WORKING FOR FREEDOM AND WORKING FOR FREE: RECOGNIZING AND RESISTING THE REPRODUCTION OF OPPRESSIVE STRUCTURES IN UNPAID ORGANIZING WORK

By

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ABSTRACT

JOSIE KAROUT. Working for Freedom and Working for Free: Recognizing and Resisting the Reproduction of Oppressive Structures in Unpaid Organizing Work.
(Under the direction of GREGORY STARRETT)

This ethnographic research is an inquiry into the obstacles that LGBTQ people face in their unpaid organizing work in Charlotte, NC. Field work included participant observation from 2014 to 2018, and 26 semi-structured and unstructured interviews with community members of diverse genders and ethnicities. The goal of this research was to produce actionable recommendations for community members in order to help them better handle the obstacles that the research identified. Those things that were found to have the most influence over the quality of organizing work were: the insidious presence of neoliberal thought, over-reliance on identities as sources of political authority, and the exploitation/reproduction of emotional trauma by some organizers to enforce conformity from others. This report argues that in Charlotte these three things work in tandem to create an atmosphere that struggles to sustain transformative grassroots organizing. To demonstrate the role these play in shaping organizing work in the community, the report explores the connection between these three influences and obstacles that are commonly identified by participants. The report concludes with the recommendation that the community collectively create mechanisms through which they can openly engage in political and ideological struggle while minimizing the undermining influence of neoliberal thought.

DEDICATIONS

To the community, and to Sam.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This would not have been possible without the infinite patience of my committee. Thank you for always taking me back every time I left.

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INTRODUCTION

My research began in 2014, in collaboration with a local LGBT youth-focused nonprofit. At the time, I was conceptualizing the project as a means of increasing LGBT youth involvement in LGBT grassroots organizing, and improving the overall efficacy of that engagement by identifying the obstacles to effective and sustained organizing in Charlotte. There was one question whose answer I had taken for granted: what *is* LGBT grassroots organizing? I believed LGBT grassroots organizing to be the political (particularly electoral) work that is done locally by LGBT people to lessen the oppression and discrimination people face due to homophobia and transphobia. Another way of wording my original research question may have been: how do we get queer and trans kids involved in electoral politics and nonprofit work, and how do we get them to stick with it? Of course, that question had the underlying assumption that those queer and trans kids would inherently focus on issues of explicit interest to the LGBT community such as marriage equality, military service, or transgender health care. This narrow perspective eventually became too constricting, producing analytical dead ends. Over time, as I became more intimate with the politics and perspectives present in the community, I realized that this formulation was not quite fit to address the issues that were continuously raised during my research.

Ultimately, my research veered away from the realm of electoral politics, policy, and even most nonprofit work. Instead, what truly became compelling to me was the mostly unpaid organizing work done *by* queer people, regardless of if any given issue was "an LGBT issue" (see Lichterman, 1999 for discussion on what makes an issue LGBT). This stands in contrast to my starting assumption that for organizing to "be

LGBT" it would ultimately need to be serving the needs of LGBT people, and perhaps even exclusively so. Issues that did not appear on the surface to be "LGBT issues" (prison abolition, police brutality, ending ICE, communist revolution) were enthusiastically taken up by queer and trans people and legitimized as "queer issues" by shaping the discourse around them to be shown within the context of queer and trans people's lives. Instead of following "LGBT issues," I began to follow LGBT *people*. This path led to unpaid organizing work, which ended up being shaped more by social ties among individual organizers and activists rather than shaped by loyalty to specific issues or formal organizations and campaigns.

Even those individuals who were doing paid organizing work, or had done so in the past, did not define themselves exclusively, or even primarily, by their paid work. Indeed, paid organizing work was present in my field site, yet it was ideologically peripheral to the unpaid organizing in which individuals participated. I observed two factors that seem to influence this: first, that organizing jobs in the community tend to be contingent on funding for sporadic and time-limited campaigns, and second, that there is rarely sufficient ideological and political unity between individuals and any given non-profit, politician, or campaign to sustain a strong allegiance outside of the duration of an employment contract. In fact, many participants considered non-profits and electoral politics to be necessary evils, while many others did not even consider the evil to be a necessary one. With some participants being actively antagonistic toward the "nonprofit industrial complex" (INCITE!, 2007) and others engaging with nonprofits more ambivalently, I decided that I would need to investigate the roadblocks to a different kind

of organizing than I had originally imagined, rather than try to shoehorn my research back into the world of non-profits, electoral politics, and “LGBT issues.”

My research is an inquiry specifically into the obstacles that arise in the collaborative, voluntary, and unpaid organizing world of queer people in Charlotte. This work can happen in groups that have structures but no legal status (coalitions, cooperatives, groups that are neither nonprofits nor affiliated with the state), as well as in non-structured creative spaces between individual organizers who are not acting as representatives of particular groups. This non-structured space could look like a group of organizers who organize independently of one another attending a workshop or training together and casually discussing and shaping their work together during and after that meeting. The informal space could also look like a group of organizers working on different projects coming together in a coffee shop to discuss in depth a conversation that started on a Facebook status. Essentially, these are spaces without legally or professionally codified structures and standards to compel us to work together in specific ways.

Despite it being a voluntary space with no formal structure in a city full of nonprofits pushing to define the progressive politics in Charlotte, this space has immense potential for shaping and creating the city’s organizing culture. This space defines acceptable behaviors, decides the correct political ideologies, and negotiates appropriate strategies and tactics (Blee, 2013) – both for itself and, to an extent, for nonprofits and campaigns. Though not representative of formal coalition efforts, this space will still host ties of friendship, acquaintanceship, and comradeship and an accompanying sense of peer pressure. Interestingly, the reach of this social peer pressure extends into the paid

organizing world due to the occasional overlap between paid and unpaid organizing - making the enforcement of conformity very effective. However, this space is still vulnerable.

In my field site, those things that have most intensely affected the quality of organizing work are neoliberalism, “identity politics”, and the exploitation (and reproduction) of trauma to instill conformity. In this report I argue that in Charlotte, these three things work in tandem to create an atmosphere that cannot sustain transformative grassroots organizing. In order to combat this, we must create mechanisms through which we can engage in political and ideological struggles so that we may more clearly assess the quality of the work we are doing and to prevent individuals from exploiting our overlapping traumas in order to gain undue influence. To demonstrate the role these things play in shaping organizing work in the community, I will explore several issues commonly identified by participants as obstacles to organizing: a reliance on crisis-mode organizing, trouble negotiating roles and responsibilities, and poor conflict resolution.

METHODOLOGY & METHODS

I originally conceptualized my research generally (and, admittedly, vaguely) as primarily qualitative with the potential for quantitative methods and analyses if it seemed feasible or relevant. As the years passed well beyond the original parameters of the two-year graduate program by an additional four years, it now seems appropriate to refer to my methodology more concretely as ethnographic. Karen O'Reilley describes ethnography exhaustively:

> Ethnography is a practice that evolves in design as the study progresses; involves direct and sustained contact with human beings, in the context of their daily lives, over a prolonged period of time; draws on a family of methods, usually including participant observation and conversation; respects the complexity of the social world; and therefore tells rich, sensitive and credible stories. Ethnography should be informed by a theory of practice that: understands social life as the outcome of the interaction of structure and agency through the practice of everyday life; examines social life as it unfolds, including looking at how people feel, in the context of their communities, and with some analysis of wider structures, over time; also examines, reflexively, one's own role in the construction of social life as ethnography unfolds; and determines methods on which to draw and how to apply them as part of the congoing, reflexive practice of ethnography. (2012, 3)

In a sense, this is an easy approach to claim due to the fact that the length of my "stay" in the community was a result of it being my own community (my belonging to it based both on my queer identity and my choice to participate in "activism.") Still, there were times during my research during which I felt so overwhelmed (and disgusted) by aspects of the community that I would promise myself and my romantic partners (also members of the community) that my "stay" had an expiration date – that I was going to get out of Charlotte as soon as my research was done. Perhaps comfortingly, I was far from the only member of the community to declare "I'm done!" at varying points. I might

even question a person's membership in the community if they had not been "done" at least a few times with something or someone in "the community" (a term used by participants, not a term I imposed as a researcher).

The specific methods I chose were semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I conducted interviews with 26 community members, each of whom were presented with a consent form detailing my purpose. These interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 3.5 hours. These interviews usually took place either at my workplace (a space that is located conveniently within the areas most frequented by the community) or at individuals' homes. While I was prepped with an official, IRB-approved list of 33 questions (which I incorrectly thought would cover any topic that could be relevant to this research) and a confidence in the flexibility of a semi-structured approach, interviews rarely got past the demographic questions before the tone changed from an interview to a conversation. I was left hastily jotting down relevant questions as they came up, as my scripted interview schedule proved itself to be far from sufficient.

Perhaps by virtue of the ethnographic approach - the long-term relationships, the shared knowledge of the community, the frequently shared physical space and familiarity – I was able to engage in interviews where most community members appeared to feel comfortable speaking to me candidly about their concerns, experiences and ideologies. It is likely because of the ethnographic approach, as opposed to an in-and-out interview process, that I have been able to evaluate with any certainty whether I was being given either truthful responses or being fed canned answers constructed to adhere to the prevailing discourse of the day. Through these relationships it was fairly easy to witness anyone's opinions changing (or, in a lot of cases, their opinions becoming more public

rather than secretive). In one case where I interviewed someone I was fairly unfamiliar with, I realized after some months of knowing him that some of his responses seemed more guarded compared to how he may currently express himself to me about community issues. I had ample opportunity to follow up with participants like him when I had additional questions or needed clarification. This long-term involvement allowed me to evaluate responses over time in a greater context, and not just as static pieces of data.

The long-term participant observation was helpful in allowing me to document and analyze the community's growth, decline, splintering, and the subsequent growth, decline, and splintering of splinter groups. It also allowed me to follow the changing discourse within the community over the years in both physical spaces and in digital spaces. The collection of data from social media was an ethical concern for me, as I had de facto access to most of the participants over several social media platforms (and likewise they had access to mine). It was not feasible to cut myself off from my participants on social media in order to engage in some sort of attempt at being ethically stringent. To engage in participant observation without engaging in social media when the field site is heavily digital would be a mistake that would heavily impact the quality of the data collected and the resulting analysis. Through the use of social media, as a community member and as a researcher, I was able to track the ideologies and discourses that were currently dominating the scene. Had I done not that, I would have been alienated from the community. Still, I did not "collect" any data in any strict sense via social media, other than by direct conversations with individuals who had already consented to participating.

I did take field notes in many physical community spaces. This usually occurred at public “events” such as community discussions, workshops, and town halls. There were times where field notes were not a wise choice and I had to forego them for safety reasons. With the Charlotte Uprising came an increase in concern with security and infiltration in subsequent organizing spaces. Heatedly taking field notes in that atmosphere, I feared, would alienate me and signal to people that I was an informant for the state. This became such a common fear and accusation that I am actually shocked that it was never leveled at me (to my knowledge). But, more importantly than just not wanting to appear suspect, I wanted to be sure to not have any notes of any organizing activities that could have been taken and used by the police or the state. In line with that, nothing I have shared here in this report is particularly sensitive or revealing, nor did I attempt at any point to collect sensitive or potentially incriminating.

FIELD SITE

The field site for my research was Charlotte, NC. The aspects of the city that seem most salient for organizers in the area are the following: it is the largest city in NC by population, dwarfing the state capital with almost twice the population (City Data 2018). In addition to being populous, Charlotte is large in the sense that it is sprawling. While most of the (queer and otherwise) organizing activity that I observed occurred in either central East Charlotte (which is home to 28205 – declared the "gayest zip code" in the city by Nick de la Canal for QNotes in 2015), or further north on UNC Charlotte's campus (still on the east side), individual organizers and social justice minded individuals travel to meet and plan from home bases in all other parts of Charlotte. It was not rare to encounter individuals who had to drive thirty minutes from one side of town to get to those areas central to organizing. The thirty-minute drive assumes that individuals have access to cars, but this was not always the case, and public transportation in Charlotte is considered to be lacking at the time of my research.

The lack of speedy and efficient public transportation in Charlotte combined with its sprawling suburbs is another part of organizing in the city that weighs frequently on the minds of organizers. For organizers whose implicit goal was to target populations all over Charlotte for mobilization, the primary solution has been to use locations in Center City (Charlotte's downtown area, also known as Uptown) as primary locations for direct actions (such as marches, rallies, and protests). The main exception to this was during the first night of the Charlotte Uprising in September 2016 when protests erupted in northeast Charlotte at the site of the police murder of Keith Lamont Scott, on Old Concord Road and on W. T. Harris Blvd. After the first night, protests relocated back to Center City and

remained there for the subsequent days and nights of spontaneous mass mobilization. Focusing actions in Center City is not without its drawbacks, one of the main complaints being the cost of parking which can be cost prohibitive. When events and actions are particularly well attended, parking is both expensive and scarce, and the farther out the parking lies, the less accessible the event will be for those with mobility issues.

Charlotte is also a banking city. From 1995 until 2017, Charlotte was the second largest banking center in the United States and is currently the third largest (Roberts and Rothacker, 2017). Through my fieldwork, Charlotte's "banking culture" has been one of the most common reasons given to explain the city's general inability to mobilize masses for social change. Generally, this has referred to a general mindset of relying on money to make a political statement, i.e., by making donations or "voting with one's dollar." This has been especially common in relation to mobilizing the LGBTQ community for grassroots change. Bank of America and Wells Fargo both have pro-LGBTQ employee and community policies, easily accessed on their websites. In fact, the annual Pride parade in Charlotte, which is the culmination of the weekend long LGBTQ Pride festival, is called the Bank of America Charlotte Pride Parade, and the main entertainment stage at the end of the parade route is called the Wells Fargo Stage. The banking industry can be a comfortable place for LGBTQ community members to make a living wage with protections against discrimination. This type of social justice presents a progressive image for the banks and makes the mobilization of mainstream LGBTQ people (those who do not already participate in grassroots organizing) against the banks (such as in response to Wells Fargo's funding of the Dakota Access Pipeline) less likely. See Jane Ward *Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations* (2008) for

more discussion on the neoliberal co-optation of social justice values for corporate interests.

The participants are engaged with a variety of organizations and projects. They share significantly overlapping networks, as most organizers participate in multiple organizations, collectives, and collaborations. Often, organizations with different goals and purposes will have nearly identical membership. Those who "do the work" tend to want to support other similar individuals and so the organizing community can seem quite intimate. This community has strong organizing connections to other cities in North Carolina, particularly Raleigh, Durham, Greensboro, and Asheville. People from Charlotte travel to these cities frequently for organizing opportunities such as day-long workshops, weekend conferences, and rallies/marches as those opportunities arise. While it has seemed most common for Charlotte activists to leave Charlotte indefinitely for areas where more organizing opportunity is available (in particular to the Triangle area), Charlotte has received an influx of interest and individuals during the Charlotte Uprising (a term which refers to the spontaneous and unexpected protests by Charlotteans in response to the police murder of Keith Lamont Scott). As such, the individual organizing networks span across the state, leading to a vague shared awareness that Charlotte is "unique" – meaning that, for some reason, Charlotte is more difficult to organize in compared to these other close-by cities.

One participant partially attributed the difficulty of grassroots organizing in Charlotte to the historic lack of organizing infrastructure due to a "history of fleeing," both in Charlotte and in the US South more broadly:

> I think that because the east coast and especially the southeast were a lot of the landing places historically for colonization and slavery, there's a deep trauma connected to the land here because of all the torture and because of all the dehumanization that has happened--to the point that when people get the opportunity to, they flee. And that's been happening. It started happening with slavery, like with the trans-Atlantic slave trade--when people could get out, they got out. [. . .] During the great migration, if you had enough money or enough resources to get out, you did. You got out north or you got out west and that's why you see so much community in Oakland is rooted in the South. So much community in New York is rooted in the South, and I think that's something you continue to see today. When people can, they leave. When people from marginalized community--when black and brown folks, queer and trans folks, poor folks, all kinds of folks, get the ability to leave, a lot of people tend to leave, even if it's just for a little bit of time and they come back; and I think it has to do with generational trauma connected to this land. And there's not as much of a cultural narrative around getting out and coming back; that part is missing. Like, to garner resources and education and come back, it tends to be just like "go." [. . .] I think that impacts a lot of the other pieces, because it impacts whatever resources people have. So whether that be skill sets, funding--any of those things. When people leave, those things leave too.

In addition to marginalized people fleeing the South historically, during my fieldwork I observed the movement of organizers between other major cities in North Carolina. While it was not uncommon to hear people in general discussing the pros and cons of leaving the South (particularly in times of political crisis), the more frequent migrations of note were when people moved between cities within North Carolina for organizing work. When asked about the relationship between Charlotte and other organizing hubs in North Carolina, the same participant went on to say:

> I think that you have folks from Charlotte who move to Durham or Greensboro because there's deeper political history and the energy is different there in regards to organizing; there's maybe a little bit more community, like community-based or collective-based things happening. But that means that as people leave, capacity diminishes. And I think especially right now with the gentrification that's happening in Charlotte, people are losing staying power. When you lose staying power you lose

history, and when people leave, if people aren't doing the work to make sure there's someone or some entity in their place when they leave, then that energy, labor, and ideology is just gone. And that's hard. And that means when people are coming in new, there's a lot more starting from scratch, and maybe making the same mistakes or coming up against some of the same things that people already came up against before, but because there's not that history, it's inevitable for that to happen. And then, because there's not a history of training around organizing and those kind of skill sets and a lot of it is electoral here, I think then there's that missing skill set piece: people have the language, but don't know what to do with it, and that's hard. So I do see this corridor between [Charlotte and] Durham and Greensboro in NC and I do think it encourages communication. I think we could probably build on it more and be more intentional about it but I also think the movement, without that communication, we kind of end up in the same place on a regular basis and that feels hard.

PARTICIPANTS AND TERMINOLOGY

Though I frequently refer to my participants as organizers for ease, individuals have differing levels of comfort and identification with the term as it tends to imply being a paid professional within formal organizing spaces. The term "activist" is occasionally preferred as it denotes a passion that is not necessarily paid. Others feel so compelled to do the work that they do not identify with any specific term and instead consider their work an inherent part of their being (for example, stating "I am not an activist, this is my life.") Similarly, others may consider the work they do inherent to their political ideologies (for example, some Charlotte communists may identify *only* as communists and consider the work they do to be inherent to being a communist rather than as a set of activities to be picked up or put down at will). Still, some participants do consider themselves to be organizers, and assign that term to others, but not all those who self-identify or identify others as organizers base that label on the work being paid. Those who are referred to as organizers in unpaid situations tend to be in leadership or decision-making positions in their projects.

"Organizer" tends to have career implications - one is "an organizer" when one is paid to do so, or pursues it as a career. Most of my participants do not hold paid organizing positions; indeed, many of my participants and much of the community in general maintain skepticism toward the efficacy of nonprofit work to achieve their long term political goals (for example, a commonly expressed desire is the elimination of capitalism). This career aspect may explain why many participants are reluctant to refer to themselves as "organizers," even when they describe themselves as participating in "organizing." It is actually not uncommon for an unpaid organizer to commit enough

hours to organizing that it interferes with their paid jobs or educations, but this burden alone does not seem to be enough on its own to push someone to identify as an organizer.

The skepticism toward paid organizing or formal organizing spaces, and thus the title of "organizer", seems primarily situated in an understanding of nonprofits--the system in which virtually all paid organizing positions exist--as not posing a fundamental threat to the state. Some participants regard nonprofits as a mechanism for capitalism to give the illusion of "change" and "progress" in order to prevent labor from going into revolutionary work. Andrea Smith compares the role of the non-profit industrial complex (NCIP) with the role of the prison industrial complex (PIC):

> While the PIC overtly represses dissent the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, functioning as a "shadow state" constituted by a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the areas of education and social services. The NPIC functions as an alibi that allows government to make war, expand punishment, and proliferate market economies under the veil of partnership between the public and private sectors. (2007, 9)

Other participants view non-profit (and even governmental) work more positively, as a way to bring positive change to marginalized peoples' immediate lives. Discussions around whether one should work either "within" the system to effect change, or build autonomous community resources free from government and capitalist control can be controversial and contentious, leading to conflict.

Another level of conflict in that discussion is the apparent belief that some nonprofits are more "radical" than others. This perception of what is radical does not seem to be rooted in an ideology where a thing's radicalness is related to its ability to produce revolution or otherwise overthrow capitalism. Instead, this appears to be rooted

in an ideology that emphasizes increasing the representation of marginalized people in positions of power (Scott, 2005) in different sectors in order to produce equitable access to resources. This could mean that a nonprofit that has a diverse board of directors and hires marginalized people could be seen as more "radical" or "less liberal" than other organizations, since under this logic, diversity in hiring practices can constitute a step toward transforming a systematically oppressive society. This engages uncomfortably with the issue of the neoliberal co-optation of diversity and multiculturalism. As Jane Ward puts it, "neoliberalism is characterized not only by the expansion of corporate control into all realms of economic, political, and social life, but also by the co-optation of social justice concepts – such as freedom, equality, and diversity- which are now invoked by corporate elites in an effort to protect their own financial interests" (2008, 1). Still, some nonprofits are regarded by participants as more acceptable for employment than others, but none are seen as perfect or viewed without some level of mistrust.

Regardless of where one falls on the issue of the merit of nonprofit work, the community is cognizant of the fact that people who organize are not exempt from the necessity of paid work for survival. As such, the issue is largely rhetorical and in my observation rarely has a lasting impact on people's membership in the community. One technique I have observed for navigating this issue (and avoiding being judged as "liberal," a designation nearly as undesirable as "conservative") is to refer to one's paid work in a self-deprecating manner and to re-focus on unpaid projects that may be seen as more radical. Failing to address one's "non-radical" work openly can result in other organizers thinking you are not aware of the difference between being radical and being liberal, showing yourself to be someone who may require education and correction, a task

that is widely seen as undesirable and harmful to the perpetually almost-burnt-out organizer.

Most of the participants identify as queer and/or transgender. Most of the rhetoric around the organizing in Charlotte employs the term “queer & trans folks” as an alternative to “LGBT People/community.” Individual participants’ identities also reflected this rhetoric. Many expressed gender identities and sexual orientations that they felt could not be adequately encompassed by the term “LGBT,” whose sterile and discrete categories maintain an implicitly Euro/Western concept of gender and sexuality which did not reflect the complexity of people's lived realities (indeed, many participants identified as part of racial and ethnic diasporas, which certainly influenced this resistance). Still, some participants identify as “cishet” (pronounced “sis-het”), meaning both cisgender and heterosexual, essentially a person who is “straight”. The inclusion of cishet participants was not initially anticipated but was unavoidable given the way I have conceptualized LGBT organizing.

Though my participants were often engaged in overlapping paid and unpaid projects, which give the impression of an insular community, they merely constitute those projects and individuals with regular reciprocal engagement. My participants represented a part of the community that engaged primarily in unpaid organizing work, which can be quite disconnected from the multiple other types of organizing to be found in Charlotte (such as electoral politics and nonprofit work) but due to its lack of structure much of this unpaid work is unable to articulate with or negotiate effective collaboration with other progressive and/or leftist groups. Indeed, many participants noted that in Charlotte and in North Carolina more broadly quite a bit of organizing is redundant due to this inability to

engage in sustainable collaboration. The community finds itself revisiting the same issues countless times as we fail to build our organizing infrastructure.

NEOLIBERALISM, "IDENTITY POLITICS," AND SOCIAL CONTROL

In the gaps between the enclaves of creative and productive movement work in Charlotte, we see the proliferation of a culture of competition among individual activists where they vie for personal recognition at the expense of movement work. In the previous section I discussed the contentious relationship community members have with nonprofits in movement work, in particular those nonprofits that employee activists and organizers and funnel them into career paths. One participant expressed to me that campaign-based nonprofits overstay their welcome after they have accomplished their goals because they are too profitable to abandon, even if they serve little logical function in the community. While the connection between neoliberalism and nonprofits and careerism are fairly well known in the community, the impact of neoliberalism as a way of thinking about unpaid movement work in under much less scrutiny.

Even when doing unpaid work, individuals end up perpetuating the logic of neoliberalism in their behaviors and politics. The mindset of making a career out of the movement remains strong in multiple ways that I will explore in more detail further in the report. We see activists attempting to monetize their identities by portraying themselves as authorities on the correct politics and discourse of the "most marginalized" communities. This authority, justified by their identities, goes on to justify the monetization of the identity. When people are not explicitly monetizing their identities, they are vying for media attention which can offer immediate gratification, but can also work toward generating enough notoriety to build a resume off of their recognizability. This can translate into future employment, speaking engagements, and interviews, and contribute to the continued re-establishment of their own authority. One participant

described to me a rally they had attended where they noticed a well-known organizer appear at the front of the crowd just in time for the media to document their presence. This organizer is not only well known, but well known for this specific kind of behavior.

We simultaneously see the use of social control mechanisms that exploit (and exacerbate) the fears individuals have learned from existing as queer, trans, and/or non-white within our oppressive society. These are mechanisms such as threats to one's livelihood or threats of social isolation. Some participants reported feeling scared they would lose their organizing jobs or be blacklisted from the community if they crossed the wrong person, even if the "wrong person" was not *employed* as an organizer. This is, of course, an exploitation of a common fear under capitalism, especially for trans and queer people who are still struggling to find workplace security (Budge, Tebbe, and Howard 2010). Others feared losing their communities, a trauma many queer and Trans people have already experienced within their natal families. The relationship between the use of these specific mechanisms and neoliberalism is unclear. Still, during the time of this research, these control mechanisms were primarily supporting the non-contested use of identity-based authority.

Identity politics has been used to refer to many things over the decades, and in current non-academic leftist circles tends to be associated with white men condemning women, people of color, and queer people for organizing along those lines rather than along class lines. This approach to denouncing identity politics may be so recognizable by the community that some might find my reference of it to be inherently aligned with the politics of those people who would want to silence marginalized groups, and thus

may color the reader's view of my argument. To be clear, when I refer to "identity politics" I am referring to a way of understanding and handling social injustice that prioritizes "lived experiences" (which are often assumed based on a person's visible and not-so-visible marginalizations), to the point of being the sole correct source of authoritative political knowledge. This is not a condemnation of people with marginalized identities organizing along those identity lines, but rather an opportunity to show the limitations of relying too heavily on this and not making room for adequate alternative knowledge sources. This is a pitfall that most of my participants identified, though few termed it "identity politics." As with any ideology, this lives in a state of flux within the community. While I do call it the hegemonic activist discourse, that is not to say that there are not constant examples of that discourse displaying its own limitations and people pushing back against it.

Identity appears to be a convenient tool for evaluating the legitimacy of authority in the absence of the structure one might find in a paid setting or organizations with bylaws, etc. Identity as authority reflects a desire to correct the biases (racial, gender, etc.) found in dominant society. It also reflects the fact that access to professional skills and training is overall more restricted for marginalized groups. As such, if these spaces were to evaluate authority primarily on an individual's ability to produce an exhaustive résumé of relevant experience, they would merely be replicating the patterns of disparity found both in dominant society and in formal, paid organizing spaces. However, it happens that the overreliance on it makes it distinctly difficult to evaluate the validity of disagreements and dissent as they can easily be cast aside as stemming from bigotry or "internalized oppression" (David, 2013) if one is disagreeing with someone of similar

marginalization. Indeed, in my field site, identity is the most easily grasped source of authority, which is then protected through the exploitation of deeply felt traumas, ultimately leading to an individual's ability to live their neoliberal vision of being "revolutionary" – a life of increasing social influence, notoriety, and monetary gain. These control mechanisms could likely be used to support a myriad of ideologies, and I am not prepared to argue that "identity politics" and neoliberalism are *inherently* or *inextricably* connected, but Lauren Leve (2011, 518) makes a strong case for the connection between identity-as-authority and neoliberalism:

> I propose that the current profusion of identity talk and also the political compulsion for states to recognize citizens' sub- and supernational identities are at once parts and products of this global assemblage, which works by extending a particular style of thought and social organization in which identity proliferates and identities proliferate and in order to do certain kinds of politics, you have to represent yourself in certain terms and make your claims in certain ways. […] it has been remarkably successful in establishing identity as a national and transnational governmental strategy that convinces citizens to assist in their own management by embracing the classificatory logics of liberal states and regulating their practices accordingly. By extending an identity-based model of political subjectivity, participation, and rights, the identity machine facilitates the globalization of neoliberal democracy.

Unfortunately, when identity is presented as the primary source of authority, the result is the further essentializing of historically and socially constructed identities, resulting in the denial of political differences between people of the same identities and/or lived experiences, as well as keeping marginalized people within the community operating within the mindset of fear and trauma. Overall, this identity hegemony and its maintenance proves to be an enormous obstacle to achieving long term, sustainable, and transformative work locally. I will now explore several issues stemming from or exacerbated by the maintenance of this ideology of identity as authority: reliance on

crisis-mode organizing, uncertainty in the negotiation of roles and responsibilities, and poor conflict resolution (sometimes referred to as “toxicity” within the community).

THREE ISSUES

1) Reliance on Crisis-Mode Organizing

Participants often spoke about getting "stuck" in a cycle of "reactiveness." Reactiveness refers to an over-reliance on "rapid response" actions at the expense of long term strategy. Rapid response actions include things like rallies, protests, and press conferences which are quickly planned in response to an injustice (such as the lack of indictment against the CMPD officer who murdered Keith Lamont Scott in September 2016). For some participants, the descriptor "reactive" carried with it feelings of frustration or skepticism about the long-term effectiveness of rapid response actions. In exploring the structures that constrain knowledge production in the context of a community-based anti-violence coalition, Aisha Rios notes the following:

> Several of my other informants across the state defined this urgency to do as much work as possible in the context of limited resources and lack of societal support for anti-violence work as being in a "crisis mode." […] There's a determination to serve people in crisis as quickly as possible, and there's no "luxury" to step back and assess what is being done. One effect of this was resistance to slowing down to reflect on practices and the theoretical frameworks guiding the work. (2017, 28)

In Rios's case, the trap of crisis mode organizing made it difficult for this group whose focus was intimate partner violence to be able to competently address intimate partner violence happening in LGBT couples, as the dominant ideology dictated that intimate partner violence (IPV) was something that victimized women at the hands of violent men, with no consideration for IPV in queer partnerships. Dissent was quickly squashed in her field site as people resisted tampering with the dominant discourse for fear of compromising the valuable successes it had brought for heterosexual women. Something

similar happens in my field site, where the attention and awareness that rapid response actions garner in support of marginalized and exploited people make them difficult to not rely on – this applies likewise to the identity-as-authority discourse which provides a quick, formulaic analysis for any situation.

Responding to crisis is not just an obstacle, though. Responding to crisis is fundamental to organizing – mass uprisings like the ones seen all over the U.S. in response to police violence are essentially responses to crisis. Indeed, crisis mode can feel unavoidable due to the conditions the state imposes on us, but working in crisis mode alone keeps organizers busy while structural oppression continues to operate. A group of organizers working on a project together may intend to do long-term work, but without explicit, shared ideologies against which they can evaluate "next moves," it can become a battle of personalities and opportunistic identity deployment.

An additional complication is that funding is erratic and when funds are available there is little consensus on its use. Many questions can be raised about its use but the most cited issue is: should money be used immediately as needed, or should it go toward a grander strategic planning? And then, how do we even agree on what that strategic plan should look like? These questions often stump organizers and lead to intense conflict. Without long term planning and shared standards it can seem nearly impossible to get out of the crisis cycle. One participant, talking about their work in a city outside North Carolina, details the issues:

> I am most interested in building infrastructure that can house and hold rapid response. I'm not super interested in rapidly responding without any kind of capacity or resources or infrastructure because it creates a lot of burn out, it's not sustainable, and there's nowhere to direct people or move people, so I'm more focused now on building the infrastructure piece. I think the

> rapid response is important. I think it's important that people do it. I think it impacts people's lives directly. [. . .] And when I say rapid response, I mean we had gotten to the point a few years ago where we had "altar boxes to go." We had altars to go because we were responding to so many police murders that we had these milk crates that had a kit - you have what's included in the kit, what to do with the kit, what it's for, and it had white cloth, it had flowers it had candles, it had water, it had all the elements represented in this altar kit. [. . .] And that was really emotionally draining and it was also really physically draining on people, and we were never going to catch up. The police were always going to keep killing people and if we were trying to be everywhere every single time someone was killed by the cops, we were never going to be able to do anything else to stop that from happening and we were never going to get to being proactive, we were always responsive. And that's the thing that's hard about rapid response is that when rapid response leads into continued responsiveness rather than trying to get ahead of it. We're never going to be able to play catch up to capitalism, and we're never going to be able to out fire-power the fire-power of the United States, and so if we're not trying to create something different at the same time that we're responding to that then we're never going to get past that point. So that's what I mean when I say rapid response - those are the things I try to stay away from.

Unfortunately, the dominance of identity-as-authority makes the answers to these questions connect back to an undefined yet pervasive politic that attempts to answer by referencing people's identities on a case by case situation. It becomes easier to respond to crisis than to engage in longer term visioning and implementation. Research participants frequently commented on the ubiquity of rallies and marches in Charlotte, identifying them as a primary, "go-to" tactic in the community. The efficacy of this type of tactic is dependent on the level of visibility and disruption it is able to achieve. Due to the necessity of visibility, it would not be surprising for a casual participant to have a skewed view of the dominance and importance of these actions for long term organizing projects. One participant describes it this way:

> Somebody would get shot and then we'd have a rally, but there'd be an issue of--ok, you show up and people are like, "fuck the police," and somebody

> will be like "OK. What are the alternatives?!" And there's this hiccup there. We really need to spend time thinking about that, knowing what that looks like so we can give out these alternatives. I think that's the problem with reactiveness, it's that you're not really doing that, you're just reacting. And that's not inherently an issue, but if you get stuck in a rut, that's an issue.

One participant suggested that the desire for individual recognition can play a role in perpetuating Charlotte's "rally-mania." The desire for visibility (to be seen, to have one's voice "centered," to have media representation) appears frequently in within Charlotte's activist rhetoric, and because it is regarded as legitimate it becomes politically difficult to suggest an individual may be seeking attention as an organizer or activist for their own gratification and gain. Still, many participants did hold similar assessments to this one:

> I think people are really into the identity of being an organizer. Like, being an organizer is cool in certain circles, and I think a lot of organizers get off on just being an organizer, if that makes sense. So, I think a lot of the work unfortunately becomes like--not egotistical, but there is a lot of "look at what we're doing." That's not really, I don't think, the route to go. I think rallies can kind of become an extension of that because it's like, "*we're* the ones out here doing the stuff."

2) Uncertainty in the Negotiation of Roles and Responsibilities

When observing how roles are negotiated among, or doled out to, community members in different scenarios, one can divide the types of roles and their associated duties into leadership roles, and support roles. This is a distinction I am making based on the patterns of discourse in the community, but the membership of these categories is dynamic and complicated. In fact, there are many ways in which "leadership" and "support" roles are articulated: "leadership" may be a synonym for "organizer," while "support" may be articulated in relation to someone's status as an "ally." Due to the role a person's identities (racial, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) play in determining

reasonable expectations, both leadership and support roles are articulated in terms of one's situationally relevant identities. Thus, you may be called a "white ally" if you are a white person performing a support role for people of color, and you may be advised to follow "POC [person of color] Leadership." Duties are almost always contingent on one's identities, and this is part of why determining roles and duties is a dynamic and complicated process.

For community members, determining the duties of leadership and supporters appears to be complicated not only by the lack of standards against which we may evaluate work, but also by a general disagreement over what tasks exactly are more fitting for leadership and which are more fitting for supporters. It is important to keep in mind here that the desire to avoid replicating the disparities seen in the larger society is what leads the community to find inherent authority in the knowledge of marginalized people. It also, however, leads the community to continually re-negotiate what leadership should entail, especially with regard to the responsibilities and burdens of making decisions for groups. The desire to put marginalized people in leadership is paired with a desire to ease the burdens of marginalized people. Of course, support roles exist to act on the decisions of leadership and, in some sense, ease leadership's workload. There is simultaneously an inherent sense of burden that comes with leadership and decision making. The difficulty of negotiating the level of "burden" a marginalized leader should be expected to carry is most clearly seen in the question of "whose work" it is to educate people about social injustice. The following conversation occurred between two participants who were discussing the continued use of a particularly aggressive "white

ally" by another group of organizers to speak on their behalf to other white people. The conversation shows some of the complexity of negotiating duties:

> A: You know what's really upsetting about this? Why do we have to bring out this one angry white woman to talk to white people? Why is it that we can't as black people--why do we believe that we no longer have the capacity to explain ourselves and articulate ourselves to white people? Why is that a responsibility that we no longer believe we have the capacity to achieve?
>
> B: You know, I disagree, though. I disagree. I've been saying this for a while for a few years; in the end, unless the minds of white people can be changed, nothing's going to go forward and it's up to white people to educate their own. Come for your people, because--we have screamed and we have hollered and we have tried to tell you and you don't believe us. Now all of a sudden, because we have the ability to record things that are being said and done to us, now you kind of believe it. You kind of believe it. And I think white people now need to educate each other and bring them to the forefront and then we can help you along from there.
>
> A: I would agree to some level, but I also think there's an issue with a couple of things being said. If we have white people educating other white people, we know that information is going to be fucked the fuck up. We have the responsibility to control our narratives. We cannot be giving our narratives away to white people to tell to other white people. Ultimately that feels violent, why would I give my story to the oppressor to tell back to the oppressor when I could just tell my story?
>
> B: I can tell my story but the thing is, is that it's not going to be believed. It just has to be--to a certain point--we tell the story together, or you stand behind me while I say it.
>
> A: Stand behind me.
>
> B: Stand behind me or stand next to me while I tell the story.

To fully address the persistent issue of whose role it is to educate, one should consider the backlash against being called an activist, even by those who may at one point have self-identified as an activist. The backlash is normally articulated by a marginalized person as "I am not an activist, this is my life." This is meant to express the

idea that one is not taking on a specific role but rather is merely speaking on their personal experiences of oppression. This seems to create a boundary so that organizers can better control the overlap between their "personal lives" and their organizing work (which, remember, is often primarily in non-professional settings). This is an important boundary for marginalized people to be able to assert, since many organizers with marginalized identities find that they are expected both by allies and bigots alike to provide customized knowledge and answers at all turns. People who begin with seemingly infinite patience for combating oppression by sharing their knowledge can be worn down over years of demands for this sort of labor, which goes uncompensated and is often demanded by people who are not engaging in good faith.

In my field site, this boundary also allows some individuals to minimize their obligations as a leader and prevent confrontation and dissent by refusing to "educate" people –all the while maintaining that that is a politically principled stance. This can be a handy tool to avoid seeming unknowledgeable. Instead of answering, people will be directed to "Google it" on their own (as a "good ally" would do, rather than burdening a marginalized person with questions), or they can have allies who share the privileged identity of the person making the inquiry take over the role of educating the person. Educating someone--especially when the educator is a marginalized person--is often referred to as "emotional labor." In this sense it is not a perfect synonym for the term coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild in 1983 to refer to the way emotions must be regulated by workers, but rather can indicate any social interaction where one individual feels they have done more than they were required to do or where they felt any level of discomfort in the interaction.

Calling it “labor” and denying the idea that someone may be ethically obligated to share their information has led to a proliferation of demanding cash payment. This is occasionally requested to express a point about the amount of demand that is put on to marginalized people to spend their time an energy on answering to oppressors, but other times it is presented as a genuine and righteous demand. Many consider this to be justified as it is assumed to be a step toward rectifying the very real financial disparities between marginalized people and privileged people. One sentiment I observed during my research was the idea that if organizers were funded in this manner, it would ultimately free up organizers to spend more time on “revolutionary” work and less time worrying about income.

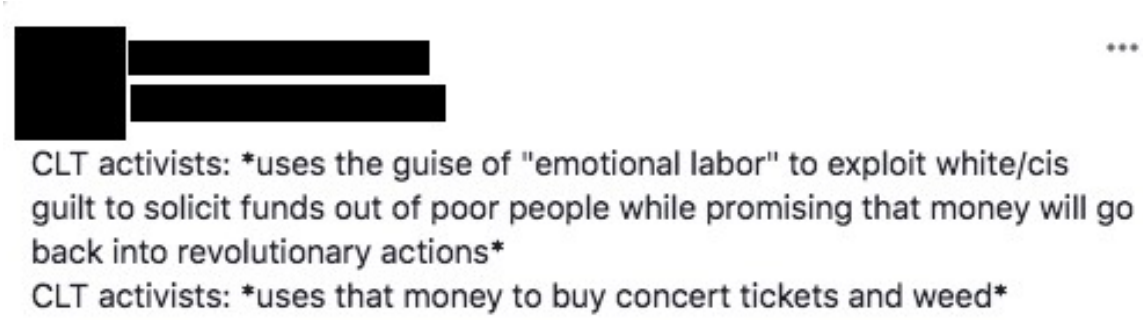

Figure 1 Participant humorously expresses the contradiction between the claimed uses of the money earned from “emotional labor” and its "actual" use.

Demanding payment for emotional labor has proliferated widely and has become a running joke among organizers, activists, and leftists on social media (not specific to Charlotte, NC, or the US), but still persists (at least) in Charlotte, where many of the allies and supporters from whom payment is being requested are not necessarily present in the online spaces where this practice is most commonly mocked. One participant

critiques the ballooning of this otherwise helpful rhetorical tool (which could cleverly express to someone their lack of consideration for a marginalized person's boundaries):

> This whole movement of acknowledging emotional labor consistently 24/7 to the point where we should be constantly compensating for it is counter revolutionary, because when we sign up to be organizers, when we sign up to be activists, we're signing up to uplift and educate black and brown queer POC. And not even just that specific group, taking identity politics out of the mix all together, we sign up to educate and uplift our communities. For us to deny education to people and say "go look it up,"-- as if we don't understand that google is a white supremacist system as well, the same information that are in our history books are in google-- we're not providing them accessible, reasonable information for how to properly do this movement work because that was given to us through people. I didn't learn how to do this through google. I learned how to do this through other organizers who committed time into me knowing that I commit that time into other people in the future.

Another participant felt that their political ideology is mostly incompatible with a refusal to educate people:

> All communists should have a fundamental [knowledge of] all forms of oppression and know why [oppressions are] bad and you should be ready to educate on that. Sometimes it is hard because we're still people. Sometimes it might be hard for me to educate about Islamophobia because I'm so emotional and caught up in it, but I have my comrades who can be like, "OK, here's why islamophobia is bad, this is how it's shown up," and stuff like that. So that is how we do it. Whereas [some others in Charlotte] are like, "unless you compensate me for everything that I'm telling you, then you're not entitled to anything that I have to say," and we're like, no. We believe that the masses of people are all entitled to everything we know because we need to build more communists and more people that are struggling for the world.

The pressing question becomes: is it actually the organizers' responsibility to educate people? The resounding answer to that, according to my participants, is yes. Educating others is a fundamental aspect of organizing. Those participants who spoke to this issue agreed that it is reasonable for organizers to set boundaries when it comes to

educating people (keeping in mind that this is generally occurring in an unpaid, and usually semi-private setting such as on Facebook), but that it is taken to the extreme at times and needlessly pushed off as "other people's work." Though my participants have firmly stated the need for organizers to be prepared and willing to educate individuals, the role allies play in propagating that education is more ambiguous. This highlights a recurring source of conflict in determining what "allies" can and should do - in this case, can allies be trusted to accurately educate people outside of the direct supervision of a marginalized person?

Indeed, a key issue defining ally work in this community is the idea that allies cannot understand the experiences of people marginalized in ways different than them. Oppression is implicitly and explicitly considered to manifest in unique ways depending on the type of oppression, and this means that experiences of oppression are not seen as things that can be generalized or empathized with. Allies have taken on the habit of attributing their knowledge and analyses solely to marginalized people who have imparted that knowledge to them. They thoroughly downplay any sense of independent analysis of issues that apply to identities different from their own. This discourse presents issues for allies who find themselves faced with marginalized people with different analyses than those with whom they have "accountability relationships." The question raised is: can privileged people be trusted to follow the correct marginalized leadership, when no marginalized group is a monolith? How can an ally know if they are doing the correct thing if the prevailing wisdom is that they cannot, in fact, know *anything* due to the faulty knowledge conferred by their privileged positions? I asked some white participants how they know what to do in organizing situations. One said, "keep your

head down and do your work, that's kind of the way to do it especially being white. I'm just there to do work, I'm not there to, like, talk about something or that kind of stuff, and I have a lot of trust with the people I work with and I think certain people will not hesitate to tell me if I'm doing something wrong."

3) Poor Conflict Resolution

Another issue that arises due to a combination of authority stemming solely from identity and also, perhaps more importantly, the social influence one may build with the help of their identities, is the formation of a community with poor conflict resolution skills. Due to the fact that authority stems from personal identities and "lived experiences," handling ideological and personal conflict become inextricable from one another, forcing any disagreement to be evaluated primarily by comparing personal marginalizations for the sake of determining if one person is oppressing another person. This underlying idea that most disagreements come from individual manifestations of structural oppression allows individuals in conflict to address one another with little regard or even outright cruelty. The logic behind this is that if a more privileged person disagrees with a more marginalized person, that disagreement likely stems from the former being a bigot, and bigots are not owed politeness or civility. This comes from the resistance to "tone policing" – a common way for people to try to shut down a person who is speaking or writing about injustice "too angrily." Instead of addressing the content of the argument, the tone becomes the focus. Tone is rarely discussed in good faith disagreements and instead is usually a tactic for derailing a political discussion. This tactic, used to deal with bad faith interactions with bigots and oppressors, is easily

deployed inside the community against one another. Since people's identities are evaluated in relation to one another, everyone is a potential oppressor or bigot. In a sense, this is logically consistent with the identity-as-authority discourse. Still, it seems unwise to routinely address close friends and intimate partners with the same tones one would use on a bigoted stranger on the internet. The set of behaviors and attitudes that stem from this issue connect to make up what participants often referred to as "toxicity."

Interestingly, though the use of the term "emotional labor" is not fully consistent with its original meaning (being closer to the related term "emotion work" which refers to emotional regulation outside of the labor force), this kind of "toxicity" could indeed be regarded as an actual, practical unwillingness to engage in emotional self-regulation – indeed, it is not uncommon to see someone refer to their interactions with another person as consisting of emotional labor when there is actually no evidence of emotional regulation having occurred at all. In some cases, it is as if an individual is requesting payment for a task that was asked of them that they did not do and have no intentions of doing. One meme, in figure 2, which is from a leftist Facebook meme page (i.e., it is not Charlotte-specific and it represents a concept as opposed to an individual Facebook user), humorously addresses this tendency for "emotional labor" to actually be just aggressive condescension which may not even include sharing knowledge or otherwise doing "emotional labor" at all.

Figure 2 A meme from a Facebook page satirizes activists who demand payment for bullying people.

Participants have described frustration with several aspects of conflict resolution in the community. One common frustration is the avoidance of in-person conflict and the ease with which conflict expressed in writing can escalate. Most conflict occurs online or via text message. One participant found it particularly disconcerting that the way people deal with each other in person is often extremely different than online:

> I just want to feel like I can be engaged but not be yelled at. Which like, I haven't been yelled at really, not often. Never in person. Folks are really nice in person. Everyone is super fucking pleasant in person, I've never had really an issue in person, it's just online. So it's kind of shitty, you know. It actually sometimes feels manipulative. You're really mean to me online and then I see you and you hug me? It's like, wow, like, what is that about?

Requests to move the conflict to in-person settings (or even phone calls) is often refused or ignored. A common line is that there is "not time" to meet in person, something that one participant is skeptical of:

> Time's a flat circle. Time's a social construct. You make time for things you want to do, things you value. Often times people don't value these people and, I mean, if you're not seeing people as a resource or necessary, then why would I? If you can't give me money right now when I say I want you to give me money, then the fuck you good for? It's still capitalism, right? [. . .] People don't value people. It's value, then you have to define value, right? So often times the people are not taking care of themselves internally, they're not addressing their own issues, then they're projecting them and so when people are here to be supportive, be helpful, they get overwhelmed. When somebody addresses them for their shit, you know, the

> accountability thing, they don't show up. They're not here to listen, they're not really here to change. When they're projecting, they're like, "oh, well, if you're gonna try to hold my ass accountable, actually what I'm gonna do is not fuck with you."

As hinted at by the previous participant, much of the conflict seen in the way people speak to each other online is understood as being due to trauma stemming from oppression. A different participant elaborates:

> I think literally everyone has something--anxiety or depression, you know? And a lot of trans folks and queer folks are medicating and don't see a therapist, are using alcohol or marijuana to chill. That's like, a factor. Folks have different traumas they've experienced and have learned how to survive and cope and communicate through those in different ways and then like, are then--if someone is experiencing trauma and says something that is not okay, and then you respond from the perspective of *your* trauma, it's a shit-show because neither of you are in good emotional places but maybe we just don't realize that, you know? [. . .] Do folks know what it looks like when someone is spiraling? Do we know how to recognize it when someone is not in a good emotional state? Do we know how to support them through that? I think a lot of it is that a lot of our interactions are online--we're talking on Facebook to each other, we're not actually sitting next to each other or looking at each other so it's really hard to know someone's tone of voice when they're online and it makes it way easier for things to escalate negatively. Yep. It's not good on the Facebook. People are not very nice to each other.

When the fear of consequences and repercussions are combined with refusal to engage in conflict resolution, it appears that the issue is not merely an inability to engage in healthy and productive conversations. Perhaps what toxicity really refers to is the manner of control and coercion that prevents questions, threatens isolation, and generally replicates the trauma that we would normally attribute to the structural violence of our society (see Appendix A p. 56 for more on this). When pressed, descriptions of the dreaded consequences and repercussions tended to focus on public humiliation (via "call

out posts," where one's wrongs are publicly enumerated on a social media platform such as Facebook (Asam, 2015), the ruining of one's reputation, and being "disposed of," or "exiled" from the community. One participant was disturbed by an attempt to discredit the reputation of a trusted friend and community member, and described the way they had seen this sort of process take place:

> Let's say this person A is naming this other person B "not safe" [. . .] Like, nobody really trusts A. People really trust B, never really registered any danger with B at all, but often times A is naming out people who are "not safe" and nobody really trusts A ever, but A has a lot of access and visibility, and speaks loudly, right? Whoever kind of is barking the loudest is getting a lot of the… I don't even know, because it's not about reputation, per se, its more about, like… [. . .] because of their presence, people tend to trust them more or lean in their direction. I won't even say "trust," but "lean in their direction," follow their direction, follow their leadership. Even if their leadership isn't founded on much, doesn't have a history of much, right? Which feels dangerous, also. Like, you just showed up and people who don't know you-- you're not from this place either --are listening to what you have to say because you speak really loudly. You're intimidating in a way, and I don't like that word for that thing but, um, people don't want to be exiled by you because they know how it will affect the rest of their life.

Of course, the fear of these consequences have not always aligned with the reality of those consequences. Public humiliation as such is rare, as call out posts are actually infrequent, and conflict rarely occurs in public places. The only call out post I witnessed originating in the Charlotte community, and which participants recalled in interviews, was a considered by its authors a "last resort" effort after an individual was repeatedly addressed privately by multiple individuals about their disrespectful and harmful behavior. A more common online occurrence is disagreements in the comment threads of Facebook posts which, while usually volatile, have not alone resulted in an exiling. In

person, regulation of ideas or actions is in line with that Katherine Blee witnessed when doing ethnographic fieldwork in activist spaces:

> Once a group establishes a sense of what is appropriate and inappropriate, this notion is fortified by conversational cues and body language. Inappropriate comments may be met by a verbal retort, as when a new member proposed that an antiwar group break windows at a military recruitment center and was silenced with the retort that this couldn't possibly happen in this group. More often, people were guided by smaller cues. Ideas that are outside the boundaries are met with awkward silences, while those appropriate to the group's character are reinforced with further ideas and examples. A mention of leader authority – in a group that sees itself as egalitarian- will prompt head shaking and sharp glances among members. (2015, 37)

Participants have experienced the intensity of actual consequences to different degrees, with a common effect being a hit to their mental health. However, I have not witnessed an actual permanent exiling of anyone; the length of time in which a person is exiled seems to rely largely on their own belief that they are unable to work in the community. While the effects the threat of social isolation on mental health can be severe, most people I have spoken to who have experienced these consequences do, in fact, continue to do organizing work and sometimes even on projects connected to those individuals who initiated the rumors and "exiling." Many participants expressed a strong feeling of responsibility to support organizing work in spite of the amount of suffering individuals may have put them through.

This type of control is gives off a facade of ideological cohesion because dissenters are unlikely to speak up, and it allows abusive individuals a freer rein than they may normally have. It is notable that these forms of control, which seem to be specifically against dissent and questions, exploit and sometimes even reproduce trauma

experienced originally in dominant society. Interestingly, the concept of "ideological purity," and specifically the idea that one should not push for it, popped up many times during my research. This seems to be a negative reaction to this façade of ideological cohesion and the control mechanisms that are used to neutralize conflict and build that façade – which is actually at the expense of ideological unity (which could be a less loaded way of discussing "purity"), as it is sometimes easier to learn how to appear to hold the same politics as an authoritative figure than it is to learn the political analysis itself.

One participant considers this phenomenon to be a "destabilizing" factor. It is worth noting that in internal conversations the term "destabilizing" often carries the implication of state-based and/or fascist counterintelligence initiatives to neutralize leftist groups. To call the push for ideological purity "destabilizing" can call into question the motives of anyone who is seen to be doing such.

> I think the emphasis on ideological purity is super destabilizing. A lot of the most like, build-y type things that happen in our communities are not things where it's like "we need to start off by making sure we're ideologically pure in the place that we're coming from." It's like, let's start this program so that people have stable housing. You don't have to have a concrete and perfect ideology to do something that's helpful and I think a lot of people will be like, super critical of organizations that are doing things that are helpful because their statements or whatever are not in-line with the most up to date political thought. So I think that is destabilizing. The emphasis on theory over action. But I think that's honestly more under like--I think the more relevant thing is what I mentioned before, like how people address the differences, you know what I mean? If you're like "that's not perfect, but that's fine," but if you're like "that's not perfect so I'm going to yell at you because you're a piece of shit," that's not great. That's going to be destabilizing.

This participant notes that the problem is not only the desire for ideological "purity" itself but the manner of its enforcement. There are not overarching agreed upon standards for handling ideological difference, and though many of my participants had strikingly similar perspectives on how to handle ideological conflict, the way it played out frequently seemed to be much different than how they might like to see it done. The implication of demands for ideological purity is that ideological differences are not to be struggled through collectively, but rather something to be neutralized due to the implied threat to an individual's authority that those differences pose. When the prevailing perspective is that the personal is political, it is understandable that some individuals would be prone to viewing disagreement as a fundamental attack on one's self, and negotiation to be a debasement of one's self. This tendency is absolutely not universal in the community but most of my participants did identify it as an issue among those considered to be in decision-making roles.

While many participants identified the pressure to say the correct things and have the correct ideas as a destabilizing factor that prevents growth, building, and sustainability, many of them also feel that work must be ideologically sound (recent popular parlance refers to this as being "principled"). In my observations, the search for ideological soundness stems from a desire to do organizing work that is coherent: the work should display a clear relation to its larger political goals. Individuals and groups who value this also frequently value good faith disagreements and discussions. Individuals and groups who push for what participants referred to as ideological purity were frequently vehemently averse to disagreement. In reality, these two urges exist simultaneously in organizing work. The question of which most heavily influences the

work being done comes down to how well the group can establish structure and norms outside of a paid setting. This may read as an issue of hypocrisy wherein people disagree with the enforcement of ideological purity only when they are the ones whose views are deemed incorrect. To interpret in this way would be a mistake, as there are fundamentally different ways in which the good faith search for ideological unity and the push against dissent play out. I will discuss this in the next section.

FINAL THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall, the lack of shared standards for evaluating the quality of work presents difficulty in determining when it is appropriate to collaborate, and what collaboration should look like. This can also have effects on in-group unity, as loosely connected groups can easily dissolve when there are no mechanisms present for engaging in political struggle when group members are not compelled to remain with a group whose politics differ from their own (unlike paid organizing work where the compulsion to find unity is based in the compulsion to remain employed). It can be easier to remove oneself from a group when a disagreement arises instead of working through the problem, which means that struggle does not get practiced and ideas proliferate without dissent, leading to what some participants call an “echo-chamber” of agreement.

In looking for solutions to these issues, I want to offer two cases of semi-structured groups doing unpaid movement work which have displayed a certain degree of resistance to the pitfalls I’ve described. In the first group, the practice of principled struggle combined with clearly stated ideological principles are their most obvious strengths, because these principles are fair game for struggling over, rather than unmovable tenets. In the second group, the ability to collaborate with other groups (providing a tactical knowledge of action for less political groups), their eschewing of ideological purity (maintaining a “vague leftist” leaning), and their willingness to engage in open conflict resolution certainly go toward building more sustainably. Both groups will face externally imposed roadblocks unique to their types of organizing, but hopefully will be able to protect against internal obstacles.

Serve the People is a mass organization in Charlotte based on Maoist principles. With work currently focused on a marginalized community in west Charlotte, the group's purpose is to build with the masses, amassing sustainable resources independent of the capitalist state to meet the material needs of the working class community. The group faces anti-Communist prejudice, as well as a certain amount of both political and interpersonal conflict with other organizers and activists in the community. In fact, STP members (and those perceived to be in support of STP) have experienced harassment in the form of threatening text messages and direct messages on Facebook from an antagonist group of organizers in the city. Additionally, STP as an organization has faced a series of factually false accusations via Facebook "call out posts" of being killers of transgender women. These hyperbolic accusations are the ultimate result of the uncritical application of systemic frameworks on an individual level combined with a discourse that discourages asking questions. The overall reason for the split between STP and its accusers is a fundamental disagreement over what the responsible, ethical, and politically correct course of action should have been during a specific incident in which some Charlotte organizers chose to take up the cause of a black trans woman who was accused of sexually assaulting a minor. This was a cause which was politically salient in light of North Carolina's struggle with HB2, which portrays trans women as sexual predators, but also a cause which was complicated by evidence procured by community members which pointed to her guilt (see Appendix B, p. 68).

This rift has caused considerable tension within the community, with previously peripheral parties eventually feeling compelled to formulate a stance on the politically sticky issue. Members of STP and organizers who chose to not engage with them felt the

threat of social isolation and ostracism to varying degrees. However, these threats do not appear to have had a significant negative impact on STP or its membership. This resilience in the face of controversy from the organizing community can be traced to the following things: 1) a focus on work that is evaluated in light of both its political correctness and its salience to the chosen marginalized community, as articulated by the community itself; 2) a focus on work that engages community members as equal partners (as opposed to work that has a top-down approach i.e., work that primarily engages other "organizers" in decision making roles); 3) a primary focus on the need for education to engender revolution; 4) a unifying set of principles that do not exclude people based on their political alignments; and 5) an active willingness to participate in "principled struggle" which allows and encourages productive dissent. At the time of writing, these factors have led to work that is focused primarily on its quality, validity, and flexibility.

Customer 49 is another example of an organizing space that strives for doing politically consistent work that produces material gains while not alienating individuals that are new to the world of organizing, activism, and leftist politics. Customer 49 is an official student group at UNC Charlotte, and the only explicitly leftist organization on campus. Though the group itself is focused on handling larger issues affecting students, members of the group participate in off-campus organizing with a wide variety of groups in Charlotte. They have a unique approach to maintaining group unity in spite of potential political differences which they refer to as "vague leftism." According to one participant, this was a good way to remain inclusive and maintain higher membership numbers. This is, in essence, directly oppositional to the ideological purity that has been seen to prevent collaboration in some other groups. On the contrary, C49 has been quite successful in

collaborating with other organizations on campus in spite of its potentially intimidating leftist politics.

Indeed, the group has members whose political leanings are undefined or still actively forming. The leanings primarily seem to be in "leftism" along the lines of communism and anarchism, i.e., left of "liberal." What appears to be the primary leading and unifying politics for this group is an anti-oppression stance rooted in anti-capitalism. When asked in written correspondence what holds the group together ideologically, one group member explains it as follows (presented verbatim):

> definitely anti capitalism, but I feel like we're united by a dissent for many of the things that fall under that too (like racism, homophobia, transphobia, islamophobia, xenophobia, heightened tuition, gentrification in clt) each of us is affected in a different proportion by each of those things so the vagueness lets us be as passionate as we need to about all of things that fall underneath anti capitalism.

However, when asked if this view was their personal impression or if it was codified the member went on to say:

> this is just a personal feeling about it, I don't know that we've ever actually defined that view among the membership. usually the language used to define us is "a radical leftist student collective fighting to secure justice in the university and community." so i think there's gotta be some deviation between how some people would describe our leftism or what we mean by justice ya know.

When asked if it was accurate to consider C49 an "anti-capitalist" group, another member gave the following assessment of the unifying principles:

> Yeah I'd say that's accurate, anti-capitalist or "capitalism-questioning" (I just made that up), I think new members tend to be liberal, social-democrats, etc. We tend to frame things within the group as a sort of battle against neoliberalism within universities, but its easily implied that we hate just plain ol' capitalism overall. [. . .] I think hands down our anti-neoliberalism

> is codified, I think our more broad anti-capitalist position is more inferred by our informal conversations and imagery, if that makes sense?

While the group does not have a comprehensive "points of unity" such as STP, they do have that foundational framing against which they can evaluate their actions. It does not, however, become so specific as to alienate potential new members. While some members have expressed to me feelings of still forming their political ideologies, "vague leftism" should not be seen solely as an accident of ambivalence (or even ignorance). In practice, "vague leftism" has been fought for and fought over: at one time, a former member put the communist hammer and sickle on C49 literature. This was quickly removed to maintain the integrity of a non-specific anti-capitalist stance (and was likely at the behest of non-communist and anarchist members). Another notable practice from the group is self-regulation in terms of group norms (taken from written correspondence):

> *Interviewer:* Do y'all have any group norms in terms of how you speak with one another, how meetings are run, that kind of thing?
> *Participant:* It's all very informal, a lot of shrugging. I think the funniest system we have is that when we go into a discussion on a topic, people will raise hands and then just a random person will start pointing at people with hands up haha
> *I:* Is that an anarchist technique?
> *P*: I mean, don't tell them that.
> *P:* I mean, that system just developed organically.
> *P:* Which I suppose you could say means that anarchism develops organically in group situations in which the group is seeking an effective and efficient way to organize themselves, you know, no big deal, am I right?

Of course, with a dedication to vague leftism, whether the system of group norms should be considered anarchist or not will have to remain undefined.

By highlighting these two groups I am by no means suggesting that they are the only two organizing spaces in Charlotte where these good habits are found. The reason that I chose to highlight them is twofold: first, it is because of all the unpaid organizing spaces that I encountered, I was most able to access the work and membership of these two. The second reason (which may actually be the underlying reason for the first reason) is because their relatively insulated and bounded character and their long-term presences in the community (more than nine months with active membership and uninterrupted organizing, which is unusual for unpaid organizing groups) lends well to case studies. This is compared to other unpaid organizing spaces in Charlotte that I came across which have been harder to define as bounded entities without the parameters that STP and C49 have. Indeed, much of the other unpaid organizing that I ran across in the field were projects and collaborations rather than organizations on their own. However, there is no reason to believe that STP and C49 are unique in their issues or their solutions. Interviews with folks who were not affiliated with either group suggest that other collaborations and projects that I witnessed had to grapple with these issues as well.

It would be difficult to try to evaluate with any specificity the longevity of these two groups, or even if their future existence will be consistent with their current existence. At the time of writing, STP is a comfortable place for people of any left-leaning background and should remain such for as long as its Points of Unity (see Appendix C, p. 74) remain the primary source of unity. Similar to C49's "vague leftism," the points of unity allow for a practical unity without the demands for specific political

affiliation. Throughout my research involving members of these two groups, there has been an underlying tension between the groups, even with some shared membership. Usually when participants have expressed to me hesitance about STP, the reasons have been an impression that the politics of individuals in STP represent the politics of the group as a whole. In truth, STP houses both communists and anarchists (something which is frequently noted by STP membership, indicating the significance of this fact), and its orientation as a "mass org" is often cited by members in determining how political ideologies should and should not manifest in the group. Essentially, this tension manifests when there just *seems* to be a threat of ideological purity. This indicates that the longevity of STP may rely heavily on maintaining a political atmosphere consistent with their points of unity and being sure to maintain their practice of principled struggle, which encourages political coherence and group unity.

Perhaps notably, in spite of the tension between members of STP and C49, the group norms are similarly equitable as there are limited ways to enforce specific ideologies if the group is to maintain its dedication to bringing in new members, engaging in struggle, and eschewing identity politics. Were these not shared standards, "toxic" modes of enforcement could arise. At the time of writing, STP's leadership structure involves democratically elected leaders whose roles sway between decision making (having the final say on a matter) and bottom-lining (ensuring the implementation of initiatives). In addition to this structure, members are expected to take turns planning and hosting fundraisers and events with little supervision required, as all members can access the points of unity and evaluate their decisions and actions based on that shared standard. C49's official structure is entirely due to institutional demands, and the idea of

having a president or vice-president is played with humorously in conversation to defuse any real authority. In action, C49 operates via lateral committees, almost identical to STP.

What I hope to have successfully illustrated throughout this report is that the challenges faced in the unpaid organizing work in Charlotte are neither mysterious nor insurmountable. Many participants expressed feeling as if they could not dissent for fear of repercussion. Many participants expressed feelings of isolation and uncertainty when expressing those concerns and disagreements to me. Some have already found that others experienced that same isolation, and the same feelings of shame for not agreeing with the "right" people. For those who have not, and those in other places who may read this and recognize these feelings and experiences, I hope they can walk away with confidence that they are absolutely not the only people feeling their same feelings. Craving better politics and craving better community are not in opposition to each other, in spite of what many may have been groomed to believe. Wanting to be treated kindly is not inextricably linked with wanting to subjugate a marginalized person. There is a substantial and identifiable difference between people who dissent due to prejudices and bigotry, and those who dissent in search of better, more transformational politics.

I hope that by condensing all of these issues and presenting the two cases of STP and C49, people will be able to see more clearly what does work and what does not work in unpaid group settings, and perhaps that people will be able to see more clearly what their own politics are or can be. Demystifying the factors that internally sabotage our organizing work should help us to be clearer about what our goals are and what we can do to achieve those. I hope that reading this will inspire people to think and speak more

on the things they have seen that have not worked, and will collaborate with one another to build up the things that have. I hope that people will remember the things that divide us, and hold those things at the forefront every time a new action is taken or a new project developed. Above all, I want anything that does not ring true in this report, or that feels incomplete, to be brought to me so that we can refine the ideas presented here. Essentially, I hope that this is not the final edition of this report.

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Appendix A: Theoretical Significance of the Practicum

In this theoretical addendum, I will begin by pulling from anthropologist and Anarchist activist David Graeber whose short work *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology (*2004*)* was given to me by a community member who correctly guessed that this would be relevant to my interests and my research. I am particularly pleased to have received such a significant theoretical contribution from a community member, as it points toward the intuitive relationship between my involvement as researcher in the community and my non-research participation. With the help of this work, I hope to more clearly illustrate the limitations of identity politics in producing transformative organizing work in this Charlotte community - limitations which were identified by my participants, though not always explicitly within the framework of identity politics.

I will then be approaching an ethical issue that I frequently wrestled with during my research: what community knowledge and experiences can be shared responsibly to an indefinite audience of known and unknown individuals? I will consider how my membership within the community and role as anthropologist informs this decision making process - i.e., what are my motivations for either maintaining silence or promoting transparency? I will explore this conundrum through the concept of cultural intimacy as explored in the anthology *Off Stage/On Display: Intimacy and Ethnography in the Age of Public Culture (*2004), which helps to shed light on the awkward ethical position of anthropologists who, through their field work, become familiar with the aspects of cultures that members would rather keep hidden from a public gaze. Graeber's ideas of an Anarchist, activist anthropology will also help to inform these ethical considerations.

In my final theoretical strand, I explore a conceptualization of this community as a community of practice where newcomers engage in legitimate peripheral participation as described by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (1991). The purpose of this conceptualization is to identify how this community reproduces itself in the absence of a shared, supposedly-inherent identity such as race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (the absence of which is perhaps ironic due to the hegemonic idea that authority stems from identity - i.e., identity politics.) When combined analytically with cultural intimacy and "shadow zones" as discussed in the previous section, this conceptualization sheds light on the curious dissonance between the pedagogical teaching of newcomers by old-timers, and the situated learning of newcomers participating from the periphery, moving toward the "center" of the community. I position the location of the Charlotte community's reproduction within our "shadow zone" which has significant consequences for maintaining our vulnerability to self-destructive forces and exploitative motivations.

In the primary text of this thesis I related the use of identity politics to the desire to undo systemic damage done to marginalized communities - to even out the playing field, so to speak. Unfortunately, this ideology has limited transformational potential for marginalized communities. To illustrate the conceptual limitations of identity politics and to hint at the responsibility of the anthropologist to resist its rhetoric, I pull from David Graber who wrote the following in his work *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*:

> Lauren Leve has recently warned that anthropologists risk, if they are not careful, becoming yet again another cog in the global "identity machine," a planet-wide apparatus of institutions and assumptions that has, over the last decade or so, effectively informed the earth's inhabitants [...] that the only way one can now make a political claim is by asserting some group identity,

> with all the assumptions about what identity is (i.e., that group identities are not ways of comparing one group to each other but constituted by the way a group relates to its own history, that there is no essential difference in this regard between individuals and groups…) established in advance. Things have come to such a pass that in countries like Nepal even Theravada Buddhists are forced to play identity politics, a particularly bizarre spectacle since they are essentially basing their identity claims on adherence to a universalistic philosophy that insists identity is an illusion. (2004, 101)

Graeber goes on to present an extended illustration which focuses on the way the global "identity machine" dictated the rhetoric available for the expression of the revolutionary aims of the Zapatista rebels of Chiapas in 1994. The political foundation for the Zapatistas, according to Graeber, was something unique within the broader tradition of anarchist thought. The Zapatistas modeled enclaves of autonomous self-government and formulated a democratic practice that incorporated a consensus process that was chosen by the Maya-speaking base. He describes the changes that occurred once the global "identity machine" got wind of this rebellion:

> Rather than a band of rebels with a vision of radical democratic transformation, they were immediately redefined as a band of Mayan Indians demanding indigenous autonomy. This is how the international media portrayed them; this is what was considered important about them from everyone from humanitarian organizations to Mexican bureaucrats to human rights monitors at the UN. As time went on, the Zapatistas - whose strategy has from the beginning been dependent on gaining allies in the international community - were increasingly forced to play the indigenous card as well, except when dealing with their most committed allies. All I want to emphasize is exactly how patronizing - or, maybe let's not pull punches here, how completely racist - the international reaction to the Zapatista rebellion has really been. Because what the Zapatistas were proposing to do was exactly to begin that difficult work that so much of the rhetoric about "identity" effectively ignores: trying to work out what forms of organization, what forms of process and deliberation, would be required to create a world in which people and communities are actually free to determine for themselves what sort of people and communities they wish to be. And what were they told? Effectively, they were informed that, since they were Maya, they could not possibly have anything to say to the world

> about the processes through which identity is constructed; or about the nature of political possibilities. As Mayas, the only possible political statement they could make to non-Mayas would be about their Maya identity itself. They could assert the right to continue to be Mayan. They could demand recognition as Mayan. But for a Maya to say something to the world that was not simply a comment on their own Maya-ness would be inconceivable. (Graeber 2004, 103-105)

It is probably clear at this point that one of the things that I believe the non-formal organizing projects, initiatives, and groups in Charlotte must specifically guard against in order to prevent collective self-destruction is this hegemonic ideology of identity-as-sole-authority - i.e., "identity politics". However, it would be something of a misrepresentation of the majority of my participants to imply that this was a frequently used term in interviews. In my research, identity politics was rarely named explicitly and yet *the complications* that emerge from identity politics were invariably identified as primary issues for the community. Whether named as such or not, these symptoms of identity politics also came up in countless informal discussions with friends and fellow community members, becoming more likely to be named explicitly as shared ideological understanding and trust were established within the informal group (i.e., through gradually "testing the waters" on the subject).

But why would identifying and discussing undesirable effects of identity politics require building trust among group members of the same community? Why is it hard to speak that truth openly? In my field site, identity politics have manifested at its worst as being merely a flipped hierarchy. By identifying identities as the source of oppression rather than hierarchies and power imbalances we are unable to fundamentally transform society. Indeed, hierarchical structures cannot be perpetuated consensually - it requires

coercion and threats. In Charlotte, individuals who do not truly wish to combat hierarchies but rather wish to gain the fruits of oppression for themselves have walked into a community whose informal organizing (i.e., voluntary and consensus-based) is vulnerable to those who are willing to harm others. In Charlotte, those who speak against the toxic manifestations of identity politics fear (and experience) shunning and violence. Still, as I have said, the conversations do occur.

The location of the more explicit conversations about the topic is noteworthy: the conversations on the problems of identity politics are part of a larger organizing and leftist discourse, accessible to almost anyone who looked for it, but, in my field site, are also not generally up for discussion in mixed company. Openly questioning identity as the source of authority can invite swift reprimand from community members who have internalized it as dangerous (in the literal sense of physical harm) to undermine this ideology. Still, I have witnessed talk of these identity politic challenges emerge in virtually every casual social setting where the topic of conversation has turned to the community itself. This is the place where I would frequently hear the sentiment shared that “you can’t say that,” - immediately, of course, after *that* had been *said*.

The challenges of speaking about identity politics and the subsequent decisions I must make about committing certain knowledge to the page - both as a community member risking social ramifications (in reality my experience of these have already occurred and have informed by ultimate evaluation of the severity of potential consequences) and as a researcher with a complex set of personal and professional ethics - is evocative of issues stemming from cultural intimacy and mass mediation. Andrew Shryock (2004, 3) explains these issues as follows:

> The production of identities meant to be public, that have publicity as part of their function, will create, of necessity, a special terrain of things, relations, and activities that cannot themselves be public but are essential aspects of whatever reality and value public things might possess. This terrain is the "off stage" area in which the explicitly public is made, even staged, before it is shown. Though not universally "private" - it can include entire national communities, ethnoracial minorities, socio-economic classes, religious movements, and global diasporas of almost any kind - this terrain can never be fully transparent and it is often a site of social intimacy. The gaps and screens that set this terrain apart from contexts of public display make it hard to represent, ethnographically, aesthetically, and politically, despite the essential role it plays in the creation of public culture.

What are the actual potential ramifications of sharing this type of information, for myself and for the community? As a community, there is a fear that revealing certain types of information can jeopardize the safety of marginalized individuals. That admitting that someone of a marginalized identity could rape, abuse, or harm another individual would perpetuate state violence against that marginalized person. That because queer people must contend with accusations from society that we are sexual predators we must not act if we identify a sexual predator in our community. There is also a fear of making ourselves vulnerable to police interference/infiltration - essentially, that speaking up about abusive individuals or even questioning the authority of certain "leaders" would "divide the community" and cause our organizing work to be put in peril. That we must "protect our own." Writing these words I am strongly confronted by the fact that this is the same logic used in all parts of our society to protect oppressors and abusers and to silence victims. I hope readers are as confronted by this as I am, and for that reason can understand my decisions to be frank here.

Of course, many readers of this thesis will have heard me be frank on this before and have wrestled with similar challenges of cultural intimacy themselves. In particular, the seeming contradiction between desiring silence for security purposes and desiring transparency for accountability purposes (and the topic coming up frequently in places which are neither entirely secure nor entirely public) is a wonderful illustration of these challenges. The following quote explores in particular what happens in the "shadows" of marginalized communities and spaces:

> These marginalized social spaces have the potential to become "counterpublics," complete with their own newspapers, TV programs, radio stations, and markets. Yet insofar as these spaces continue to be stigmatized, their emergence as publics, even as counterpublics, will cast "shadows" over aspects of identity that make inclusion in majoritized publics both difficult and undesirable. The content of shadow zones tend to be richer (and more sensitive) than material that circulates in counterpublics [...] The area of shadows, ironically enough, is often used to initiate and entice. Outsiders are not automatically excluded from it. Unlike the counterpublic that helps shape it, however, the shadow zone is not meant to be broadly seen. Instead it provides relief from, alternatives to, and staging grounds for the representation of a fairly narrow spectrum of cultural materials and practices that, in an age of identity politics, must inevitably be shown. (Shryock 2004, 12)

The potential theoretical and social value in revealing that uncomfortable knowledge is complicated by the urge to be accountable to the community's desires to keep certain things hidden. One should recall that these issues are not issues that I invented and about which I have written a subsequent diatribe - these are issues that my participants identified in and out of private interviews, and which I have merely synthesized into one piece of writing. What I mean to point out here is that there is a solid portion of the community who not only see these as issues, but do, in fact, speak fairly openly about it with non-community members present (or potentially present, if the

conversation occurs on social media) - even those who lean toward maintaining silence. Many recognize my writing about us to potentially aid in combating these issues. Ultimately, the urge to be accountable by maintaining a silence that perpetuates harm is not the appropriate ethical choice. Instead, accountability to this community needs to be an accountability to the community's transformative potential and I think the majority of my participants and other community members would find that to be a sound, or at least understandable, conclusion.

To address, now, how the community is reproduced and how individuals learn to be part of the community, I use the concept of legitimate peripheral participation. LPP is explained by Lave and Etienne as a process which is the "central defining characteristic" of situated learning:

> By this we mean to draw attention to the point that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. "Legitimate peripheral participation" provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (1991, 29)

Of particular note for my use of this concept is the fact that there is not an inherent connection between learning and teaching. This problematic relationship between what is taught and what is learned is particularly salient when considered in light of the publicly mediated face of a community in contrast to the shadow zone where that mediation occurs. In my field site, it appears that that information which is formulated for

newcomers (or potential newcomers) from a pedagogical standpoint is consistent with the mediated face of the community, and the situated learning which newcomers experience occurs in the shadow zone.

Though the hegemonic ideology of the "community" is identity politics, the community itself does not quite share a single identity (there is a wide range of opinions on whether or not one should identify as an organizer or even an activist and in which scenarios it is appropriate). However, it *does* share a *practice* which must be learned in order to reproduce the community. This practice is learned in ways that are most often not within a traditional pedagogical context (not for a lack of attempts on the part of old-timers). The actual practice which is being reproduced is difficult to identify, but the perpetual public trainings and workshops and private scolding are at least suggestive of a feeling of a shared practice. I will tentatively identify allyship as the practice being reproduced in these teaching and learning settings. This is the only practice that can be said to dictate the information we attempt to put into pedagogical structures for wider public dissemination and for the simultaneous education of newcomers (workshops, trainings, "how-to" guides written on blogs and share on social media). Indeed, in spite of the lack of community-wide shared identity, allyship as it manifests in this field site - i.e., the ways in which individuals must interact with each other according to their respective marginalizations - is absolutely consistent with identity politics.

Interestingly, the sites of pedagogically dictated learning and teaching are the product of this shadow zone of cultural intimacy - a consciously mediated version of what the community thinks they are, and what, by all accounts, the community thinks it needs newcomers to know to become part of the community. However, the most salient

learning - the site of proper initiation and integration, where one learns the ins and outs of actually being part of the community of practice - comes only within the context of the practice. Locating this situated learning within the zone of cultural intimacy is consistent with Shryock's description of cultural intimacy as being a place that is not totally private and not totally public, and is often a site of initiation.

The actual reproduction of the community - the situated learning that occurs in our community of practice - is located in the shadow realm where we learn the problems of identity politics, but are entirely beholden to them due to the imagined viewer for whom we have mediated our existence into the neat pedagogical boxes. The reason this is significant is because while we will eventually pick up on the faulty logic of identity politics, we also learn that it is dangerous to speak to that. In the shadows, as we move centripetally into the community, we are lead to produce trainings for newcomers which are challenging yet ultimately palatable and completely ill-equipped to prepare them for actual integration into the practice. The actual reproductive work being done is the reproduction of those hierarchies that are protected by coercion and threats. All we have done in this is reproduce a community that emulates oppressive structures and is so ashamed and frightened of that fact that we will not, or feel we cannot, speak openly about it. Many newcomers sacrifice the majority of their social network in order to pursue justice work, and now must fear losing the society they have entered into.

Fortunately, there are places for people to go if they recognize the political limitations and/or moral decay of the practice, whether they would like to speak up on the issue or merely find a place where the social ramifications of engaging in justice work (loss of friends and family and associated resources) is mitigated by the individuals in the

community rather than heightened. Many of my participants shared stories of resisting the hegemonic ideology within the community and having to unlearn the ineffective tools they picked up from joining a community of practice such as this. People have told me of the long road toward realizing that their experiences and feelings were not isolated incidents. Some of them experienced shunning, harassment, or having rumors of being federal agents spread about them. Most participants, whether they experienced these things or not, knew those were risks. From the outside (not as an anthropologist in this case, but as someone who has experienced some of that and loves many who have also) it feels easy, now, to recognize that there are other options and that there is life and community involvement and justice work to be welcomed into in the realm of organizing in Charlotte, after having lived through Charlotte Organizing

The significant takeaway here is just to ruminate on the way we conceptualize ourselves and our practice, and the ramifications of allowing our community to be reproduced with identity politics as the dominant ideology. What if, instead of battling the consequences of identity politics as they show up, we do not reproduce them in the first place? What if, instead of talking about our ideal society, we begin to model it in our actions? What if we were no longer beholden to an ideology that has so far only protected abusers, prevented deep relation building, and justified the harmful expression of our traumas? I would like to see a community where if a comrade berates, demeans, or verbally assaults someone with “more privilege” than they do, we recognize that not only does that comrade have the potential to do that to anyone, but that that comrade needs support to evaluate and challenge their own behavior and thoughts. I would like to see a community where we do not reason away abuse, harm, assault, and rape by counting out

who has the most marginalized identities. Above all, I would like to see a community where newcomers do not have to sign up for fear and silence in order to dedicate themselves to transforming the world for the better.

APPENDIX B: OPPOSE RAPE APOLOGIA

Oppose Rape Apologia

This statement was originally written and posted to our Tumblr site on July 30th, 2017. It is being reposted here for continuity as we move our website from Tumblr to wordpress.

For the past 2 months, Serve The People Charlotte has been on the receiving end of social media harassment, threatening messages, and accusations of transmisogyny (misogyny against trans women) and anti-Blackness (racism specifically against Black people/Blackness). Messages and posts to the STP-CLT Charlotte page started when a group of activists here in Charlotte saw that we were having our servings in Clanton Park. Our Facebook page was bombarded with accusatory questions and demands that we relocate from our current location.

Their reasoning for demanding we move to another park is that a Black trans woman was attacked by community members in Clanton park, the same Black trans woman they are currently organizing around who has been accused of sexual contact with a 15-year-old. Harassment intensified when some Serve The People Charlotte volunteers who were previously involved decided to separate themselves from the activists supporting the accused and had questions about whether or not a she could be a rapist.

The beef between Serve The People Charlotte and this group of activists is being portrayed as a conflict of personalities and a direct, petty, attack on a Black trans woman because we have our servings in the park where she was attacked in. To be honest, we did take her attack into account while choosing between Clanton or Wingate Neighborhood Park, and we had a feeling it would come to this, but we chose Clanton Park for solely logistical and political reasons. Clanton Park is larger, has covering from rain, a bigger

playground, basketball courts, a community center, and a more frequent number of visitors than Wingate Neighborhood park. STP-CLT chose Clanton Park because we believe it's more central to the community than any other park in the area. We didn't choose our location to piss off or annoy a group of people we didn't plan on working with anyway.

Our choosing to not be involved with this group of activists is rooted in their current and active support of an accused rapist as well as the definition of rape. We firmly believe any sexual contact with a 15-year-old by someone in their mid-twenties is rape, while the group attacking us believe it is NOT rape. Statutory rape is often excused because of the belief that there is still a level of consent. We refuse to downplay the seriousness of statutory rape and the vulnerability of young teenagers in sexual situations. Adults have a responsibility to not engage in sexual activity with teens and children regardless if they feel "consent" has been given. Children cannot and will not ever be able to "consent" to sexual acts with an adult.

We aren't able to identify this group of activists by name as they are not an official organization, and we are not interested in sending out personal attacks such as they have. We are coming from a political place only. This statement was not written to out people to police, therefore, we will not identify anyone by name. This is a political statement to make where we stand clear. With this background information being given, the rest of this statement is a direct response to the allegations against us stating that Serve The People Charlotte is anti-Black and transmisogynistic.

"I have this identity so any criticism of me is an attack on my identity/identities"

When people in the organizing community voiced questions, confusion, and concerns about the support of someone being accused of sexual contact with a minor, they were met with "Trust Black trans women!" "You hate Black trans women!" and "This is anti-Blackness!" Trusting Black trans women, not hating Black trans women, and recognizing

anti-Blackness are good ideas and direct responses to the oppression black trans women face. However, they are weaponizing this to shield from the accusation of rape and criticism of rape apologia.

This group has continually said that their politics and political work are centered around the most oppressed and exploited and that defending them at all cost is liberation work. They claim they combat all forms of anti-Blackness on the spot and at every corner.

This sounds great in theory but was completely misapplied in the case of the person they are shielding from criticism. The person accused of sexually assaulting a minor is a Black trans woman and the minor who was assaulted is a cis (not trans) Black boy. When age was mentioned in reservations about supporting a statutory rapist the rebuttal was an emphasis on gender using reasonings such as “He’s a cis man and she’s a Black trans woman so the power dynamic is different” all the while ignoring the fundamental difference between them: age.

What we found contradictory in their reasoning was the inherent anti-Blackness of not issuing a young Black boy childhood and the painting of HIM as the predator and not the adult in the situation. How many times have we seen on the news young Black kids being described as big, scary, and adults instead of children? When has it ever been the correct idea to combat anti-Blackness against one Black person by using anti-Black narratives against another?

An adult is an adult regardless of race, gender, etc. Adults should be held responsible for their actions and shouldn’t be able to pass off blame to younger people with “Well they look older, they act older, I didn’t know their age, etc.” It’s the responsibility of the adult to question how old somebody is before engaging in risky (drug use or drinking alcohol for example) or sexual activity with someone who could possibly be a minor. At what point do we consider a teenager “grown?” This is the perfect opportunity for them to

paint a teenager as capable of consent because it removes all responsibility from the adult in the situation.

This group's entire political platform is centered around a person accused of sexual assault and rooted in guilting people into giving monetary support to her.

Another way they use identity politics is by them guilting white people, non-Black people, cis people, and people they deem as cis passing (people they deem as not "looking" trans) into giving them money and into supporting a person accused of rape because anybody who asks questions is labeled anti-Black and trans misogynistic. This is usually followed up by call out posts on social media and being pushed out of activist spaces.

They ostracize people for not being radical enough by their standards all while operating as liberals, taking on whatever politics work for their benefit in the moment. We've seen this by their use of the phrase "trust Black trans women" as a rallying point when they only mean the black trans women they choose. They proved this to be true when they told the community not to trust the Black trans woman who outed the accused for being a rapist, painting her as neurotic, crazy, and untrustworthy.

These are all clear examples of their identity opportunism, picking and choosing where and when identity matters, as an opportunity for political gain.

There's more inconsistencies with the narrative the group accusing us of being anti-Black and transmisogynistic is pushing out. Every time this group organizes an event around the accused person they say she's facing years in prison "for being a Black trans woman" and for being the victim of a hate crime. What her charges are and what she's being accused of are never actually mentioned. When anybody brings this up (not just members of STP-CLT) people are accused of believing the State (cops, the court system, etc.) over a Black

trans woman.

The fact of the matter is, the accusation that she engaged in sexual activity with a minor didn't just come from police. The initial accusation came from the victim and his family, leading up to her assault. We are trusting members of the community over the police and we always will. She wasn't attacked in a completely random hate crime, she was attacked by family members AND the boy she is accused of having sexual contact with. Her attack was a direct response to her relationship with the 15-year-old boy. This, however, is almost never mentioned and the story of what happened is always changing.

It would be naïve, fake, and opportunistic for us to say that her being a Black trans woman played no role in her attack. There's a strong possibility that had she been white, cis, or a man the response would have been drastically different. However, our response shouldn't be ignoring that she's accused of rape just because other people can get away with it easier. In times of HB2, a bill that criminalizes trans women, painting them as "men in dresses" that want to sexually prey on children, and at a time where Black trans women are being murdered at high rates, we understand the need for Black trans women to be seen as human, worthy of respect and life. But giving someone, humanity means being able to see them as a whole person, not a romanticized version we've created in response to a demonized one.

For example, Black and brown men are portrayed in the media as violent and nobody can forget Trumps comments about Mexican being rapists. Fighting this with 'Black and Brown men can't be rapists!" misses the point. It ignores the sexual violence so many people in our communities' deal with by others from the same community. Sexual assault victims in marginalized communities have been silenced because the person who assaulted them faces oppression too. They're told it will "make us all look bad" or play into stereotypes. (See Bill Cosby, R. Kelly, and Chris Brown for example.) Serve The People Charlotte is refusing to prioritize image over people's safety. People aren't rapists because of what communities they come from. There's rapists in all communities, it's our

job to isolate and out them to keep people safe. Our accusations of anti-Blackness and transmisogyny don't come from us being anti-Black and transmisogynistic, they come from us not supporting someone accused of rape.

At least 15 trans woman have been killed in 2017, an overwhelmingly majority being Black (one being a Black trans woman killed here in charlotte, Sherell Faulkner May 16th.) Most trans women aren't killed by police, but by members of our own communities. That's why it's so important we unite our communities to protect each other and hold each other accountable. Transphobic and anti-Black ideas are present throughout all communities and that's why we won't ignore how her being a Black trans woman has affected her attack.

The group accusing us says they think Serve the People Charlotte wants to see a Black trans woman in prison. We want the accused person to be held accountable for their actions, and that's something this group is not doing, with or without a jail involved. Most rapists never see jail time, it's obvious that we can't rely on the police or the court system to deliver justice. But what does community/people's justice look like? What does protecting our community without state power look like? If we're not going to send rapists to prison then we must at least remove them from our communities and divest ourselves from their support systems.

Serve The People Charlotte is doing this by not supporting or attending events organized around her and by keeping her out of our spaces. The only way we would unite with the group of activists making these accusations would be is if they were to join in isolating the accused person they are supporting from any communities they are involved in. Rapists and people who have a history of perpetuating sexual violence and their supporters must be isolated from political organizing communities because they are not spaces to find new people to abuse. The masses must be protected from rapists because rape is an anti-people crime

APPENDIX C: SERVE THE PEOPLE POINTS OF UNITY

Points of Unity (Second Version), December 2017

These are the fundamental bases of STP-CLT. This version has been democratically approved to replace the first one. As an organization we have learned a lot since since our founding, and needed to sharpen some things. Much of the content here was taken from the Serve the People– Austin Points of Unity.

Anti-Capitalism

In the capitalist system, the ruling class, made up of a few people, controls every aspect of society. This is because they own the things (land, facilities, materials, and tools) necessary to make society run. That ruling class (**bourgeoisie**) is the bosses, the business owners, the stockholders, and the politicians they hire.

The working class (**proletariat**) produces all goods and services in the world, but the owners take the vast majority of the wealth that comes from selling what the workers produce. Meanwhile, the workers are left struggling to make ends meet.

Through an irreversible process where “big fish ate up small fish,” we are now in an era of monopoly capitalism, where gigantic corporations that are spread across continents control most of the world’s business.

Capitalism can’t be reformed. As long as it exists, it will put profits before people and continue expanding. It must be overthrown and replaced with people power. We want the people who produce the world’s wealth to enjoy the full benefit of that wealth, and we want those who make the world run to be the ones who decide *how* it is run.

We stand with all the exploited and oppressed people of the world, and we aim to create a world where there is no exploitation.

Proletarian (worker) feminism

Feminism is an overall progressive social movement which addresses **patriarchy**. Patriarchy is the system of oppression of women, including transgender women. The problem is that today's popular feminist movement does not show the necessary difference between ruling class women and working class women.

Proletarian feminism is in the interest of the working class overthrowing capitalism, and removing patriarchy from the position it has under capitalism. It opposes reformist feminism that seeks integration into existing society, like bringing in more women CEOs and senators.

We seek to build power for *all* women by empowering the women who make half the world run: working-class women. Patriarchy forces those it oppresses into lower-wage and dangerous jobs and unpaid labor, and it weakens the ability of the working class to resist the exploitation of capitalism.

Patriarchy has not always existed. It came into human society at a specific point in time: when property, such as land, stopped being owned in common by the whole tribe and instead became the property of private families headed by men.

Patriarchy is a weapon that capitalism uses to rule. In order for either patriarchy or capitalism to be destroyed, we must fight them both. In order to succeed we must struggle against patriarchal thinking wherever it manifests.

Patriarchy also oppresses working-class people who do not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth, and/or who are romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same gender, and/or who refuse to obey traditional gender roles.

Just as there are various types of women's movements, some methods of LGBT struggle have only tried to provide protections and rights to ruling-class LGBT people. This does

not help most LGBT people. We seek power and liberation for all working-class LGBT people.

In a similar way to how it oppresses working-class women, patriarchy forces working-class LGBT people into lower-wage and dangerous jobs and unpaid labor, and turns the working class against itself instead of against the real enemy: the owner class.

We believe that in order to succeed we must struggle against anti-LGBT thinking wherever it manifests.

Solidarity, not charity

Solidarity is in the interest of the working class' needs. Workers struggling amongst workers is much different from **charity**, which is in the interest of the ruling class.

Charity is capitalism in practice because the ruling class gives some hand outs hoping they will satisfy people and stop them from resisting the system. Really, the existence of charities ensures that the ruling class will not be overthrown.

For example, many charitable organizations claim that they want to "end hunger", but nothing except the overthrow of capitalism can truly end hunger, because it is the system that allows people to starve in the first place. Charity is a band-aid where revolution is needed.

The goal of STP-CLT is to build ongoing solidarity with the community and neighborhoods surrounding Arbor Glen. Solidarity in this case means providing material needs in the short term with the long-term goal of taking down capitalism.

As a commitment to solidarity not charity, we do not accept grants or endorsements to keep the organization going, and never will. We will never pay our volunteers, as our motivation is not personal gain.

Police are enemies of the people. We don't work with, talk to, or assist them.

The function of the police in our society is to protect the ruling class and their ability to profit from exploiting the working class.

The police stand as an occupying army in oppressed neighborhoods. Policing in the US grew out of teams of slave catchers and strike breakers. Their historical root is still very present today, as the police routinely jail and kill Black, Brown, and working-class white people to enforce the dictatorship of the ruling class and white supremacy.

In Charlotte we remember Keith Lamont Scott, and many others, who have been killed by CMPD. Murderous police will almost never be brought to justice for their crimes under capitalism, because their crimes are part of the tradition of their history as a whole, and not a break from it.

In the existing society the police have a monopoly on violence. They are allowed to use force to maintain order and are therefore opposed to the people building up their own forces. The police are class enemies and therefore we oppose them, and support community self-defense. They do not protect and serve.

Anti-Imperialism and Internationalism

Internationalism opposes imperialism.

Imperialism is the final stage of capitalism, where rich countries (and groups of rich countries) have fully divided the world's poor countries up between themselves, parasitically exploiting them to steal their resources and seek out cheap labor. The main form that imperialism takes is the financial power of rich countries dominating poor countries. The main export of these rich countries is capital itself—they send it wherever it makes them the most profit, flooding it into poor countries that heavily exploit workers

and resources while denying it to any countries that offer some protection to their workers and the environment.

Capitalists want to set sections of the international working class against each other by forcing them to fight in their wars. Internationalists, on the other hand, want to to unite all working class people against capitalism.

Solidarity means struggling against backwards practices like racism, US patriotism, and the exploitation of the Third World.

We don't participate in electoral politics.

Both the republicans and democrats ultimately are tools of the ruling class.

In capitalist society we are taught that our hand in democracy is our vote. We ask, democracy for who? In reality, this is only democracy for the ruling class. Capitalism, using elections, gives us the option of who we would prefer to oppress us. No matter which party they represent, every US president and congress has exploited working class people in the US and in the Third World.

The ruling class will never allow us to vote away their wealth. They will allow us to vote in reforms that temporarily satisfy but ultimately distract the working class.

The entire system of voting under capitalism is unfit for a revolutionary organization to participate in. Even candidates or parties who *claim* to have the interests of the people will, once working for the system, have to conform to it. Therefore, even third-party candidates should not be supported because support for them means some kind of faith in the existing system.

For these reasons, STP-CLT will never endorse political candidates in capitalist elections, or work within the electoral system as an organization. We support boycotting elections

as a whole. This includes national elections like the presidency and congress, state elections, and even local elections like the race for the mayor and city council positions. This also includes fighting for reforms that can be voted in.

We are a mass-line organization.

The mass line method of leadership is the guide for revolutionary organizing. This puts the slogan “from the masses, to the masses” into practice. We don’t have all the answers, which is why we must “learn from the masses, and then teach them”. At the same time, the mass line is not meant to be a mirror to simply reflect things as they already are, but to raise consciousness. The steps of the mass line are as follows:

Gather ideas and information from the masses.

Filter those ideas through revolutionary politics, sharpening them into revolutionary weapons.

Develop these revolutionary weapons, by bringing a program, slogan, or plan of action back to the people. Putting into practice what was decided on in Step 2.

Evaluate the correctness of what we are putting into practice politically, based on the relative successes and failures of said action. We then repeat this process over and over.

Unite for Community Defense!

This point has been added as a result of the mass line method of leadership. STP-CLT asked community members, “What would you say is the biggest issue in the community?” Violence within the community has been one of the most common responses to this in the last 5 months.

Arbor Glen, like oppressed communities all over the country, has been heavily influenced by the so-called “war on drugs” which in reality flooded Black and Brown communities with crack and heroin. The spread of these drugs is directly connected to the need for capitalism to sustain itself by growing. Capitalists used people living paycheck-to-paycheck to peddle drugs and guns into the community, and at the same time sentenced masses of people to jail and prison for it. This cycle repeated and caused even more low income, lack of jobs, gun violence and a generation of estranged families with no hope in sight.

We understand that the narrative of violence within communities is specifically used to discredit the Black Lives Matter movement. This is not at all the aim of this point and we do not support the racist narrative of “Black-on-Black crime”. At the same time, the fact that that argument is used by racists does not negate the fact that violence within oppressed communities is a real thing that affects real humans’ lives. We cannot solve a problem by pretending it does not exist, we have to figure out where the problem came from and why it persists.

Today, desperation in Arbor Glen and some of the surrounding neighborhoods has caused some to resort to violence against other community members. While we are not against all forms of violence we do see the deep problem of a city in which most of the murders happen inside communities themselves. The community needs to unite against those that poison our minds with drugs and alcohol, who give the youth prison sentences not jobs and leave families broken with resources fleeting daily.

In pursuit of a better society, we must aim to change the basis for which murders happen inside of oppressed communities. Gun control isn’t the answer; guns in the hands of the working class organized for revolution are a necessity. Gun control will be another attempt, like the “war on drugs”, to further criminalize Black and Brown youth. We are fighting to end the violence happening inside the community, keep the guns up instead turn them around on the real enemy: the ruling class.