

**AN EXAMINATION OF GAY PRIDE AS A COLLECTIVE
IDENTITY FOR GAY MALES WITHIN THE
GAY AND LESBIAN SOCIAL
MOVEMENT**

By

CHAD E. BRATSCHI

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Thesis approved:

George E. Arguitt

Thesis Advisor

Thomas E. Shivers Jr.

Kerry Kiser

Thomas C. Collins

Dean of the Graduate College

PREFACE

This study is concerned with the concept of gay pride and how it serves as a collective identity for gay males who identify with the gay and lesbian social movement. Being gay is usually viewed from a negative perspective. By identifying with a gay subculture, being socially active, and by fighting discrimination and stereotypes, gay males socially construct a perspective which necessitates the interpretation of gay as good. A qualitative analysis of self reports of individuals who possess gay pride is undertaken to ascertain any generic processes of gay pride among gay males.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

"For at least 200 years, under one label or another, the public has been opposed to the private; the economic to the aesthetic; the rationalist to the romantic; secularization to revival; and institutionalization to nascent movements intent on breaking free" (Calhoun 1993:415).

Homosexuality is an omnipresent phenomenon. Throughout time, it has been discussed in various formats within numerous societies and cultures. However, it was not the basis for an identity, a subculture, or a social movement until the latter part of the 19th century. Since then, homosexuality has become a significant part of Western society often reflected in a very vocal and highly visible subculture and an active social movement. The main goal of that movement is the acceptance of homosexuality as an equal alternative to heterosexuality.

As with other movements, participation in the gay and lesbian social movement is socially and culturally diverse. Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Caucasians, females, males, transgendered, Christians, Jews, and Buddhists of all ages and sizes participate. Even with this diversity, the members are unified in specific ways. Researchers who study the gay and lesbian social movement have been unable to identify a common denominator among gay and lesbian people besides that of a preference for the same sex. The aim of

this paper is to present the gay male identity as one that has characteristics of a political identity by discussing it in relation to gay pride.

The groups and organizations in the gay and lesbian community are easily classified as diverse. Some organizations exist on a national level such as Queer Nation, ACT UP, and the Log Cabin Society. Others are grass-roots organizations primarily concerned with local issues. The Oklahoma Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Tulsa Oklahomans for Human Rights, Stillwater Gay and Lesbian Professional Organization, and the Red Earth Bears can all be classified as grassroots organizations.

The gay and lesbian social movement has a long history in the U.S. In May of 1969, New York City police raided a bar, The Stonewall, whose patrons were predominantly gay. On May 14, they fought back. Joined by others on the street, they rioted for the next two days. The Stonewall riots marked the birth of the modern gay and lesbian movement. "Stonewall and gay liberation inspired more people to come out and to come in to the gay and lesbian communities" (Vaid 1995:61).

For gays and lesbians, Stonewall was a momentous occasion that called for celebration. Annual celebrations have taken place since the riot to commemorate the event -- men and women fighting back against a system which sanctioned discrimination against homosexual behavior. Stonewall is representative of the gay subculture's plight for acceptance as a positively confirmed lifestyle.

Other events have also been inspired by the Stonewall riots. For example, occurring almost simultaneously with Stonewall celebrations each year, gay pride

marches take place globally. Also, October 11 is recognized as National Coming Out Day. On this day, persons who are "closeted" (gay to themselves and to significant others, but not to the general population) are given opportunities to come out indirectly with others, or collectively. Since Stonewall, a number of changes have taken place concerning the acceptance of same sex relationships due in part to the organized movements of gays and lesbians. Gays and lesbians now have the ability to interpret their actions from a positive perspective. This has been possible due to the numbers of gays and lesbians that chose to interpret their actions from a provalued perspective. These actions have nurtured the positive affirmation of a personal identity, a lifestyle, and most importantly, a community.

Gay pride, a term widely used in the gay and lesbian social movement and subculture is presented as a collective representation for gay males. What follows is an *exploratory research project* using in-depth interviews with gay male activists¹ in Oklahoma to discuss gay pride. The New Social Movement paradigm will be employed for both the theoretical and analytical frameworks in this study.

¹Only gay males were sought for this project for two reasons. First, the lesbian identity is already considered to be partially a political identity where the gay male identity is not. Second, a study concerning the collective identity of lesbian feminist was completed by Taylor and Whittier in 1994.

Chapter II

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Social movements have been studied from many different theoretical perspectives. Historically, there have been two major schools of thought concerning social movements: general and more precise. Early perspectives defined collective behavior in a more general fashion and addressed all aspects of collective behavior phenomena. Theories such as contagion theory and convergence theory are characterized in this manner. On the other hand, more precise theories specialized in or explained only particular aspects of collective behavior. For example, resource mobilization discusses how the dissent or discontent of persons is mobilized by the leaders of the movement. Where resource mobilization theory places a great emphasis on the resources available to the movement participants and how the resources are incorporated into the movement, New Social Movement theory discusses the use of a collective identity which acts as the catalyst in a movement.

The study of social movements strives to answer three questions. First, "How and why do social movements emerge?" Second, "What drives a person to join a social movement?" Third, "Why do some social movements succeed while others fail?" Whatever the theory, each prospective claims to be the ideal explanation. What follows is

a discussion of key theoretical explanations that historically have been used to answer the preceding questions concerning collective behavior and social movements

Collective Behavior

Early writings of collective behavior have been characterized as atheoretical. The first writing appeared in 19th century Europe. Charles Mackay, a Scottish poet, first published *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions* in 1841. In this work, Mackay discusses events such as the Crusades and phenomena such as witch hunts, fortune telling, and prophecies. His basic argument was that nations and individuals were alike. "[T]hey have whims and their peculiarities, their seasons of excitement and recklessness, when they care not what they do" (Mackay 1932:xix).

While this was considered the first writing of collective behavior, Mackay's work had little impact on collective behavior theory. His approach offered no explanation of how or why a collective action arose. Mackay focused entirely on collective behavior as irrational behavior. While his writings offer insight into 19th century thought, they have had little to no impact on the collective behavior tradition.

The first author to present a theoretical interpretation of collective behavior was Gustave LeBon. LeBon's work, *The Crowd*, was first published in 1895. His interpretation of collective behavior was heavily influenced by the occurrences of that time. LeBon, a wealthy landowner, mistrusted democracy and crowds. His work was completed after the turbulent Paris Commune of 1871 and he [and other aristocratic

constituents] viewed democracy as evil due to its nature of placing power in the hands of the masses.

He describes all collective behavior as irrational. He argued that individual identity was lost when a person became part of a group. He believed that "crowds are only powerful for destruction" (1982:xviii originally published in 1895). He argued that crowds are irrational, chaotic mobs bent on destruction. "The conscious personality has entirely vanished; will and discernment are lost" (1982:11). LeBon's interpretations were also biased against ethnic groups and women. LeBon states that female crowds are more emotional and uncontrollable while certain ethnic groups were much more violent and irrational than Anglo-Saxon crowds.

Even though LeBon's work is still being published, it is not taken seriously. Besides the racist and sexist overtones, his writings offer no substantial explanation of collective behavior. LeBon places his entire argument on the gathering of a large group of people -- the "organized" or "psychological" crowd. Yet, he offers no explanation as to what distinguishes the "psychological" crowd from any other grouping of people. Also, LeBon's argument ignores other facets that may influence collective behavior. He does not address political or economical impacts, religion, or individual attributes that have the potential to effect the degree of action. LeBon discussed the crowd but offered an extremely weak and limited view, with no discussion of the origins of collective behavior. His biggest contribution is being the first to discuss collective behavior, though exceedingly limited, from a theoretical standpoint.

LeBon, who is known as the father of contagion theory, did influence the work of some sociologists. Robert Park used LeBon's ideas in his analysis of collective behavior. Park distinguished between the crowd and the public. Park viewed the public as a heterogeneous entity while the crowd was composed of an irrational, homogenous group. Park believed that involvement in a crowd allowed anonymity, an attribute which allowed persons not to claim responsibility for their actions.

One of Park's students, Herbert Blumer, expanded on Park's work concerning crowd behavior. His work became known as Contagion Theory. Blumer devised a theoretical perspective which explained collective behavior as being a contagion which infected others. According to Blumer, when this contagion existed, social unrest occurred. Blumer outlined three general characteristics of social unrest: 1. People are seized by an "urge to act". 2. People experience "an excited feeling". These feelings are expressed through rumors, exaggerations, false perceptions, insecurity, fear, and apprehension. 3. People are highly suggestible and emotions are easily sparked in a crowd. (Blumer 1969:75-78).

Like LeBon, Park and Blumer viewed collective behavior as erratic and chaotic. All three saw collective behavior being charged with emotion. Blumer also recognized the mechanisms through which a crowd becomes excited and that behavior in a crowd is different from behavior of individuals.

Another general explanation of collective behavior is convergence theory which argues that the way people behave in crowds or in public are an expression of who they

are ordinarily. Proponents of convergence theory state that like-minded individuals come together, thus collective behavior is nurtured. Gatherings of people sharing beliefs and positions on matters act out behavior that's already embraced by them. By being in a crowd, individuals are able to display their "true selves" without fear of retribution.

According to convergence theory, humans possess the desire to engage in collective behavior. However, some persons have the ability to inhibit this behavior due to culture, education, or personal responsibilities. By placing emphasis on the effect of personal characteristics, convergence theory goes a step further in analysis than earlier forms of collective behavior theory.

Convergence theory, like Contagion theory, concentrates solely on behavior that is irrational. By discussing collective action from this view point, it is limited in its ability to address collective behavior generally. Another drawback is the assumption that crowds are homogenous. Crowds are very heterogeneous in the behavior exhibited and in the social background of the constituents. Convergent theory also assumes, incorrectly, that all collective behavior ends in violence. Though convergence theory offered new insights in collective behavior, it is too limited in its approach.

Turner and Killian (1987) developed Emergent Norm theory to correct the previous emphasis on irrationality. This theory interprets collective action as rational (or no more irrational than conventional behavior), heterogeneous in participation, and not in violation of orthodox norms. Emergent Norm theory begins with the question of "how meaning is constructed" (Turner and Killian 1987:27). It discusses how actions are

constructed in collective behavior. How do people come to support certain ideas? How do some ideas come to be known as true? The theory's basic premise is ideas, values, and actions that are validated through the sharing of a definition in a given situation. By doing so, values, norms, and ethics of the situation are outlined. Since the norm is specific to the situation, it is an emergent norm. The emergent norm then determines the reconstructed definition of reality for the collectivity. "This definition emerges in a situation and its function is to explain and interpret current reality" (1987:58). Interpretation of actions or behaviors as acceptable or unacceptable is socially constructed within the context of the situation. Social movement participation is seen as an emergent behavior in which homogenizing ideologies are important preconditions (Turner and Killian 1987).

One of the most thorough general theories of collective behavior was first introduced by Neil Smelser in 1963. Smelser's valued-added theory provides an explanation for the how and why of collective behavior in a manner reminiscent of structured grand theory. As a student of Parsons, Smelser synthesized collective behavior based on social structure rather than the individual. In doing so, Smelser served as an important bridge to contemporary social movement analysts.

His approach to the analysis of collective behavior is based on six conditions which must be present to precipitate collective behavior. The conditions are: structural conduciveness, structural strain, generalized beliefs, precipitating factors, mobilization for action, and operation of social control. Since each step provided the platform for the

proceeding step, all six had to be present or the probability for collective action to occur was severely diminished.

In accordance with grand theory, Smelser viewed strain on the social structure as the most important determinant of collective behavior. Smelser references poverty, rapid unemployment, urbanization, and industrialization as examples of strain. "Some form of strain must be present if one episode of collective behavior is to occur" (Smelser 1963:48). In order to relieve strain, some form of action is necessary. This action is manifested in collective behavior and social movements.

Smelser's discussion of collective behavior has been criticized. Some argue that what he offers is too broad and vague in discussion. His argument is characteristically weak due to its need for all six conditions to be present in order for collective action to occur without hindrance and his emphasis on collective behavior as irrational. Also, his *explanation of collective behavior offers no significant insight*. Smelser's observations are commonsensical. For example, it is obvious that strain must be present and generalized beliefs shared in order for collective behavior to occur. Herring (1986) compares Smelser's generalized beliefs to LeBon's focus on irrationality. He argues that it is a throwback to past conceptualizations of collective behavior.

Smelser's main contribution to collective behavior analysis is his use of mobilization and social control. Unlike previous collective behavior theorists, these were key variables in Smelser's rendition of collective action. His work has also been linked to the development of the resource mobilization paradigm due to his use of mobilization

and social control as part of the six conditions which must be present for collective action to occur. Mobilization and social control are also main components of collective action when discussing resource mobilization.

Smelser's interpretation offered new insights into collective action, but he was faced with the same problems as earlier social scientists. His grasp for the understanding of collective behavior did not go beyond that of a specious mob. Smelser's understanding of collective behavior did not encompass collective action as rational, planned behavior. Rather, he viewed it as unfocused and chaotic.

Smelser's explanation of collective behavior as irrational is a common theme found in early collective behavior theory. Past interpretations of collective action only viewed behavior in a group as hyper-intensive and chaotic. Due to this, past incidences of collective action may have been misinterpreted.

Resource Mobilization

Early analysis of social movements started from a social psychological perspective. LeBon, Park, and Blumer placed great emphasis on the individual's involvement. Smelser's interpretation provided an important link to more micro oriented theories such as resource mobilization theory, which is grounded in organization theory. Resource mobilization offered a new perspective by emphasizing the mobilization of resources on "political sociology and economic theories [rather] than upon the social psychology of collective behavior" (McCarthy and Zald 1987:16)

Past perspectives of collective behavior concentrated on the irrationality of the mob and saw the use of available resources as a reaction to frustration. Resource mobilization stresses rationality of a group. It focuses specifically on social movements and social movement organization. The theory interprets social movement activity as political and addresses certain pertinent questions: Where are the resources available for the movement such as money and labor? How are groups organized--the form of organization? [what forms of supply and demands exist] How does the state facilitate or impede mobilization and [what outside influences affect the individuals or groups]? What are the outcomes? (Mueller 1992, McCarthy and Zald 1987).

Where traditional analysis looks at aggrieved persons for provisions of necessary resources, resource mobilization theory does not assume those involved are the resource suppliers. Where traditional analysts describe violence, bargaining, threats, and persuasions as tools used to influence change, resource mobilization focuses on "mobilizing" supporters, and the transformation of masses and elites into supporters. Where traditional analysts have concentrated on the effects of the cultural environment on social movements, resource mobilization theorists concentrate on how society acts as the underlying framework through implementation of the media [and other communication sources], institutional involvement, and former grassroots organizations (1987:15-17). In other words, this theory emphasizes the discontent of society and how that discontent motivates the group to mobilize into collective action by using the resources at hand.

Resource mobilization emphasizes "the constancy of discontent/strain and the availability of resources" (McAdam 1982:ix). Resource mobilization theorists discuss the emergence and evolution of insurgency as the basic postulate for social movements. This theory is interested in both the support and constraint by individuals and organizations in society for a particular movement. By placing greater emphasis on support/constraint (conflict), resource mobilization approaches social movements from a new direction. Analysts must consider preexisting organizations and the mobilization of the population prior to the movement.

In resource mobilization theory, the unit of analysis is not the individual. Instead, the focus is on the social movement organization (SMO). McCarthy and Zald (1987) define a social movement as "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population representing preferences for changing some elements of the social structure or reward distribution, or both, of a society" (1987:20). The two authors view social movements as a tool implemented for social change. As individuals become involved, the central locus or "preferences" (1987:20) are transformed into collective action. The manner in which goals are met is a main focus for resource mobilization theorists. Oberschall (1973) believed that the prime concentration in the study of social movement activity should be on the type and availability of resources. This included both material (income, investments, job) and nonmaterial (friendship, skills, authority, and morality) items. Oberschall, McCarthy, and Zald agree that social movement activity is a struggle over

scarce resources. Groups face opposition from others when they vie for the same resources.

McCarthy and Zald (1973) focus primarily on organizations. They argue that only a minuscule amount of organization is required for collective action. The SMO structures this collective action. The SMO is the physical binding agent. It recognizes the goals of the movement with the preferences and tries to activate change.

Even though resource mobilization theory¹ is the predominant perspective in social movements today, there are questions that it fails to adequately address. Resource mobilization ignores or glosses over the idea of values and ideologies. McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1987) deliberately ignore an examination of the development of group consciousness and the formation of ideology. It does not address the importance of a collective representation within a social movement. Rather, it places a heavy emphasis on the characteristics of the leadership of the movement. Resource mobilization does not recognize the carrying effect that the commitment of the individual to the movement has on the collective identity of the movement as a whole. Resource mobilization does not take into consideration what the face to face interaction has upon the collective identity. Face to face interaction has the potential to offer a social setting in which "meaning critical to the interpretation of collective identities, grievances, and opportunities are created, interpreted, and transformed" (Mueller 1992:10). This theory undermines the effect that member's grievances have and how those grievances affect the movement

¹ The writer try to address these same subjects through the theory of micromobilization process.

itself. Finally, resource mobilization takes too much for granted. The processes [i.e. identity, beliefs, values, ideologies] which lead to collective action were accepted as given and were not considered for analysis themselves. Resource mobilization ignores the culture within and behind the movement. Due to resource mobilization theory's deficiency in answering certain questions, social movement analysts undertook new interpretations of social movements. These new interpretations address topics such as a group consciousness and culture rather than politics and economics. These new perspectives discern movements as possessing a cultural dimension of human action as the core resource for production and consumption -- New Social Movement Theory.

New Social Movement Theory

Past studies of social movements underemphasized the culture, race, and gender of those involved. Previous studies also ignored how these variables could be the source of the movement itself. The inability of theories to analyze social movements beyond conclusive goals led participants and analysts to discuss social movements which "emphasized lifestyle, ethical, or 'identity' concerns." (Calhoun 1993:385) New Social Movement theory grasps the concepts of identity and uses it to comprehend the mobilization of a movement. Melucci views the shift to New Social Movement [NSM] theory due to "interest in cultural analysis." (Melucci 1995:42) He relates it to how

people perceive the world--"shift toward questions about how people make sense of their world." (1995:42).

There are two general characteristics of new social movement theory (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). First, social movements are primarily social. Social movements occur within the cultural sphere of society. Collective action is not limited to the economic or political sphere of a culture. Second, NSM's try to bring about transformation through the changing of values and by developing alternative lifestyles.

NSM theory characterizes social movements as developing first out of a social or cultural realm of society and secondly from the political. This perspective forces social movement theorists to consider concepts of identities and ideologies in their analysis. According to Scott (1990:73) "The new social movements...broadened the definition of politics to include issues that had been considered outside the domain of political action."

NSM sees the emphasis of the social movement as centered on lifestyle[s] and values rather than the political sphere. The group is not concentrated around a political figure. Rather, the group is situated around a **collective identity**. This collective identity stems from ideologies, values, or issues that are relevant to members of the group and are communicated through face to face interaction. "The groups...accomplish the task of letting individuals re-define symbolic relations between them, with society, with nature, creating other relation networks that radically oppose the mass and its atomization" (Sassonn 1987:871).

NSM has been called identity politics, even though the concept of implementing an identity with a movement to further develop that movement is a new interpretation. Some theorists agree it is a trait that cannot be ignored. The most important aspect of new social movement theory is the concept of collective identity. Melucci defines a collective identity as "an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level.) [It is] concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the actions take place" (Melucci 1995:44). In other words, Melucci sees a collective identity as shaped by those involved in the movement and by the physical and emotional environment of the movement. He sees a collective identity as something that is continually being renegotiated. It is not something that is readily identifiable as an object or thing. Rather, it is a series of relationships and actions that, together, form an identity. Melucci describes a collective identity as a non-linear process. "First, collective identity is a cognitive process concerning the ends, means, and field of action...Secondly, a collective identity refers to a network of active relationships, between the actors, who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate, and make decisions...and a certain degree of emotional investment, which enables individuals to feel like a part of a common unity...."(Melucci 1995:44-45).

Some current social movements are motivated and defined by more than economics or politics. Rather, culture is also used for interpretation as a factor for collective behavior. The key to understanding new social movement theory is the simple

understanding that new social movements involve identity politics that are autonomous, that defend specific aspects of life, and have a collective identity that has politicized everyday aspects of life.

Some social movement analysts argue that it is best to view NSM as a paradigm rather than a single theoretical perspective. Buechler (1995) argues that there are actually four major varieties of NSM: Manuel Castells, Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci, and Jurgen Habermas. Each of these variations is discussed below.

Castells discussion of New Social Movement (NSM) theory is focused around capitalism, urbanity, and their combined effect on social movements. He views urban issues as the key to new social movements because of the growing emphasis of collective consumption and the necessity of governing bodies to intervene in order to promote the production of nonprofitable but vitally needed goods. Castells views urban social protests as developing around three major themes: economics, a fear of assimilation [loss of identity], and decentralization and bureaucracy. Castells argues that collective action is due to the vying for control of an urban space and urban social life. From this arise social movements that seek to defend popular interests, establish political autonomy, and maintain cultural identity.

Alain Touraine's NSM perspective sees society as the product of social action. His viewpoint is assembled around the concept of historicity, which he defines as the growing capacity of social actors to construct both a system of knowledge and the technical tools that allow them to intervene in their own functioning. Historicity is

reference to the further self-production of society by its members. Touraine suggests that the access to knowledge is the epicenter in present social movements. He distinguishes between two groups that struggle for control of knowledge: consumer/clients which represent the masses and the manager/technocrats which represent the dominant class.

Touraine also believes there is a single central conflict in each form of society. He uses the example of an industrial society with social movements centered around material production which he compares to social movements in postindustrial society. Where social movements in industrial societies were built around material production, Touraine sees postindustrial social movements being implemented around conflicts of identity. He sees past and present social movements as sharing only their oppositional nature.

Jurgen Habermas' perspective on new social movement theory describes collective action as existing within a dichotomy of a politico-economic system. This system is operated by a generalized media and a lifeworld. The generalized media is a manner of logic occupied with power and money and little relevance of responsibility or accountability. The lifeworld consists of rationality that is strengthened or weakened through continual discussion. Habermas views the new social movements as responses to the meshing of generalized media logic to lifeworld situations. He sees social movements as having a purely defensive character. Also, he views the concerns of social movements as having less to do with material production, and more to do with cultural production, integration, and socialization.

Alberto Melucci discusses social movements within the confines of a postmodern culture. The movements are triggered by new forms of conflict which are combined with everyday life. New movements contest with established forms of symbolic codes and established identities. In a postmodern world, symbols are an important part of the information system. Melucci sees social movements as a very active message of opposition with collective action emphasizing a phenomenological approach to the analysis of society with the possibility of altering current interpretations of action.

Melucci's work also provides definitions for central issues of NSM theory. He discusses the concept of identity. Due to rapid change and the abundance of information, traditional references of identity are weakening. This leaves individuals without the ability to establish a strong frame of reference, or a master identity. Melucci believed that for some persons the reason for involvement in collective action is directly related to their ability to define a master identity. Melucci also views NSM as an ongoing social construction which is a non-linear process. Whatever a movement may achieve is the result of ongoing efforts rather than an initial starting point for collective action.

An Analytic Framework for New Social Movement Theory

Drawing upon Melucci's work on collective identity, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1994) discuss the collective representation of a movement. They argue that current theories (resource mobilization, political process, and micromobilization) in

social movements fail to address how networks “transform their members into political actors” (1994:104). They define collective identity as “a shared definition of a group that derives meaning from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity” (1994:105). They point out that what distinguishes current movements from past class based movements is the political organization around a shared identity. Taylor and Whittier believe that an understanding of identity construction processes is necessary in order to comprehend grievances in all forms of collective action.

Taylor and Whittier offer a framework for analyzing the collective identity of a social movement. Taylor and Whittier discuss the collective identity of a lesbian feminist and its effect on how females are perceived by the dominant order. They characterize the lesbian feminist collective identity as sustained through community, social, and economic networks. The writers’ believe that involvement in the women’s movement translates into political and social action which challenges dominant beliefs and systems concerning females.

Taylor and Whittier interpret involvement in the lesbian feminist movement occurring through what Melucci (1989) terms as “submerged networks” or forms of resistance that are ever-changing. These networks are composed of alternative systems of symbolic codes and informal political action which takes place outside the realm of formal organizations. They analyze the collective identity of a lesbian feminist through three interacting parts: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation. A collective identity is a social construction that develops out of shared social movement activity and is not

limited by geographic location. It is best understood by addressing the social and political environments surrounding the identity.

According to Taylor and Whittier new social movement tradition suggests three elements of a collective identity: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation” (1994). First, persons see themselves as part of a group when certain shared actions and characteristics become salient and are viewed as important. Second, new social movements advocate for new forms of interpretation of an identity, new ways of thinking, and for acceptance of certain cultural categories. Third, Taylor and Whittier believe that a collective identity leads to direct opposition to the dominant order. This opposition is expressed through “submerged networks of political culture that are interwoven with everyday life and provide new expressions of identity that challenge dominant representations” (1994: 106).

In their analysis of a lesbian feminist collective identity, boundaries refer to the social, psychological, and physical structures which establish buffers and highlight differences between the out-group and the in-group. Boundaries act as symbolic trenches. They can exist as physical, spatial, racial, religious differences and separate social institutions, organizations, and cultural systems. Taylor and Whittier focus on two forms of boundaries: the creation of separate institutions and the development of a distinct women’s culture guided by “female” values.

Consciousness is comprised of the interpretive frameworks which are the result of a challenging group’s struggle to define and realize its interests. Taylor and Whittier

discuss consciousness as an ongoing process which defines and redefines lesbian feminist identity outside the realm of sexuality and within a political one. It is the reevaluation of lesbianism as feminism in reaction to the dominant culture's insistence that lesbianism is defined as a sexual act.

Negotiation of a movement encompasses the actions which groups use to resist existing interpretations of a subordinate group. Negotiation is best described as *how* an identity is politicized. Taylor and Whittier state that negotiation points to the ways that activists work to resist negative social definitions. They suggest that two types of negotiation are central to the social construction of a lesbian feminist collective identity. First, they describe the negotiation of new ways of thinking as occurring in both the private (between the members of the social movement) and public (between the members of the social movement and a general audience) settings. Second, identity negotiations are both *explicit* (direct attempts such as a protest or legal action) and *implicit* (undermining of stereotypes held by the dominant culture through everyday interaction) actions.

Through Melucci's theoretical framework and Taylor and Whittier's analytic interpretation on a collective identity, the collective representation of gay males in the gay and lesbian social movement will be discussed.

Theoretical Framework for this Study: Gay Pride as a Collective Identity

Within the study of social movements, some theorists have classified movement outcomes oriented toward structural change (instrumental movements). Others are oriented toward an outcome which involves a change in social consciousness (expressive movements). In other forms, some movement outcomes are directed to outcomes within both spheres. New social movement theory deals more with social movements oriented toward a change in social consciousness or with the politics of the change of an identity.

New Social Movement theory discusses the collective transformation of an identity as a catalyst for change. The theory interprets collective action as a summation of shared actions, reactions, and physical presence, not simply the sharing of a common event such as rallies or demonstrations or the mobilization of resources. This research project is concerned with whether or not gay pride acts as a collective identity for gay males within the gay and lesbian social movement.

The concept of gay pride is discussed from the theoretical standpoint of New Social Movement Theory [NSM]. As pointed out earlier, NSM is best described as a paradigm rather than a singular theory. For this project, NSM is discussed from Alberto Melucci's perspective (1980, 1995). The analysis of the research follows the format as outlined by Taylor and Whittier (1994).

NSM is a social psychological approach to the study of social movements. The theory emphasizes the definition of the actor, the social context within which the

meanings are developed and transformed, and the cultural context of the social movement itself (Mueller 1992:5). Given its emphasis, NSM is the ideal theoretical framework to study gay pride as a collective identity of the gay and lesbian social movement and community.

Taylor and Whittier (1992) suggest that resource mobilization does not address how networks transform their members into political actors. The two discuss the collective identity of lesbian feminist and its effect on the current women's movement and how the collective identity of lesbian feminist is sustained through community, social, and economic networks. The writers believe that involvement in a movement translates into political action that challenges dominant beliefs and systems concerning females.

This form of political action is also found within the gay/lesbian struggle for equality. Urvashi Vaid (1995) writes in her book *Virtual Equality* that the "lesbian and gay movement [have] claim[ed] that it was a civil rights movement as early as the founding of the Mattachine Society." Vaid argues that the gay and lesbian movement chose legal reform, political access, and legitimization over cultural acceptance, social transformation, understanding, and liberation (1995:111). By taking the route of a civil rights movement, Vaid believes that gays and lesbians have avoided assimilation into mainstream American culture. "One could argue that two distinct gay movements came into being in the 1970's: the political and the cultural. The former pursued the goal of representing gay people; the latter was absorbed with understanding what our

homosexuality meant" (1995:62). The gay and lesbian subculture grew from urban enclaves to an international network of businesses, organizations, philanthropies, and social events all offering an acceptance in same sex relationships and positive affirmation -- **gay pride**.

The cultural perspective of the social movement ensconced support groups and services, implemented numerous businesses to serve the gay and lesbian community and established links of communication between gay men and lesbians. The gay and lesbian social movement exists on two levels: a political one which fought for equality and representation as an oppressed minority while the cultural movement identified homosexuality as an acceptable, alternative lifestyle to heterosexuality. The end results were also quite different. The final products of the cultural movement were established gay and lesbian communities while the political movement created a gay and lesbian mainstream. What Vaid is discussing are the implications of the development of a collective identity by gay men and lesbian females. By identifying with one another, gays and lesbians have developed social networks, economic strategies, and physical, geographic niches in cities. All of which fight against the negation of a gay identity and fight for the redefinition of a gay identity as positive.

The question of the existence of a gay community has been pondered by many. Some researchers adamantly deny the existence of gay communities while others disagree. In sociology, the concept of community is one that is key to the discipline. The concept of community is viewed as a "constituted set of social relationships based on

something which the participants have in common-- usually a common sense of identity" (Marshall 1994). John Alan Lee addresses the concept of a gay community by discussing the existence of communal institutions that are gay or lesbian oriented. Lee supports the idea that a gay community can be composed primarily of institutions specifically for the gay and lesbian community. "A gay citizen in Toronto can buy a home through a gay real estate agent familiar with the types of housing and neighborhoods most suitable to gay clients. He can close the deal through a gay lawyer, and insure with a gay insurance agent. If he is new to the community...he can consult the Gay Yellow Pages...a gay bookstore...a gay newspaper or periodical...He can buy food at a gay bakery, records at a gay phonograph shop, and arrange his travel plans through gay travel agents" (Lee 1979:180). In the same work, Lee also makes a comparison between a gay community and ethnic communities, the only difference being the common bond which holds the community together. For the ethnic community, it is language and tradition. For the gay community, it is sexual orientation and tradition and **gay pride**. Lee further supports his argument for the existence of a gay community by discussing the idea of boundaries, population, territory, time, and niches [a species place in the community--a combination of the former three].

This same topic is discussed by Abrahamson in his book, *Urban Enclaves*. He discusses the gay community in reference to San Francisco's gay and lesbian population. Abrahamson's discussion is built around the physical representation of the community by geographic space. He uses the Castro and Mission Districts as examples of a gay and

lesbian population creating symbolic boundaries, territories, time, and niches through the physical use of space.

Vivienne C. Cass studied the stages in homosexual identity formation. Stage 5, titled Identity Pride, is discussed as the individual developing an awareness of the difference between his concept of self as homosexual and the larger society's delineation of such an identity. Cass discusses how the individual [referred to in the article as P {person}] handles the incongruity of self identity with society's perception of that identity by devaluing a heterosexual identity and provaluing a homosexual image. Goffman refers to this as stigma management.

"Commitment to the gay group is strong, generating a sense of group identity (These are 'my people') and of belonging. P characteristically immerses the self in the gay subculture, voraciously consuming gay literature and culture. P mixes primarily with gay groups that espouse the same philosophy as P perceives other homosexuals as the only real source of companionship and emotional fulfillment. There is a strong sense of pride in being gay, typified in slogans such as 'Gay is **good**' and 'Gay is **proud**.'" (Cass 1979:233).

Cass discusses the individuals' establishment with the group identity of the gay community as leading to an acceptance of the values of the gay community. At this time, management of one's gay identity is controllable. "The strong identification that P now has with the gay subculture provides an alternative and more satisfying set of values. P

not only accepts a homosexual identity but prefers it to a heterosexual one." (Cass 1979:233).

Jenny Corbett recognizes the idea of gay pride, but only discusses this concept in a very limited fashion. "It is about beauty and dignity of difference, the celebration of diversity, and the pride in a **valued identity**. This only emerges when people label themselves, both personally and collectively, and define their own terms of reference. Pride has to be audible and visible" (Corbett 1994:344)

Cohen (1991) questions the use of an identity based on sexuality. Cohen's argument states that the gay/lesbian context is much too limited in scope. He describes the social movement as being composed of both gay/lesbians, transgendered, straight, and bisexual individuals. "I[Cohen] have no idea who 'We' are" (1991:72). What Cohen proposes is something that cannot be ignored. He is arguing that the language used to describe the gay/lesbian movement is too limited by only acknowledging a single spectrum of those involved. The same can be said concerning the concept "gay pride". But, it must be pointed out that the terms "gay pride" and "gay/lesbian" are phrases that are used as general representations for the entire movement. For the sake of familiarity, the social/political movements have chosen these terms over others. Gay Pride should be interpreted as pride in alternative life choices.

What I am most interested in is the concept of gay pride within the gay and lesbian social movement/community. How is the movement and community conveyed to other groups? How is it represented to the main culture at hand? What actions does an

individual take to identify with the gay and lesbian community/movement? First and foremost, the focus of this study is the analysis of gay pride as a collective identity for gay men involved in the gay and lesbian social movement.

Taylor and Whittier suggest their interpretation of a collective identity is broad enough to include collective action based on race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. For this reason, their analytic framework will be used in conjunction with Melucci's interpretation of New Social Movement theory to discuss gay pride as a collective identity for gay males in the gay and lesbian social movement.

I will address the following with concern to gay pride and new social movement theory:

- A. What is gay pride?
- B. How does a gay male identify with the gay and lesbian community (boundaries)?
- C. What is the collective representation for gay males in the gay movement (a consciousness)?
- D. How is gay pride expressed to people not associated with the gay community (negotiation)?

Chapter III

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The topic of this investigation is the concept of gay pride within the gay and lesbian social movement and community in Oklahoma. The focus of this study is the actual meaning of the concept of gay pride for gay males. Melucci (1980) discusses how collective identities are the vehicles of change for perceptions of a lifestyle, belief, or attitude from a negative to a more positive perception. Writers (Cass, 1979; Corbett, 1994; Vaid, 1995) have discussed how gay pride acts as an affirmation of a lifestyle that is perceived by some as negative. Being gay, facing discrimination, and obstructing the negative stereotypes of a gay lifestyle create shared experiences for males that identify as gay.

This study is designed to describe and discuss the meaning of gay pride by males that identify as gay in a society that has historically and is currently involved in the process of negating the gay lifestyle (Abrahamson, 1996; Browning, 1993; Cass, 1979; Cohen, 1991; Cooper, 1987; Corbett, 1994; Dowsett, 1993; Esterberg, 1994; Goldstein, 1994; Lee, 1977, 1979; Ponce, 1978; Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Vaid, 1995). This process takes the form of negative stereotypes of being gay, of the gay community, and of the gay lifestyle. The research is approached from a naturalistic, sociological perspective as

well from a social psychological perspective, which has been so pervasive in the literature (Cass, 1979; Corbett, 1994; Kitzinger, 1987; Coleman, 1982; Taylor and Whittier, 1992.) It is quite apparent to this researcher that socio-cultural factors play an integral role in the negation of a gay male identity.

In depth interviews are employed in this project. The only research instrument used is the human researcher because it would be “virtually impossible to devise a priori, a non-human instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered” (Lincoln and Guba 1985:47).

In-depth Interviews

Unstructured, in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty respondents. Respondents were interviewed one time, with each interview lasting approximately ninety minutes. Follow up interviews were only used for clarification purposes.

Interviews were audiotaped so that exact wording of the respondent(s) could be used. By recording what is being said, the interviewer is also reminded of the emotional nature of the interviewee during the meeting. Each interview was transcribed and a cut/paste method employed for the analysis of information.

In-depth interviewing provides the researcher with several advantages. Unstructured interviews create an environment in which detailed insights are provided. In this format, interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee is not a planned inquiry with a specific set of questions. Rather, the interview is essentially a conversation

in which the interviewer directs the topic of conversation toward the interests at hand.

Also, interviews are conducted in a non-threatening environment. This allows the interviewee to feel comfortable resulting in the collection of further valuable data. In-depth interviews also allow the researcher to collect information in the subject's own words. There is a great deal of flexibility when conducting individual interviews. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to probe the respondent by asking questions for clarification. In-depth interviews also allow the interviewer to return and interview again. In-depth interviews allow direct interaction between the researcher and the subject and allow the researcher to view the non-verbal behavior of the subject. This direct interaction allows the interviewer to build trust and a working relationship with the subjects.

Disadvantages of in-depth interviews include small sample size and a lack of generalizability of information. If the interview is unstructured, the interviewer has the potential to bias the respondents answer. Also, information from unstructured interviews can be hard to interpret. Despite the disadvantages, in-depth interviews are more suitable for exploratory research than other methods.

Data Collection

When the research project was first initiated the questions of where to find self-proclaimed gay males, and even more critically how to get them to talk about gay pride were addressed. The initial approach I used was to contact a gay human rights

organization in a local metropolitan area. I spoke with the current director, explained my research project, and was promptly given eleven leads (eight males, three females). I requested that my leads be gay or lesbian and politically or socially active in the gay community. From the initial eleven names, five interviews were scheduled with gay males. A snowball sampling technique was employed to make contacts with other potential respondents. Snowball sampling is a technique where those interviewed provide names of other potential respondents to the interviewer. This approach was effective approach in locating respondents who were interested in discussing gay pride. A total of twenty interviews were conducted with gay males. Table I is a summary of the socio-demographic backgrounds of each respondent.

All of the respondents currently live in Oklahoma City, Stillwater, and Tulsa, Oklahoma. The respondents range in age from 22 to 56. Eighteen of the subjects are white, one is black, and one is Hispanic. The majority are from middle class backgrounds. They are employed as professionals, semi-professionals, business owners, students, and volunteers.

Table I. Respondent demographics:

CODE NAME	AGE	ETHNICITY	RELATIONSHI	OCCUPATION
Mr. Pauls	22	Caucasian	Committed	HIV Counselor
Mr. Gates	37	Caucasian	Committed	Business owner
Mr. Channing	48	Caucasian	Committed	Hairstylist/Drag Queen
Mr. Barbar	43	Caucasian	Single	Gay Org Director
Mr. Talbert	35	Caucasian	Single	Volunteer
Mr. Luther	33	Caucasian	Single	Volunteer
Mr. Smith	31	Caucasian	Single	HIV Counselor
Mr. Bass	31	Black	Single	HIV Educator
Mr. Albueto	30	Hispanic	Single	Accountant
Mr. Kermit	36	Caucasian	Single	Gay Bar Owner
Mr. Money	42	Caucasian	Committed	Accountant
Mr. Suttles	29	Caucasian	Committed	Hospice Worker
Mr. Mills	27	Caucasian	Single	Events Director
Mr. Tony	26	Caucasian	Single	Business owner
Mr. Ironhand	56	Caucasian	Single	Business owner
Mr. Lee	26	Caucasian	Committed	Student
Mr. Hatfield	25	Caucasian	Committed	Airline sales rep
Mr. Hare	28	Caucasian	Committed	Dentist
Mr. Tieg	51	Caucasian	Single	Teacher/lawyer
Mr. Fitz	37	Caucasian	Single	Minister

I interviewed gay men that worked in lesbian/gay organizations, businesses, philanthropies, and social clubs. I also interviewed gay male business owners identifying themselves as being “gay friendly.” When the project was first initiated, both gays and lesbians were sought for interviews. After numerous rejections from lesbian females, it was decided by this researcher and his committee to concentrate solely on males that

identify as gay.

The majority of the interviews were held in the respondents' homes while others were held in restaurants, and interviewees' offices. The interview lengths ranged from one hour to two and half hours with the average being one and a half hours. The interviews were basically unstructured and open-ended questions were asked.

Data Analysis

The first step in the data analysis phase was to transcribe the interview material. I transcribed the interviews closely to use comments in respondents own words. The transcriptions do not reflect the entire interview process since they did not include nonverbal gestures and communication. Thus, I supplemented the transcripts with personal observances from the interview process and information gathered in relevant document analysis. The analysis also draws from the researcher's experience as a member in the gay community.

Once all interview materials had been transcribed, I used a cut-and-paste method to analyze the data. After extensive reading of the material, I developed a classification system based on key topics and issues. One key topic was related to respondents' views of involvement in the lesbian/gay social movement and community. This included an examination of membership in organizations and attitudes concerning the origins of homosexuality. A second key topic was related to the affiliation with the gay subculture.

This included information concerning the definition of gay pride, group identity in the gay subculture, and personal identity as a gay male.

Summary of Methods

I am using the concept of gay pride to examine a central issue in new social movement theory..a collective identity. To address this topic I used a qualitative method which is complementary to an exploratory study, in-depth interviews. Since this project focuses primarily on the gay communities in Oklahoma, this research is regarded as generalizable primarily to this sector of the gay male community. In the next section, I present my analysis using the concepts boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation.

Chapter IV

A Collective Identity: BOUNDARIES, CONSCIOUSNESS, and NEGOTIATION

Past research, in the area of gay and lesbian studies, is rich in discussion of urban gay enclaves (Abrahamson, 1996; Browning, 1993; Chauncey, 1994), political agendas of gay men and lesbians (Berlant & Freeman, 1993; Lashof & Thorne, 1983; Johansson & Percy, 1994; Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Vaid, 1995), steps or the process of recognition of a gay identity (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Dowsett, 1993; Fenster, 1993; Kitzinger, 1987;), and the history of the gay and lesbian "movement" (Chauncey, 1994; Devall, 1993; Vaid, 1995). Yet, there is little discussion of the binding force for gay males involved in the movement. For this project, the cohesiveness that bonds gay males to the gay and lesbian social movement is referred to as **gay pride**.

Gay Pride is not discussed as existing as a single action or entity. Rather, it is described as being an aspect of everyday life that influences everything with which a gay male comes in contact. The respondents' answers described gay pride as an attitude, as activism, as a unity, as having a provalued identity, and as a defining point for their everyday lives. They also discussed gay pride as leading to feelings of marginalization from the general population, as leading to the ability to empathize with other minorities,

and as fighting stereotypes and discrimination. Since the responses presented offer no unilateral discussion of gay pride, Taylor and Whittier's (1994) analysis of a collective identity through [symbolic] boundaries, a [political or collective] consciousness, and [manners of] negotiation] is chosen to discuss gay pride. Though the analysis of gay pride is presented in three separate categories, it must be understood by the reader that boundaries, a consciousness, and negotiation are only topics and that the three interplay and support one another to create a collective identity in a movement

In Melucci's perspective of New Social Movement theory, he outlines a collective identity that is composed of shared definitions among a group of people (1980, 1995). His perspective also places heavy emphasis upon the interpretation of the emotion[s] surrounding a movement. Melucci views social movement activity as being melded from the collective action of the group through common actions. From this envelops a collective identity. This collective identity is created and recreated through collective action, common experiences, and shared definitions of self. The collective identity is also a binding agent for newcomers and for those currently involved in the movement. Gay Pride can be distinguished as a collective identity for gay males because it evolves from "participants common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (Taylor and Whittier 1994: 110).

Building upon Melucci's discussion of collective identity, Taylor and Whittier (1994) discuss the collective identity of lesbian feminist and how the collective identity of lesbian feminist is sustained through community, social, and economic networks. The

writers believe that involvement in the feminist movement translates into political action that challenges dominant beliefs and systems concerning females. They describe the collective identity of lesbian feminist as sustained and communicated through boundaries, a consciousness, and negotiation. This same approach is used to explain gay pride as a collective identity for gay males².

BOUNDARIES

Alberto Melucci (1980, 1995) discusses the evolution of a collective identity within a social movement. He devises a theory that encompasses a collective identity as being composed of shared definitions among those involved. These shared definition are interpreted as boundaries by Taylor and Whittier (1994). They are defined as “marking the social territories of group relations by highlighting differences between activists and the web of others in the contested social world” (1994:111). Taylor and Whittier suggest that not only are blocks [boundaries] set up by those opposing the movement, but also by those supporting it. Boundaries act as symbolic trenches which distinguish *them* from *us*. The authors also feel that establishing boundaries is essential to the formation of a

² It is recognized by this researcher that Taylor and Whittier’s work concentrates solely on lesbian feminists. It is acknowledged that gay males and lesbians differ in many ways. This researcher believes that Taylor and Whittier’s discussion of boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation can be implemented to discuss a political or collective identity for gay males.

collective identity. "It promotes a heightened awareness of a group's community and frames interaction between members of the in-group and the out-group" (1994:113).

Boundaries easily distinguish members of one group from others and can exist as almost anything. Some good examples are sexual preference, religion, or ethnicity. The boundaries that surround a group are not always a matter of choice. Rather, the process of reshaping a collective identity involves the renegotiation of that collective identity to encompass persons of different ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and religions. In this research project, three categories are discussed as boundaries: the gay male identity, the gay community, and gay symbols.

A Gay Identity

While homosexual *behavior* can be found in almost all historical times and places, a homosexual identity and discussion of homosexual people is a nineteenth and twentieth century phenomenon (Esterberg, 1994; Browning, 1993; Chauncey, 1994; Foucault, 1980). As time progressed, the homosexual identity has evolved into a collective identity which advocates for parity with heterosexuals on all levels. Melucci believes that a collective identity is the direct result of a social movement and is socially constructed not only by those provaluing the identity but also by those devaluing it.. Taylor and Whittier build upon Melucci's discussion and explain these ideas through the concept of boundaries. These attributes are found in the gay and lesbian social movement and are known as Pride.

One may ask, "Pride in what?" Having pride is having a sense of a valued identity. This only emerges when persons label themselves, both individually and collectively, as positive. This definition occurs from within a groups' own terms of reference in reaction to those opposing it. A gay identity is the building block behind informal relationships and is a very important aspect of gay pride. It aids in defining grievances, resources, and opportunities as well as developing ideologies and symbolic representations of the gay and lesbian community.

When asked whether or not there was a difference between being gay and being homosexual, the overwhelming answer from the respondents was a resounding "no". When probed further and asked if gay was just a sexual act, those interviewed began to distinguish between a gay identity and a homosexual one. The youngest respondent in the study described a gay identity as a form of self description:

"Being gay requires self identification...you've accepted that you are gay."
(Mr. Pauls)

Another respondent agreed:

"First of all, it was more accepting of who I am. A good deal was accepting the fact that I was gay" (Mr. Mills).

Another respondent made a distinction between being gay and homosexuality:

"I think people live differently. I think there are homosexuals that do not live the gay lifestyle." (Mr. Channing)

A gay bar owner gave a similar response:

"To be a homosexual is to be attracted to your own sex, but it is not a defining characteristic. You are gay your whole life. It's being a part of a

community. You are a practicing homosexual a few minutes a day.” (Mr. Kermit)

A respondent who had in the past lived in cities with very large and vocal gay populations described a gay identity as being connected with how a community handles itself:

“I mean homosexuality is someone that has a sexual orientation towards someone of the same gender. The gay lifestyle is something that I see as being defined by your surrounding area. I have to say that it has to do with the way the gay community deals with itself and its sexual orientation.” (Mr. Barbar)

Another respondent described the actions of a group as leading to being socially classified as a collective representation:

“I have always thought of the gay lifestyle as a culture.” (Mr. Albueto)

A gay identity allows identification to be made with others through the sharing of similar interpretations of being gay. It is much more than just a preference for a sexual relation with someone of the same sex. Rather, being gay allows a homosexual person to define who he or she is. It may offer explanation. Most importantly, being gay offers the individual an identity ..a valued identity. By placing value on a gay identity, one is able to say, I am gay and I am proud. In her discussion of the development of a homosexual identity, Vivienne Cass (1979) refers to this as Identity Pride. Respondent’s described a gay identity in many ways. Each response reflected the gay identity as a master status.

According to one respondent:

“It is the ability to live openly as a gay male and to conduct my business and live as a free and open person. That’s where my pride comes in. I don’t hide behind any barriers or walls.” (Mr. Gates).

Another respondent who has been in the same relationship for thirty-two years said:

“[Gay pride is] just the way I live my life. I am gay. I am not one who stands up with a banner and shouts, ‘You must accept me!’ I just live life and I live it as a gay male. I’m not ashamed of it in any manner. I just live my life.” (Mr. Channing)

A former Army officer who voluntarily informed the government that he was gay

described gay pride as being open about his identity:

“[Gay Pride is a] vocalization of and towards one’s own sexual identity. I don’t care what other people think. I value myself and my gayness.” (Mr. Mills)

A gay identity is a boundary through the simple act of declaration of the gay identity as a master status. By being out³ and proud, gay males can identify one another. For gay males, being out and proclaiming one’s identity is one aspect of a boundary in the gay and lesbian social movement. It is also gay pride. Having this ability is the direct result of past struggles of gays and lesbians involved in the movement.

A gay identity goes much further than the individual. Being gay also offers cohesiveness with a group. Melucci discusses how “social identity is the attribution of the condition of ‘belonging to.’ It is a relationship within which one both recognizes and is recognized” (1981:210). Gay pride in reference to a gay identity is described by respondents as providing a common platform through similar experiences in a shared lifestyle. One respondent said:

³ “Out” is common gay jargon which refers to a person that is open about his or her gay identity. The gay identity is most likely the master status for the individual.

“We share bonds because we have experienced some of the same things, if they are out. A gay identity allows gays and lesbians to identify with one another through proclamation of a proud identity.” (Mr. Kermit).

Another respondent made reference to collective action by gays and lesbians as leading to gay pride:

“Its [Gay Pride] taking empowerment upon ourselves and coming together as a community and showing people who we are. That’s what pride is to me.” (Mr. Suttles).

A respondent who had extensive experience working with minority populations described gay pride as leading to unity due to the common struggles that all gays and lesbians face:

“[Gay Pride] is a sense of not being ashamed of your sexuality, to be able to say that because I am gay makes me no better, no less, no different than another...Gay to me is a lifestyle and having pride in that is a unity, much like blacks and Hispanics having pride in who they are.” (Mr. Talbert)

A prime example of a collective identity leading to the empowerment of actors is evident with Mr. Suttles statement, “It is the ability to say, ‘I am who I am.’” For out gay males, a gay identity works as a boundary by allowing an identification to be made with other gay males, lesbians, lesbian/gay organizations and businesses. It allows gay males a common arena in which shared experiences and actions help define a gay male identity separate from the dominant culture.

Gay Community

The gay and lesbian subculture in the United States entered its first substantial

period of growth during World War II. Homosexuality has existed as long as humans have walked the earth. Before World War II, homosexual behavior was individual and had no structure of communality. After the War, homosexuals were able to view their participation of sexual acts from within a communal context. They were able to identify one another. Both Browning (1993) and Chauncey (1994) suggest that World War II was the catalyst for the gay enclaves which grew in the urban areas of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. World War II provided the opportunity that allowed men and women to meet others who shared the same desires or felt the same attractions for members of the same sex.

During the war, if a male was discovered to be a homosexual, this individual was kicked out of the military. He was immediately taken to the nearest American port and given a dishonorable discharge. With people too ashamed to return home with a dishonorable discharge due to their behavior and not willing to stop it, substantial gay subcultures were created with a geographically carved niche much like other ethnic groups. Browning (1993) draws a comparison between ethnic areas of cities and the gay ghettos of the 1940's. "Quietly, they [homosexuals] settled in the bohemian zones of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco forming bridge clubs, staking out their own semisubterranean turf -- much as the Irish, Jewish, and Chinese immigrants had done before them. Without trying to, they created something like a culture" (Browning 1993: 222). A gay community offers the settings in which social networks are boundaries by

allowing gay males to associate with “gay “ groups. In doing so, gay males are more likely to have shared definitions of self and shared experiences.

One of the areas investigated in this study was the existence of a gay community. When asked, “What is the gay community?” the overwhelming response depicted it as extremely diverse in the physical and social makeup of the movement’s participants and a community that faces constant discrimination. A respondent who is an active member in the gay, Hispanic, and larger community of Oklahoma City described the gay community as diverse:

“To me its a very big cultural community made up of differences of color, and personalities, and socioeconomic status.” (Mr. Albueto).

Another respondent who is very active in his community described the gay community as crossing all social distinctions in Western culture:

“There is definitely a gay community, through every net, every occupation, there is a gay community.” (Mr. Kermit).

A respondent who had participated in the Twenty-fifth Anniversary Stonewall Riot Celebration described the gay community as being composed of a wide array of people:

“I mean you look at those people [in the parade] and I see a lot of people that I wish weren’t there. But, it makes me realize the broad spectrum that there is in the gay and lesbian community.” (Mr. Hatfield).

Gay male activists tended to describe the gay community as one that provides opportunities to make friends, to build strong social relationships, as an outlet for involvement [social, economic, and grassroots], and for providing a safe haven from

discrimination. These ideas are also presented by John Alan Lee (1977) in his description of a gay citizen's interaction with the gay community of Toronto. He describes a gay community as existing through physical and geographical depictions of space, symbolic boundaries, and through niches [a species place in the community]. He provides an example of how a gay citizen becomes familiar with and uses the gay community. Part of his example is the acquisition of knowledge concerning community activities through gay newspapers. This is also possible for gay males in Oklahoma. Three gay publications (two regional and one national) are briefly introduced to discuss how communication sustains and supports the collective identity of a group and helps a gay community define itself as a separate entity from the dominant culture.

Both *The Gayly Oklahoman* and the *Perspective* serve as regional indicators of the gay and lesbian issues central to Oklahoma. The papers' emphasis was placed more on the cultural aspects of the local gay communities of Tulsa and Oklahoma City rather than the political. The publications serve mainly as information guides for regional community activities such as gay pride events and association meetings. The newspapers also provide listings of area bars, businesses, and organizations which support the gay and lesbian community. Advice columns, charity events concerning AIDS, and horoscopes are also common features. The *Perspective* and *The Gayly* offer information that is relevant to persons living in Oklahoma. Little coverage of national events is present besides a column which offers short snippets of information about gay issues from around the world. Where *The Gayly* and *Perspective* served as informants of local

issues pertaining to gays and lesbians, the *Advocate* is directed more towards a general audience of both gays and lesbians in the United States.

Topics discussed ranged from national and grassroots activism to coverage of any anti-gay activities from conservative and religious groups. The main purpose of the *Advocate* appears to be that of informant to a lesbian and gay audience concerning national issues. The *Advocate* continually reports on human rights issues, activities, and agendas central to the fight for parity with heterosexuals. Emphasis is placed on general discussions of issues or interviews with gay and straight celebrity and political figures involved in the gay and lesbian movement. No continual coverage of a single topic was found. Rather, the *Advocate* provides a general consensus of issues pertinent at time of publication.

Though no articles discuss gay pride as a collective identity for gay males in any of the papers, numerous ads use themes relevant to gay pride. For example, The Pride Network™ (a national long distance carrier), The Pride Institute™ (a national drug and alcohol rehabilitation clinic), The Rainbow Card Foundation™ (a Visa charge card), and the Pride Fund™ (a mutual fund) all use catch phrases that tie the product or service to gay and lesbian consumers. This process is also evident in the use of symbols such as the rainbow flag, the red ribbon for Aids, and the inverted pink triangle in screen savers for computers, on pet collars, and in logos for television shows and national businesses. In doing so, businesses or organizations showcased their support for the gay and lesbian community thus expanding into a market that was ignored for many years.

Advertisement that uses symbols relevant to the gay and lesbian community allows individuals to identify with the group by using a product or service specifically designed and targeted to a gay and lesbian audience. In doing so, a symbolic boundary is strengthened. The gay community provides a separate space for gays and lesbians in which same sex relations are supported and nurtured..

Gay pride is the underlying support for gay communities, both physically and emotionally. A gay community is the arena for shared actions and experiences which are communicated through gay publications. This leads to new interpretations of gay by gay males and the larger community.

Rainbows and Triangles

Melucci describes collective action as not simply a reaction to social and environmental constraints, but also producing symbolic orientations and meanings that actors are able to recognize (1995: 47). He is discussing the formation of symbols that represent an identity or the shared experiences which comprise that identity. Within the gay and lesbian community, such symbols do exist. The rainbow and the inverted pink triangle not only readily distinguish one as a member or supporter of the gay and lesbian social movement, but the symbols also act as boundaries by reminding those in contact with such symbols of the two main characteristics of the gay and lesbian community as outlined by the respondents.

Stories abound about how the rainbow was adopted by the gay and lesbian social movement. Some of the respondents proclaimed that it was first used in San Francisco [the Promised Land for Queers in America] to distinguish operations that welcomed business from gays and lesbian clientele from those that did not. Presently, the rainbow has come to represent the diversity within the gay community. As numerous colors interlock to create a rainbow, so do different ethnicities, races, and socioeconomic statuses come together to form the gay community. One respondent described why he chose to wear a bracelet made of several different colored beads:

“I’m wearing my rainbow bracelet right now. I am saying that I am an out homosexual. I don’t want to represent all gays. There is such a plethora of gays and lesbians. We run the gamut. I want people to know that I am a small facet to this community” (Mr. Kermit).

Another respondent discussed the meaning of the rainbow flag, a common agent used to display gay pride:

“The rainbow flag has become a kind of symbol for gay pride. It has become our symbol as a community, of our pride” (Mr. Gates).

The second symbol predominantly used by the gay and lesbian community is that of an inverted pink triangle. Described by almost all of the respondents as a symbol once used by the Third Reich to identify homosexual males (and other persons considered abnormal), it currently represents the struggle that gays and lesbians face on a day to day basis. “Collective action is not simply a reaction to social and environmental constraints, it produces symbolic orientations and meanings that actors are able to recognize...it

entails a notion of causality and belonging...identity entails an ability to perceive duration, an ability that enables actors to establish a relationship between past and future and to tie action to its effects" (Melucci 1980: 47). Symbols are symbolic boundaries by acting as reference for gays and lesbian in larger society.

The gay and lesbian community, through adoption of the rainbow and the triangle have produced symbols through which gays and lesbians can identify with one another and with the community as a whole. Each symbol represents and acts as a common reminder of the defining characteristic of the gay community . The rainbow represents the diversity of the community while remaining as a single entity and the inverted pink triangle represents the adversity and discrimination that gays and lesbians face. In doing so, gays and lesbians are able to easily identify symbolically with the gay and lesbian social movement through the adoption of these symbols.

Taylor and Whittier state in order to maintain an oppositional identity depends upon the creation of a world separate from the dominant society. Gay males have done just that through the creation of a positive gay male identity and a gay male community which both encompass representative symbols and defining characteristics of the gay and lesbian social movement.

CONSCIOUSNESS

Where boundaries act as partitions distinguishing one group from another, a

consciousness is the defining of the aspirations of a collective identity. Taylor and Whittier's discussion of consciousness is constructed from various writings in identity politics. It is devised from cognitive liberation (McAdam 1982), frames (Snow et al. 1986), collective consciousness (Mueller, 1987), and especially cognitive frameworks (Melucci, 1989). Taylor and Whittier define it as "interpretive frameworks that emerge from a group's struggle to define and realize member's common interests in opposition to the dominant order" (1994:114). Those involved in the movement must have the opportunity to tie their discontent to a movement rather than just individual emotion. This is accomplished through the writers' interpretation of consciousness.

Taylor and Whittier discuss consciousness as an "ongoing process in which groups reevaluate themselves, their subjective experiences, their opportunities, and their shared interests" (1994:114). They perceive a consciousness which is disseminated through various forms of communication and through everyday life. A consciousness establishes new forms of interpretation for those involved in a movement. It also helps implement the challenging of a dominant order's perspectives. For gay males, the political consciousness of gay pride accomplishes all of this.

The political consciousness forces the dominant order to reevaluate perceptions of gay men. By having gay pride, gay men challenge stereotypes of the effeminate male. A political consciousness establishes feelings of marginalization with other minorities. By having gay pride, gay males are able to provalue a negative identity. What follows are discussions of consciousness in relation to gay pride. The consciousness of gay pride

comes from and is supported through the realization that gay males do live happily [A Pandora Box], through confrontation with those in opposition to the identity [A Gem is not Polished], and through feelings of marginalization [Through Gay Eyes].

A Pandora Box

"It entails a notion of causality and belonging...identity entails an ability to perceive duration, an ability that enables actors to establish a relationship between past and future and to tie action to its effects" (Melucci 1995:47). Respondents discussed how the realization that there are other gays and lesbians provided the chance to identify with others and to interpret being gay as good.

One respondent described his early adulthood as sheltered. Having grown up in a rural area of Oklahoma, this respondent knew nothing of the gay lifestyle besides what he had learned in church. After completing college, he moved to Tulsa. He described discovering that other gays and lesbians did exist as leading to a reawakening in himself:

"The most common thing that I see is the realization that there are other gays and lesbians and that we exist as a community. I think that's really the bond, because socially as we grow, from childhood to development, we are taught that its not an acceptable orientation and to find out that there are other people that are accepting of that and that people live that way, happily that way, its like a Pandora box has opened up...the main process is the realization of other gays and lesbians which leads to a realization of self." (Mr. Gates)

Another respondent spoke of the feelings he encountered during the march on

Washington in 1990 where over an estimated 100,000 gays and lesbians rallied together to show political candidates the strength of the gay and lesbian social movement:

“It’s real empowering. It’s *real* empowering! We went to the march on Washington. I was just overwhelmed once I was there. [There was] absolutely a unity and support and love -- an affirmation. It was like, ‘We [the gay community] love you just the way you are.’” (Mr. Suttles)

Gay Pride, as a political consciousness, empowers gay males through recognition of a collective power. This collective power is visible through gay themed events. Some examples of large scale events are the annual Oklahoma Gay Rodeo Association event, the Ms. Gay Oklahoma Pageant, and the Mr. Levi’s Leatherman contest all of which occurred in Oklahoma City. Examples of less informal events are PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays] meetings and worship with other gays and lesbians in a Christian church setting. All of the events offered an environment in which same sex relationships were the norm. Discussion of homosexuality and being gay were encouraged and nurtured in an environment where judgment based on sexual preference was not present. Acceptance of homosexual behavior and a gay identity were not questioned. Rather, they were supported, encouraged, and proudly displayed. Streamers, flags, T-shirt logos, and face paint were all common displays of traditional gay symbols such as the rainbow and the inverted pink triangle.

A collective identity empowers social actors to act as unified and banded persons, to be in control of their own actions, to act as collective bodies because they have

achieved to some extent the constructive process of a collective identity (Melucci 1995:46). The collective representation of the gay and lesbian community is visible through events specifically designed for the gay community. By being involved with other gays and lesbians through various activities, the consciousness of a group is strengthened.

**A Gem is not Polished Without Friction,
Nor a Man Perfected Without Trials**

A political consciousness is constructed not only by those in favor of it, but also by those opposing it. Respondents described gay pride as leading to questioning the dominant perspective of gay as bad through various actions such as strong religious ties and as a reaction to negative discussions of being gay. A respondent who has a strong relationship with his church and a strong affiliation with Christianity referenced gay pride as coming to terms with God through prayer:

“You have these feelings and attractions and you don’t understand why. I asked God why because so much that I understood homosexuality to be was evil and wrong” (Mr. Mills).

A respondent who was one of the main driving forces behind a now defunct Human Rights Commission in Oklahoma City adamantly described gay pride as fighting negativism outside the gay and lesbian community:

“We started from a place that was negative or a reaction to something that was negative. Because of that negativity, we said ‘Wait a minute. There are things to me and those are things that I have every right to feel good about.” (Mr. Ironhand)

Another respondent stated:

“[Gay Pride] to me is being proud of who and what you are because so many people have told you that it is not right or that its wrong. It is one time when you can say...I am proud of who I am,” (Mr. Mills)

This respondent described why the term gay pride became so popular in the gay and lesbian community:

“We started hearing more of it [the term gay pride].in the late 80’s. I imagine its in response to attacks that we have been exposed to as we try and attain equal rights within our own individual communities. Its been a painful process to hear the things that people say and to hear them direct those words towards other human beings. It is a difficult process. At some point, we need to be able to escape that and be proud.” (Mr. Gates)

A consciousness is strengthened when those acclimating to it, fight outside dissension. Some respondents were more vocal concerning what pride meant to them. They discussed pride as overcoming prejudice and standing up and fighting against negative opinions of the gay lifestyle. The following respondent discussed the use of the term “pride” by first offering an example of black pride in the African American community. He then correlated the phrase black pride with gay pride. He described gay pride as:

“...overcoming any adversity placed in the way...you can be proud of overcoming prejudice and hatred. I think that’s what pride is” (Mr. Bass).

"The definition that the actors' construct is not linear but produced by interaction, negotiation, and the opposition of different orientations" (1995:43). The consciousness of gay pride is not a linear process. Rather, it is one that is shaped by the political climate surrounding the movement. One respondent who is a volunteer at a HIV organization with strong political ties, discussed gay pride as a reaction to strong right wing political groups in Oklahoma:

"Its like we're not going to put up with that crap anymore. We're not going to put up with those biased opinions. You know, it's not gonna work" (Mr. Luther).

A consciousness becomes stronger when faced by excessive opposition. Gay males, through various ways, charter new interpretations of gay as good. This is a key characteristic of consciousness in a collective identity. A collective identity is not the starting point for a social movement. Rather, it is the result of one.

Through Gay Eyes

Taylor and Whittier discuss a political consciousness as providing a group's understanding of their structural position in relation to the dominant culture but also as establishing new expectations regarding treatment by others. Respondents described being gay as leading to feelings of marginalization from the dominant society and a more thorough understanding of discrimination. This interpretation influences the form of collective action taken. This is evident when considering how the gay social movement

has defined itself as one fighting for equal rights with straights or parity at all levels with straights.

A respondent who was partially responsible for the creation of a gay, lesbian, and bisexual student organization at a local metropolitan university discussed how being gay leads to many interesting interpretations of life. He also described being gay as leading to feeling separated from those who are not gay:

“I think that being gay provides you a sense of being marginalized. I think that it makes you perceive more things about the world around you in a more interesting way” (Mr. Pauls).

Another respondent discussed a gay identity as leading to a better understanding of the plight that other minority groups face:

“You are more attuned to discrimination. You have felt that. You are less aggressive. I think its more touching and feeling. You care more about how people feel. It is a genuine feeling” (Mr. Smith).

Another responded in a similar fashion:

“Its an awareness and an appreciation for and an empathy for all of the people that I see face discrimination” (Mr. Tieg).

The following response was by an activist in Oklahoma City. He discussed being gay as affecting how everything in the world is perceived by a gay person. An interior designer by trade, he discusses how his gay identity may unconsciously affect his work style.

“I did not pick to be gay. If someone came along and offered me a pill that would make me straight, I would not take it. I have a privilege being gay. The privilege is insight and understanding in the difficulty in being something that wasn't easy.

What else I think that is bullshit is the only difference between me and a straight person is what we do in bed. I think that I look at a sunset through gay eyes. I look at a man's back to his buttocks and I think that is a beautiful sign and I have incorporated that into maybe the design of a chair leg without even thinking about it. I was talking to a straight man and he said 'I understand that you are a gay man, but I think that you would be the same type of person if you were straight' I said, 'I agree and I thank you for what you said, but I think that is absolutely fucking stupid.' That's like saying that you would be the same if you were a woman. No, you wouldn't because whatever you are since you were in the womb, it filters everything you see, everything you hear.

As a child, most of us know we are different. We don't know why. It filters everything we see, we hear, we feel in the same way as being a straight man. Pride is when you are not knuckling under something anymore. Pride is getting out of the floor, not letting someone walk all over you. It's one thing to be treated badly, and it's another to know that you don't deserve it" (Mr. Ironhand).

Melucci describes a collective identity as one that is created through shared definitions and actions. Taylor and Whittier discuss the consciousness of a collective identity as a continual reevaluation of that identity and how this identity is interpreted by those associated with it. They understand the consciousness of a collective identity as providing "an understanding of their structural position but also establishes new expectations regarding treatment appropriate to their category" (1994:114).

Respondent's also reflected the gay subculture as one that faces discrimination and prejudice in their struggle for equality just as other minorities have done in the past. One respondent discussed how the gay community faces discrimination due to behavior that he feels has genetic roots:

"It's a community of people that have been discriminated against for years and years, and who have now come to grips with the fact that its

okay to be gay and that it is the way we are born and its natural. The community has actually come together to try and fight for equal rights.”
(Mr. Gates)

Another respondent who had just recently come out and who was only socially active in his gay community identified discrimination as a major problem gays face. He also stated that a collective representation provides an easy outlet for persons to fight discrimination:

“The gay community to me is a group of homosexual people. We are a group of people that have had to fight against discrimination. By having pride in who we are as a group, we fight negative stereotypes of being gay.”(Mr. Hare)

Another respondent made reference to a gay identity by referring to affiliation with a group. He described association with the gay community as occurring through a matter of choice. He is not referring to the origins of homosexuality. Rather, he is describing how a person that identifies as gay understands how it feels to be discriminated against. Because of this, the respondent believes that affiliation with the gay community leads to a stronger provaluing of gay.

“[The gay community is]much like any other minority community. It is a chosen one much like a religious community is a chosen one.” (Mr. Suttles)

The description of the gay and lesbian social movement as a human rights issue was a common theme in the responses. Some respondents discussed this issue by stating they believed that gays and lesbians should have some form of legal protection.

One respondent stated that gays and lesbians should have access to protection from discrimination:

“It is definitely a human rights agenda for gays and lesbians much like it was for blacks during the civil rights era. I think that gays and lesbians should have some type of protection, and we don’t...I think that we are pushing to get equality. I don’t think it is so much a queer issue, but I think that we should have parity with straights.” (Mr. Kermit)

Another respondent who is extremely politically active in Tulsa discussed his gay identity and his close friendships with blacks and females as leading to a better understanding of what it means to not be part of the status quo:

“For me, it has to do with an awareness of the human condition. It is an awareness and an appreciation for and an empathy for all of the people that I see that face discrimination, and I see all the stuff that blacks, and Jews have gone through, because I see this in the gay community. I am sensitive to black issues and other forms of struggle because we are faced with subtle forms of discrimination. I am aware of this because I am a faggot.” (Mr. Fitz)

Gays males interpret and define actions of the dominant culture as discriminatory due to the nature of the gay and lesbian social movement. Taylor and Whittier describe consciousness as influencing the interpretation an individual has of the collective identity and how this leads to the types of collective action in which the individual chooses to participate. Gay pride as a political consciousness, empowers gay males through recognition of a collective power. This recognition is met through the acknowledgment that gay males do live happily, by confronting the dominant societies interpretation of gay as bad through some form of action, and through shared feelings of marginalization and discrimination.

NEGOTIATION

Gay pride also provides levels of negotiation of a gay identity. Taylor and Whittier point out that new social movement theory is primarily concerned with interpreting a collective identity as being politically charged. Many authors (Breinnes, 1982; Melucci, 1988; Kauffman, 1980) have stated that the “new” in new social movement theory is the politicization of everyday lives. What Taylor and Whittier call negotiation is *how* an identity is politicized. The authors state that the concept of negotiation “points to the myriad of ways that activists work to resist negative social definitions and demand that others value and treat oppositional groups differently” (1994: 118). The authors discuss negotiation as being central to the social construction of a collective identity. They believe that negotiation occurs in both the private and public settings of a group and that it undermines the meanings held by the status quo. It is an act that instills in members ways to challenge negative images. This is usually accomplished through active affiliation with an organization. In this manner, a collective identity is strengthened. By having gay pride, gay males are provided the opportunity to associate with gay organizations, businesses, and philanthropies. In doing so, gay pride is propagated. Negotiation is discussed as fighting stereotypes through everyday occurrences and activism.

Fighting Stereotypes -- No Limp Wrists Here

Gays and lesbians form an identity around a sexual orientation that is politically and culturally motivated. Historically, the movement called for political equality through anti-discriminatory means. In doing so, more persons were able to identify with the gay and lesbian movement and community. "The actors 'produce' the collective action because they are able to define themselves and their relationship with the environment." (Melucci 1995:43)

Many of the respondents discussed gay pride as a way of negating the stereotype of a gay, effeminate male through their everyday lives. One respondent who is a drag queen⁴ discussed how his career has led to him being in the public eye. He describes gay pride as not allowing those in opposition to stand in his way:

"I don't mind being a topic of fun, but insults are another thing. By insult, I mean someone putting down the fact that you are alive. I've been interviewed in that manner and I am not ashamed to let people know that I am a man in drag, I guess I would say that is gay pride." (Mr. Channing)

Some respondents discussed being out and being gay as a way of revealing to straights that gay males run the gamut in our culture. A former Marine describes acknowledgment of his gayness as fighting the stereotype that gay men are effeminate:

⁴ A drag queen is a gay male who impersonates females.

“The public has a general misconception of what gay is; that we are all hairdressers. I don’t think they have the concept that gays are omnipresent, that you don’t have to have a limp wrist to be gay.” (Mr. Kermit)

Another respondent agreed:

“Too many people are out there saying ‘Oh, you’re gay so you gotta cut hair or a run a flower shop.’ Excuse me! It’s like getting rid of those attitudes.” (Mr. Smith)

An organizer of a metropolitan gay soccer league discusses how, overall, gay males are perceived as effeminate. He insinuates that by being openly gay he fights the stereotypes of gay males through everyday life. He also describes how the media in our culture tends to focus on the more absurd images of a group and how this leads to negative stereotyping by the dominant culture:

“Well, I have always been one to tear down the stereotypes that straight people hold. I don’t know how to walk in high heels. I own power tools and I know how to use them. I don’t own a Madonna, Judy Garland, or Barbara Streisand tape. These are all stereotypes and these are all things that people that do not know gay people, or a lot of gay people, think that is what we are all about.

I guess my philosophy is to do what makes you happy and you know, if it is wearing a dress, then do it. I mean if its not, then don’t do it. Their [heterosexual society] general perception is what the media has presented to them. Unless they know people or have friends, all you see is a bunch of dress wearing, leather clad people with their nipples pierced with all of this debauchery running around the world.

The media never focuses on the doctors, lawyers. or the couples that have been together for thirteen years....I have always felt it necessary to do that [break down stereotypes]. I hate when I come out to people and the first thing they say is ‘I had a very good friend that was gay. He was so much fun. But, he died.’ I hate it when people say that. I mean it is depressing. Not all of us are ill. You’ve got to break down these stereotypes because it [the gay identity] is perceived as being a negative thing. And that’s not what its about” (Mr. Albueto)

Another respondent said:

“I think its important to have gay pride where people won’t be afraid of gays. The stereotypical person that works as a florist or a nurse isn’t representative of being gay. By being involved and out, you have gay pride” (Mr. Tieg)

By identifying as gay and being out, the respondents discussed gay pride as fighting stereotypes and letting straights understand that gay males are omnipresent in Western culture. The is a prime illustration of negotiation among actors at the individual, as well as the communal level.

Another example of successful negotiation is concerned with questions about the origins of homosexuality. The question, “What are the origins of homosexuality?” was asked. No trend was found in the analysis of why persons think they are homosexual. The chosen quotes are representative of how gay males have renegotiated the origins of homosexuality with the dominant order. Many of the respondents insinuated that homosexuality was genetic. An activist in Oklahoma City described being gay as being a part of him. He implied that being gay was determined by genetics:

“To be gay is absolutely a part of who I am. It is a part of me just as much as my age, hair color, or the color of my skin” (Mr. Ironhand).

Another respondent agreed:

“I don’t think its a choice. I just don’t. It is not a pick/choose situation. I’m sure you’ve heard that a million times, but no one would put themselves through this kind of hell, all of the anti-everything. So, I always felt that it was my destiny” (Mr. Channing).

A respondent who is a minister at a metropolitan gay church made a statement expressed by almost everyone in the group. He described how he had always known that he was different:

“I have always known I was gay. Our Creator does not make mistakes.
(Mr. Fitzgerald).

Others responded differently. One respondent discussed his gayness as not existing due to a singular causal-effectual relationship:

“I can sit here and think of the different theories and so forth. I have heard some say it is genetics or environmental or that your mother was strong and your father was weak. I don't know. I think there are a lot of factors that come into play”
(Mr. Mills).

Another respondent stated the factors behind why a person is gay isn't important:

“I just usually answer that question with `I don't care.” But, personally I feel it is cultural” (Mr. Pauls).

From Judeo-Christian tradition to the American Psychiatric Association prior interpretations perceived gay negatively. This dated position has been replaced by more current interpretations which views a gay identity as one that is an acceptable, alternative lifestyle that may have biological roots. This has been possible through the processes of negotiation accomplished in the gay and lesbian social movement. Gay males have renegotiated the concept of a gay male identity as something outside the sphere of choice. In doing so, gay males have forced dominant culture to reinterpret generally held beliefs of a gay male identity.

Activism- Discrimination and Social Networking

All of the respondents were socially or politically active in their local gay communities. Activism ranged from business owners active in their local gay business association to female impersonators [drag queens] who volunteered their talent for fund-raisers affiliated with the gay community.

Activism was not limited to the gay issues only. Rather, many of the respondents expressed that their involvement with gay organizations spawned activism with other groups concerned with similar issues. An events planner for a local gay and lesbian outreach program who has a long history working for all types of human rights organizations described his affiliation with these groups:

“I am involved in a lot of organizations besides gay and lesbian ones. I am also in Pro-choice and political organizations in the city. (Mr. Mills)

This sentiment was also expressed by this respondent:

“I do a lot of work, but they usually have a tie to umh, gay and lesbian issues somehow. I serve on a couple of committees for Tulsa Human Rights Commission and I am a co-chair to the ‘Say No To Hate’ Coalition which is a multicultural organization. (Mr. Money).

When questioned as to why they were involved with gay or lesbian organizations, all of the respondents tied their activism to some personal issue. The answers fell into two categories: past discrimination and social networks. It appeared that the older respondents tied their involvement to past discrimination . The younger respondents

discussed their activism as growing from their social networks. With the exception of Mr. Suttles, who described his activism as coming from his HIV+ status and being gay bashed, those who reported some form of discrimination were over the age of 42.

One respondent, age 43, described an incident that occurred in his early twenties which led to his community activism:

“I was asked to leave a restaurant because I was with another man and I said no. It made it into the papers because the police got involved. Ever since, I have been vocal.” (Mr. Barbar)

Another respondent, 42, also discussed discrimination as being the cause for his involvement with gay and lesbian organizations.

“The primary issues for me was the fact that I was a chief financial officer for an aircraft parts manufacturing here in my home town for five and a half years. After we had our [he and his spouse] picture in the paper for World AIDS Day while participating in a march, no name identification or anything like that; just two of us walking along participating in a memorial service, I got fired for that. They were afraid their customers would not want to buy their airplane parts if they knew there was a queer in their organization. That pretty much propelled me into activism” (Mr. Money)

Another respondent discussed his HIV status and being the victim of a gay bashing incident as leading to his activism within the Tulsa community:

“I became political in my life when I was diagnosed with HIV. That same year I was gay bashed. Before, I was never socially aware of anything except for myself. I knew there was discrimination, but I was ignorant about it...It really woke me up.” (Mr. Suttles)

A respondent who at the age of 56 is the oldest participant in the study. He has a long history of activism in relation to equality. This respondent is an extremely active member of his gay community and is recognized and sought by the local media as a representative for the Oklahoma City gay community. He describes an incident that occurred during the 1970's:

“The thing that made me an activist is an incident of discrimination. I was arrested for the public display of affection towards another man. One weekend I walked into a gay bar and kissed each man on the nape of the neck [a total of four males] We [he and his companion] walked out a few minutes later and I was arrested for lewd and lascivious public behavior...I did not think I deserved that behavior. I went to court and fought it. It was thrown out...Basically after that, I was off and running as a gay/lesbian activist.” (Mr. Ironhand)

Other respondents made no mention of direct discrimination. Instead, they described their involvement as being a part of their social identity. Mr. Albueto, one of two minorities who were interviewed, describes his involvement in this manner:

Mr. Albueto: “Well, a lot of people say they are, to some degree, thrown into these organizations because of some very negative situation that happened in their lives; they think they must stand up and fight for their rights. I was never, it never happened to me. I was always, to some degree drawn to it.”

Interviewer: “You mean, as a gay man?”

Mr. Albueto: “Yeah, yeah. I was more or less drawn to it. I mean nothing negative has occurred to me in my life.”

This theme was also expressed by Mr. Lee and Mr. Hatfield, a young, gay couple that participate in a local gay sports league and who are active in the drag queen circuit of Oklahoma.

“We want to be around people more like us. We are able to talk to these people without having to worry about them accepting us. We are just alike. We have had the same experiences as gay people.”

What Mr. Lee is suggesting is for gays and lesbians the possibility for discrimination is always likely. By identifying with others that are gay, renegotiation of a gay identity as good is accomplished collectively. Melucci states, “The unity of collective action, which is produced and maintained by self-identification, rests on the ability of a movement to locate itself within a system of relations” (Melucci 1995:46).

From the time that persons are small, they are receiving messages that gay is bad, immoral, and ugly. They have been told in many subtle ways that gay is not good. Society says that straight is better, but is it? Many persons have been convinced that they cannot be gay and value themselves. The respondents described that by being out, they are fighting stereotypes and letting straights understand that gay males are part of Western society at all levels. By affiliating with gay and lesbian organizations and by fighting stereotypes of gay through everyday occurrences and various actions, gay males negotiate and renegotiate gayness with themselves and with the dominant culture. Through certain processes, the provaluing of a gay identity is accomplished. This is gay pride.

The collective identity of gay pride has been presented in three separate dimensions: symbolic boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation among actors. In reality, the three interact. Using these three factors to decipher the social construction of a valued gay male identity suggests the process is almost impossible without collective representation. First, symbolic boundaries allow the affirmation of gay male identity and allow for separation from a society that devalues gay males. Secondly, a consciousness undermines the concept of gay as bad. Gay pride offers an identity that is valued. Last, negotiation among actors strengthens the role of a gay male identity which, in turn, also strengthens the symbolic boundaries and the consciousness of gay pride.

Chapter V

Conclusion

This project was first initiated in a quantitative methods class in the form of a scale that measured the level of gay pride among gay and lesbians. As time passed, it became obvious that the concept was widely referred to in the gay subculture, but was never defined. This study was undertaken to explain the concept of gay pride and discuss its meaning in the gay community in Oklahoma.

Drawing from theoretical and analytical frameworks of new social movement theory, gay pride was discussed as a collective identity for gay males. Data suggested that gay pride served as a focal point for men that identify as gay. Every aspect of a gay man's life was influenced by gay pride. It was not described in any single manner. Instead, gay pride was discussed as activism. It was unity. It was a provalued identity. Gay pride also led to feelings of marginalization. It led to empathy for and identity with other minority groups. It led to fighting of stereotypes of and discrimination against gay males. Consequently, gay pride is discussed as the final product of interaction between three categories: symbolic boundaries, political or collective consciousness, and forms of negotiation.

This research is based on the concept of gay pride as a collective identity was conducted in the state of Oklahoma, an area of the country where one might not expect to find a substantial gay culture. People might assume that gays in Oklahoma seek solace in other parts of the country, maybe in other better known “gay” cities. Oklahomans do seek solace but in the cities of their own state. By conducting research on a gay collective identity in Oklahoma, I was given the opportunity to study two very distinct gay communities and to interview people who from past experience were able to draw comparisons between Oklahoma’s gay communities and others around the U.S.

The Tale of Two Cities

The majority of the research concerning gay pride was conducted in two metropolitan areas in Oklahoma: Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Though the two cities share the same state boundaries, they are perceived as being worlds apart. Perceptions in the state view Tulsa as a city with a cosmopolitan flair. For Oklahoma, it is a city that has the cultural appeal usually associated with leisure for the social elite: opera, theater, ballet, fine dining and shopping. Oklahoma City, on the other hand, is viewed by many as a sprawling mass of asphalt, narrow minds, and good ole boy politics. As one respondent put it:

“OKC is a lot more redneck than Tulsa. You have to be careful here. Tulsa is totally different. Tulsa has a little more international appeal... You have to remember we live in a city [OKC] that was so afraid of equality and unity, they disbanded the human rights commission” (Mr. Barbar).

Differences between the two cities, perceived or not, do not stop with the larger community. The cities' gay communities are also dissimilar in reference to gay pride. This difference is best described by looking at Urvashi Vaid's description of the gay movement in the 1970's.

Vaid discusses how the early social movement existed on two levels: the political and the cultural. "Indeed, one could argue that two distinct gay movements came into being in the 1970's: the political and the cultural. The former pursued the goal of representing gay people; the latter was absorbed with understanding what our homosexuality meant" (1995:62). This is true for Oklahoma City and Tulsa with the former representing a highly visible cultural community where gay pride is nurtured by a geographic location and the latter housing a very active, political influence which strongly encourages gay pride through more indirect means.

Even though it does not have a "gay area or district," Tulsa's gay community is extremely well organized politically at both a grassroots and national level. The national organization PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) has one of its strongest chapters in Tulsa. Many of Tulsa's PFLAG executive committee members hold offices in several other national gay organizations as well.

At the grassroots level, Tulsa is home to the largest and most influential gay human rights organizations in the state, TOHR (Tulsa Oklahomans for Human Rights). Also, Tulsa's Rainbow Guild, a quasi-gay chamber of commerce, is a very active economic force in the city. The founding member of the business guild is currently

advocating for the establishment of a gay community center to provide a meeting place for the gay community outside the networks of bars that are sporadically spread throughout the city. Though gays and lesbians are spread throughout Tulsa with no central gay area, the gay political network there is the strongest in the state.

The opposite end of Vaid's dichotomy is reflected in Oklahoma City. Oklahoma City offers what is typically described as the gay area in the state. The 39th Street district is a zone of the city where in a three block radius, 80% of the businesses are gay-owned or operated. In this district, rainbow flags are flown from every storefront. Inverted pink triangles hang in many of the shop windows. A gay community calendar is displayed in the storefront window of the local community center. Street lamps and walls are covered in announcements of upcoming events and graffiti proclaiming, "Dyke Power" and "Queer Nation." The 39th Street also offers gays and lesbians restaurants, grocery stores, churches, and housing all of which cater to a lesbian and gay clientele.

Oklahoma City is also home to the only gay sports league in the state which is comprised of baseball, softball, football, soccer, dart, and pool tournaments. Oklahoma City also hosts the only gay television show in the state, *The Gay Newsbreak* and the only gay marching band, *The Banned*. Oklahoma City also has three outreach programs for lesbians and gays concerning alcohol and drug abuse. The city has singles organizations and is home to the most widely read gay paper in the state, *The Gayly Oklahoman*. Oklahoma City does have gay political organizations, but they are not as prevalent as they are in Tulsa. The Oklahoma Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus is the

largest such organization in the city and PFLAG also sponsors a chapter in the Oklahoma City metro area.

The 39th Street district presents a geographic location where gay pride is out and loud. The area offers a safe, physical outlet where the gay lifestyle, gay community, and a gay identity are encouraged. In Oklahoma City, the opportunity to display a gay identity is not lost. Rather, it is propagated through the presence of a gay district. The existence of such a geographic location offers an outlet for gay pride to be shown in a very present and direct way leading to an interpretation that Oklahoma City has more gay pride than Tulsa. Due to Tulsa's lack of a gay area, gay pride is reflected through political activism, less localized and more indirect, rather than social activities and sense of place.

Significance of Findings

This research project is significant in its theoretical contributions and its practical applications. The research contributes to our theoretical knowledge of the social construction of a sexual identity. The combination of Melucci's interpretation and Taylor and Whittier's analysis of New Social Movement Theory has proved to be a fruitful combination to discuss the collective identity for gay males in the gay and lesbian social movement. This research has applications in promoting new social movement theory as one that helps discuss questions left unanswered by dominant paradigms in social

movement analysis. Further research is needed to explore the theoretical implications of a collective identity of a social movement

In terms of practical application and social relevance, a gay male identity is often interpreted as being only sexual. Males, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are viewed as being “highly sexed” creatures. Because of this, same sex relationships between two men are perceived as being strictly in nature. This is a very narrow interpretation of the gay male identity. Through this study, a gay male identity has been presented as being more than sexual. It is an identity around which a whole culture and community has been created meeting all aspects of human need. It is now possible to interpret a gay male identity as a one with political application. If this research can provide knowledge as a base for a better understanding of the gay male identity with social and political as well as sexual roots, perhaps more people will come to understand that being gay is more than just copulation between two persons of the same sex.

This research project has laid the groundwork for future related projects. Few minorities were contacted who would discuss a gay identity. The two male participants who are members of a minority group discussed the gay male subculture as being one which is mainly white or centered around a white male image. Mr. Bass discussed participation in the gay subculture as having to choose between two identities. He described the attitude of many minorities as that of nonidentifiers, persons who refuse to label themselves as gay or straight. Future research on minorities would be beneficial in understanding the social construction of a gay identity.

Another area of interest for future study is the relationship between city size and attitudes toward a collective gay identity. My interviews focused on gay males living in urban areas. Gay males living in rural areas described a gay identity in reference to individuality. Collective representation of gay pride for these men existed only in the arena of mass culture. Other respondents who discussed their experiences as gay males in large areas, such as New York City, San Francisco, and Dallas, described gay pride as being a stronger unity. This suggests that a difference exists in reference to the concept of gay pride based on city size.

Epilogue

While doing this project, I realized as a gay man that gay pride is more than just individual prosperity and acceptance. Rather, gay pride is a focal point for gay males. It provides gay males the arena in which to voice their concerns, to acknowledge a substantial gay subculture and to accept themselves in a dominant culture that, in many ways, constrains the interpretation of gay as good. While being gay is becoming more accepted by mainstream society it is not without its problems. Gays and lesbians are still faced with possible discrimination in almost all facets of their lives. To be gay is a struggle for many. Through the adoption of gay pride, a person is given the opportunity to place value in who he is.

Since the inception of the modern day homophile movement, gays and lesbians have made tremendous gains. A gay identity now has the potential to be interpreted as

good. Through continual collective action and grassroots activism, the parity for gays and straights gets closer and closer.

Melucci describes a collective identity as an identity that licenses social actors to act as allied and delimited subjects. "[T]he unity of collective action, which is produced and maintained by self-identification, rests on the ability of a movement to locate itself within a system of relations" (Melucci 1995:46). This study presents strong evidence that a gay cultural movement is taking place in American society which provides new opportunities for individuals to find clear identities

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VITA

Chad E. Bratschi

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: THE EXAMINATION OF GAY PRIDE AS A COLLECTIVE
IDENTITY FOR GAY MALES IN THE GAY AND LESBIAN SOCIAL
MOVEMENT

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Erin, Tennessee, On November 4, 1970, the son of Ronnie and Linda Bratschi.

Education: Graduated from Houston County High School, Erin, Tennessee in May 1989; received Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky in May 1994, respectively completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Sociology at Oklahoma State University in July 1996.

Experience: Raised in Erin and Nashville, Tennessee; employed in numerous positions ranging from hardware salesperson to counselor for Easter Seals of Tennessee; employed by Oklahoma State University as a graduate research assistant; Oklahoma State University, Department of Sociology, 1994 to present.

Professional Memberships: American Sociological Association, Mid-South Sociological Association, Southwestern Social Science Association.

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