a power hierarchy within the group and emphasized the organic nature of their small group.

Conclusion

We analyzed the cultural role of infighting, a subtype of conflict, within a small political group and how this conflict can manifest through subgroups espousing contending ideologies (and identities) about the moral claims and uses of group resources along with its public image. The case of the Chicago Dyke March proved valuable for our endeavor. Here was a group that ostensibly shared an ideological perspective and believed that they were involved in creating an activity that mattered both internally and with a larger public. Yet, precisely because the march mattered so deeply—at least as organizational leaders saw it— they were unable to reach a long-term consensus on participation and process. They were stuck with the fact that the activity mattered too much to let a disappointing decision pass without comment. Fortunately in this case, the need for some event to happen—and that some corresponding decisions simply had to be made—transcended the particular disagreements. The march did eventually occur, and it was more inclusive than some thought possible, though less than others may have wished. As in all annual events, the following year permitted the internal battles to be played out yet again as participants anchored their debates in a shared repertoire as they considered the successes and failures of the past and the hopes and fears for the future.

All groups develop cultures—idiocultures—that characterize the collective to its members. But despite the desire to reach consensus, a sensitive analysis of microculture reveals that fissures inevitably develop, even in small face-to-face interactions, and these threaten to derail both instrumental and expressive ends. How can groups hold together in light of such currents that threaten to tear them apart? The sociological imagination, it seems, requires space be made for infighting into our pre-existing models. Infighting serves cultural ends for preserving and even ratifying group life. Groups can gain tensile strength from conflict and debate. To this end, we propose four issues of group life that infighting helps us to understand better. The diversity of perspectives found in situations of infighting permits the advent of multivocal perspectives; it permits participants to restructure, expand, and define boundaries to include a heterogeneity of ideas and people, even as they sometimes internally conflict; it thereby permits tensions to be dealt with to promote a "precarious equilibrium" of inclusion and group boundaries; and it debates ideologies of authority while permitting organizational action.

Infighting may not be part of a consultant's manual for happy and harmonious group life. Still, infighting does contribute to a group's cultural creation and, as such, helps to define the group to itself and targeted others as an organic and evolving community of different, albeit jostling, perspectives. Just as a group requires some measure of commonality and consensus, the airing of dissent within a community of commitment can cement members to each other by showing that the issues at hand really matter and must somehow find resolution. As a result, infighting is as much a feature of group culture as is a collective hug.

References

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities*. New York: Verso.

Armstrong, E. A. (2002). *Forging gay identities: Organizing sexuality in San Francisco, 1950–1994*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Berube, A. (1990). *Coming out under fire: The history of gay men and women in World War Two*. New York: Penguin Books.

Bourdieu, P. (2001). Sociology is a martial art (La Sociologie est un Sport de Combat). Edited by Pierre Carles.

Boutiller, N. (1993). The Dyke March: Celebration, not separation. In *Bay Area Reporter* (p. 10). San Francisco.

Brown-Saracino, J., & Ghaziani, A. (2009). The constraints of culture: Evidence from the Chicago Dyke March. *Cultural Sociology*, *3*(1).

Coser, L. (1956). *The functions of social conflict*. New York: The Free.

Echols, A. (1989). *Daring to be bad. Radical feminism in America 1967–1975*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Eliasoph, N. (1998). *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fine, G. A. (1979). Small groups and cultural creation: The idioculture of little league baseball teams. *American Sociological Review*, *44*, 733–745.

Fine, G. A. (1987). The strains of idioculture: External threat and internal crisis on a little league baseball team. In G. A. Fine (Ed.), *Meaningful play, playful meaning*. Champaign: Human Kinetics.

Fine, G. A., & Holyfield, L. (1996). Secrecy, trust, and dangerous leisure: Generating group cohesion in voluntary organizations. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *59*, 22–38.

Fine, G. A., & Sandstrom, K. (1993). Ideology in action: A pragmatic approach to a contested concept. *Sociological Theory*, *11*, 21–38.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977*. New York: Pantheon.

Gamson, J. (1997). Messages of exclusion: Gender, movements, and symbolic boundaries. *Gender & Society*, *11*, 178–199.

Gans, H. J. (2007). But culturalism cannot explain power: A reply to Borer. *City and Community*, *6*(2), 159–160.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Ghaziani, A. (2008). *The dividends of dissent: How conflict and culture work in lesbian and gay marches on Washington*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Ghaziani, A., & Ventresca, M. (2005). Keywords and cultural change: Frame analysis of business model public talk, 1975-2000. *Sociological Forum*, *20*, 523–559.

Gieryn, T. (1983). Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: Strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists. *American Sociological Review*, *48*, 781–795.

Johnson, H. M. (1968). Ideology and the social system. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, *7*, 76–85.

Lamont, M., & Wuthnow, R. (1990). Betwixt and between: Recent cultural sociology in Europe and the United States. In G. Ritzer (Ed.), *Frontiers of social theory: The new syntheses*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A radical view*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mannheim, K. (1936). *Ideology and Utopia*. New York: Harcourt.

Marx, F., & Engels, F. ([1846] 1976). The German Ideology. In *Karl Marx-Frederik Engels Collected Works*, 5. New York: International Publishers.

McLellan, D. (1986). *Ideology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Moody, J., & White, D. R. (2003). Structural cohesion and embeddedness: A hierarchical concept of social groups. *American Sociological Review*, *68*, 103–127.

Nestle, J., Howell, C., & Wilchins, R. (Eds.) (2002). *Gender queer: Voices from beyond the sexual binary*. New York: Alyson Books.

Park, R. E., & Burgess, E. W. (1921). *Introduction to the science of society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. New York: Free Press.

Parsons, T. (1967). *Sociological theory and modern societies*. New York: Free Press.

Polletta, F. (2002). *Freedom is an endless meeting: Democracy in American social movements*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Queen, C. (2001). Sex options. *Girlfriends*, *7*, 10.

Rayner, J. (1980). The uses of ideological language. In D. J. Manning (Ed.), *The form of ideology* (pp. 90–112). London: Allen and Unwin.

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *5*, 631–660.

Ross, E. A. (1920). *The principles of society*. New York: The Century Company.

Seidman, S. (1997). *Difference troubles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sherif, M., & Sherif, C. W. (1964). *Reference groups: Exploration into conformity and deviation of adolescents*. New York: Harper and Row.

Shively, J. (1992). Cowboys and Indians: Perceptions of Western films among American Indians and Anglos. *American Sociological Review, 57*, 725–734.

Simmel, G. (1955). *Conflict and the web of group-affiliations*. New York: The Free.

Swidler, A. (2001). *Talk of love: How culture matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, V., & Rupp, L. J. (1993). Women's culture and lesbian feminist activism: A reconsideration of cultural feminism. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 19*, 33–61.

Taylor, V., & Whittier, N. (1995). Analytical approaches to social movement culture: The culture of the women's movement. In H. Johnston, & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *Social movements and culture* (pp. 163–187). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Weber, M. (1949). *The methodology of the social sciences*. Glencoe: The Free.

White, W. (1961). *Beyond conformity*. New York: Free Press.

Whittier, N. E. (1995). *Feminist generations: The persistence of the radical women's movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Wuthnow, R. (1987). *Meaning and moral order: Explorations in cultural analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.