

Losing Forward: An Ethnographic Study of the LGBT Movement in North Carolina

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## **ABSTRACT**

Laura Meadows: Losing Forward: An Ethnographic Study of the LGBT Movement in North Carolina  
(Under the direction of Daniel Kreiss)

On May 8, 2012, North Carolina voters approved a constitutional amendment banning marriage equality in the state. On October 10, 2014, a federal judge ruled the amendment unconstitutional. This ethnographic study of the state's LGBT movement during this timeframe explores both the campaign that led to the marriage ban and its aftermath through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and qualitative analysis of legacy and social media archives, revealing a state-level movement that was transformed through its engagement in the electoral field.

Specifically, this study transports Chadwick's (2013) analytical approach of the hybrid media system into the study of social movements, viewing the movement activities of North Carolina's LGBT activists through the lens of a system "built upon interactions among older and newer media logics" in order to reveal the complexity of contemporary media strategies deployed by movement actors at the state, local, and hyper-local levels. Additionally, this dissertation develops the concept of movement publics, defined as discursive groupings of individuals and organizations that share a set of political, social, and/or cultural sensibilities in relation to the movement, in order to reveal both the cultural diversity of the LGBT movement itself and the strategic communicative strategies activists utilize to organize these diverse publics. Finally, this study proposed the conceptualization of a catalyzing event, defined as a political happening that fundamentally alters the trajectory of a social movement to provide a

distinct perspective through which to examine the trajectory of a social movement and the experiences, interactions, and events that alter its course.

In addition to contributing to multiple literatures on political communication, social movements, LGBT studies, and digital media, this study argues that the larger LGBT movement will benefit from adopting a “Southern strategy” to speak to people where they are in order to build a coalition of movement publics capable of reshaping the social, political, and cultural contexts of their communities. While the LGBT movement has amassed an unprecedented number of victories of the past several years, the path to full political and cultural equality runs through locations and publics historically understood to be antagonistic to the movement’s goals: farm country, churches, and communities of color. North Carolina provides an exemplar case to navigate the road ahead.



## **PREFACE**

“We live in the South. We are from the sticks, the hollers, the hills, the swamps, Appalachia, the Ozarks, the Bayou, the Delta, Down East, and the coast” (S.O.N.G., 2014).

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

On May 8, 2012, North Carolina voters went to the polls and voted to amend their state constitution to define marriage exclusively as between one man and one woman. Despite a multi-million dollar, months-long campaign, the effort to defeat Amendment One failed, and North Carolina became the 31<sup>st</sup> state to constitutionally ban same-sex marriage. In a year of unprecedented progress for the LGBT movement nationally – Minnesota’s citizens voted against a similar constitutional ban, the U.S. military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy barring openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons from serving was repealed, and the citizens of Washington, Maryland, and Maine voted to legalize same-sex marriage – North Carolina’s vote marked the state in the eyes of many as a regressive community, a vacuum of LGBT progress. As a prominent *New York Times* columnist explained of Amendment One’s passage, “But that was the South” (Bruni, 2012).

Nearly two and a half years later, on October 10, 2012, Judge Max O. Cogburn, Jr., a federal judge in North Carolina’s Western District, struck down Amendment One as unconstitutional, making North Carolina the 29<sup>th</sup> state to allow same-sex marriage. During that time, key rulings from the U.S. Supreme Court opened the floodgates to judicial challenges to marriage equality bans, effectively forcing the federal government to recognize married same-sex couples and grant them all attendant rights and protections. Further, these rulings established legal precedents on which LGBT activists could challenge states’ constitutional bans in federal courts. In relatively quick succession, legal challenges filed in 2013 and 2014 produced dozens

of court victories and brought marriage equality to an array of states from Idaho to Indiana to West Virginia. In the state of North Carolina, between the waging of the Amendment One campaign and Judge Cogburn's ruling, dozens of LGBT groups formed, hundreds of LGBT-focused articles, op-eds, and letters to the editor were published in the states' newspapers, and thousands of individuals joined LGBT organizations as members, supporters, followers, or Facebook friends. Despite this progress, however, the narrative often hues to a familiar script: "But my read is that it takes a certain kind of very brave gay person to live in the South and bear the nasty parts" (Lowder & Stern, 2014).

These judgments ignore the textured reality of the South generally, and North Carolina specifically. Despite such stereotypical assumptions about the South, a vibrant, though specific, LGBT movement has developed below the Mason-Dixon line. Illustrative of the Southern LGBT movement is the Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance (Mitchell County GSA). Organized by two local residents of Bakersville, NC, population 459, the group's initial meeting was attended by dozens of protesters holding signs exhorting "Christian" values and giving voice to fears that the group would work to "force their lifestyle" upon the town. Less than two years later, in 2012, the Mitchell County GSA organized a reading of "8," portraying the closing arguments of the trial that overturned Proposition 8, a California ballot proposition and state constitutional amendment that banned same-sex marriage. They held the event in the Mitchell County Historic Courthouse, and more than 100 people attended. There were no protests. Even more, less than two years after that, in 2014, the co-founders of the Mitchell County GSA established the Yancey Mitchell NAACP chapter to "unite rural NC coalitions fighting for social, economic and environmental justice," bringing together many of the same movement actors and resources into the state's broader progressive movement.



As demonstrated in part by the Mitchell County GSA, the Southern LGBT movement reflects the region's rural areas, religiosity, and racial composition. The Coalition to Protect All NC Families, the campaign to defeat North Carolina's Amendment One, was led by more established organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina (ACLU-NC), Equality NC, and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), but represented a diverse group of national, regional, and local organizations such as the Mitchell County GSA and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In a concerted effort to achieve a shared electoral goal, and based on a messaging strategy developed by the campaign's steering committee in conjunction with a prominent national pollster, these groups communicated (and, at times, reshaped) campaign messages that focused on *children* who might lose their healthcare, *women* who might lose their domestic violence protections, and *families* that might be harmed by the negative political consequences of the proposed "marriage amendment."

This messaging is surprising because towns like Bakersville and messages about harms to children are not often, if ever, equated with LGBT activity. Rather, the movement has typically been associated in both the activist and academic mind with urban environments. In D'Emilio's (1998) seminal history of the origins of the LGBT movement and the development of its collective identity, he situates the movement's beginning around the Second World War when large gay and lesbian communities formed in urban areas such as New York City and San Francisco. Relatedly, other scholars have noted the development of gay and lesbian communities in New York (Chauncey, 1995), Chicago (Faderman, 1991), San Francisco (Gallo, 2006), and Washington, D.C. (Johnson, 2004). As Gray (2009) notes, "This particular history of gay and lesbian visibility positions the city's capacities to make space for queer difference and consolidate capital as necessary precursors to modern lesbian and gay identity formation" (p. 7).

In addition to an urban bias with regard to conceptions of LGBT collective identity, the continued oppositional interactions between the LGBT movement and the Christian right (Fetner, 2008) are illustrative of the fact that a secularist worldview has also become an expected feature of the movement (Wilcox, 2003). In short, the recognizable LGBT community is urban and secular. Whether owing or contributing to this conception, few studies in any discipline have examined the movement in rural or Southern contexts (for exceptions, see Gray, 2009; Stein, 2001; Fellows, 1998; Howard, 1999), and few scholars have specifically examined the intersection of the contemporary LGBT movement and electoral campaigns (for an exception, see Stone, 2012) and modern day organizational and communicative efforts of LGBT activists in these contexts.

Recognizing that a specific LGBT movement operates in the more religious and rural South, this dissertation examines the Amendment One campaign and its aftermath to allow for the exploration of a series of understudied questions in the context of the LGBT movement in the South, but with implications far beyond it for movements more generally: What communicative, organizational, and mobilizing strategies do social movement organizations utilize to build diverse bases of support in politically-antagonistic settings? How do organizational actors tailor their messaging and organizational strategies to appeal to specific audiences in varied political, social, and cultural contexts? How do activists groups leverage electoral politics to increase their communicative reach in their local communities? How do activists on the hyper-local, local, and state levels navigate multiple media platforms within our contemporary, and increasingly complex, media landscape? Finally, how does the case of the North Carolina LGBT movement speak to broader challenges facing the LGBT movement over the next several decades?

To answer these questions, this dissertation explores the communicative and organizing efforts of the many organizational actors comprising North Carolina's LGBT movement through ethnographic research conducted over a nearly 18-month span from September 2011 to January 2013. In addition to field observations of the political, social, and cultural work of these actors operating across the state, I conducted open-ended interviews with key movement actors and collected and analyzed Internet archives, public records, and legacy media archives. I chose this time period because it spanned the state's most high profile, resource-intensive, LGBT-focused political engagement. Additionally, it allows for analysis of the development and deployment of the campaign coalition to contest Amendment One, as well as an examination of the effects of the campaign on subsequent movement work.

In order to situate the efforts of North Carolina's LGBT movement actors within the context of the larger movement, I draw on an influential strand of framing and social movement theory which posits that a key aspect of social movements is "meaning work." As Benford and Snow (2000) note:

From this perspective, social movements are not viewed merely as carriers of extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies. Rather, movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers (Snow & Benford, 1988). They are deeply embroiled, along with media, local governments, and the state in what has been referred to as 'the politics of signification' (Hall, 1982) (p. 613).

Movement actors operating in North Carolina actively engaged in meaning work, both during and after the campaign, but crafted it so as to speak to activists, allies, and opponents where they were at socially and culturally. And, where they are in the South differs in significant ways from other regions of the country.

As one author has noted, “The South has been – and is – the country’s most diverse region; our colorful characters come wrapped in all kinds of packages” (Burns, 2012). As a region, the South is more rural, more racially dichotomous, more religious, and more politically conservative than the rest of the United States. Whereas 80% of Americans nationwide live in urban areas, just 66% of North Carolinians do so. While African Americans comprise 12% of the population nationally, 22% of North Carolinians are black and this number continues to grow (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Though the country as a whole is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country, evangelical, Mainline Protestant, and historically black churches thrive below the Mason-Dixon line (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). Finally, more than 40% of North Carolinians identity themselves as conservatives, while just 20% label themselves liberals (Saad, 2012). Despite these characteristics of Southern peculiarities, the size of North Carolina’s LGBT population is remarkably similar to that of the rest of the country. While the proportion of citizens that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender nationally is 3.5%, the state’s proportion is 3.3% (Gates & Newport, 2013).

In an effort to broaden their base of support, movement actors working in the state targeted their messages, and the messengers that delivered them, to a host of disparate audiences. In short, they spoke to people where they were. Consequently, these actors facilitated the organization, mobilization, and deployment of what I call *movement publics*: discursive groupings of individuals and organizations that share a set of political, social, and/or cultural sensibilities in relation to the movement. Viewing social movements from the perspective of movement publics offers a unique framework through which to analyze both the composition of a social movement *and* the multifaceted communicative strategies organizational actors leverage to convene them. In order to persuade opponents, enlist new allies, and galvanize their

supporters, North Carolina's movement actors engaged in the instrumental practice of convening movement publics through strategic dialogue. Recognizing that a singular, monolithic message such as "equality" would be ineffective amongst the culturally diverse groups within the state, LGBT movement actors used strategically targeted communicative and organizational tactics to build a diverse coalition of supporters.

In doing so, activists convened historically underrepresented publics with only tenuous connections to the movement, most notably in rural and faith communities, to fight against Amendment One and remain active and visible within the LGBT movement after Election Day. In arguing that North Carolina's LGBT movement is constituted by diverse publics, this dissertation draws on Fraser's (1992) conceptualization of "subaltern counterpublics," as well as Warner's (2002) contention that "publics exist only by virtue of their imagining" (p. 8), in order to complicate our understandings of the diversity within a single movement. To date, social movements literature has not recognized such diversity within movements. Even more, this dissertation contributes to an emergent body of literature at the intersection of new media technologies and social movements by illustrating the role of media in convening movement publics.

Further, this dissertation will contribute to literatures that look at the intersections of institutional and non-institutional politics by conceptualizing the Amendment One campaign as a *catalyzing event* that convened and mobilized new organizational, material, and cultural resources for activists, energized the work of existing movement actors, and changed the trajectory of a social movement, not just for the duration of a campaign (Stone, 2012), but for the months and years following election day. Although Protect All NC Families lost on May 8, 2012, many organizations within the state leveraged the increased mobilization generated by the

campaign's efforts into long-term organizing and heightened visibility. For instance, Equality NC grew its membership from 25,000 people to more than 125,000. Since the campaign ended, the organization has utilized these contacts to rally support for a host of LGBT and progressive issues. Seeking to capitalize on the heightened attention to LGBT issues within the state, the leaders of the Campaign for Southern Equality (CSE) launched a series of "We Do" direct actions on May 9, visiting a county courthouse to request and be denied a marriage license, which continued throughout the summer and fall, garnering national attention in publications such as the *New York Times* and *USA Today*. Originally organized to fight against Amendment One, the Mitchell County GSA remained visible in Bakersville and surrounding communities after the vote, hosting events such as "8" and teaming up with Equality NC to convene a town hall meeting to discuss next steps for their movement work. These organizations typify work being done across the state and, though varied in their objectives and tactics, all have worked to remain visible within their communities.

To date, most work surrounding the intersection of social movements and electoral politics focuses on discrete campaigns (Stein, 2001; Fejes, 2008; Ginsburg, 1998) *or* social movement work (Soberiaj, 2011; McAdam, 1998; Polletta, 2002). This dissertation, however, examines the work of an influential network of movement actors by following them across election cycles and specific social movement campaigns. As Kreiss (2012) argues, "what takes place in the interstices of presidential politics has generally been ignored by scholars who focus narrowly on electoral cycles" (p. 190). Though this dissertation does not focus on presidential election cycles, the conceptualization of catalyzing events highlights the idea that focusing on the liminal spaces between and around campaigns reveals dynamics typically hidden from scholarly view. Further, according to Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, and Su (2010), "there is little research on

movement influence over elections and the political influence gained through such electoral support” (p. 297). The catalyzing events concept offers a framework through which to evaluate the effects of social movements on electoral campaigns, and vice versa.

As scholars have long known, media coverage is a vital resource for social movements seeking broader audiences (Rohlinger, 2002). To date, however, the vast majority of literature on media and movements focuses on a single medium rather than the interactions between multiple media platforms, movement actors, and audiences. Recognizing that North Carolina’s LGBT activists strategically navigated a complex and interconnected media environment, not only at the state level but also at the local and hyper-local ones, to increase their communicative reach, this dissertation focuses on that complexity through the analytical framework of Chadwick’s (2013) hybrid media system. Defined as a system “built upon interactions among older and newer media logics – where logics are defined as technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms – in the reflexively connected fields of media and politics” (2013, p. 4), Chadwick’s conceptualization provides a new framework through which to illustrate the contemporary media strategies of movement actors. In doing so, this dissertation advances literature that has tended to focus on either the role of legacy mass media (Gamson, 1998) or digital media (Stein, 2009) within movement organizing. Further, this study explicates the understudied role of social media in state and hyper-level electoral and movement work.

If the current trajectory of LGBT movement progress continues, then the North Carolina case, despite a loss at the ballot box, will be instructive for movement actors going forward. While a spate of recent legislative victories to repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and to find states’ marriage bans unconstitutional has many pundits envisioning an inevitable and swift path to full equality for all LGBT citizens, the reality is much more complicated. Currently, LGBT

citizens can be legally fired for their sexual orientation in 29 states. Same-sex couples are discriminated against (most often, legally) when looking for housing at a much higher rate than heterosexual couples. Even more, opposition to LGBT equality generally is significantly higher among religious individuals and communities – an issue of vital importance to Southern LGBT organizations. As one author notes, “Even as we celebrate victories like this month’s Supreme Court order on same-sex marriage, the real front in the battle for equality remains the small towns that dot America’s landscape” (House, 2014). In short, the LGBT movement will continue to fight for full legal and cultural equality for the foreseeable future and will need to develop messaging strategies to build supportive and persuade antagonistic publics. North Carolina provides an exemplary case to explore this next phase of the LGBT movement.

The remainder of this dissertation proceeds as follows. I provide a “state of the movement” as it existed in the fall of 2011 and present an account of the legislative session that ended with Amendment One on the subsequent primary ballot. I then detail the methods for this dissertation. In chapter two, I apply the analytical lens of the hybrid media system to the complex and interconnected media environment LGBT activists in North Carolina leveraged to speak to the social, political, and cultural realities of multiple Southern and national audiences. In chapter three, I elaborate the conceptualization of movement publics in order to reflect both on the cultural diversity of the North Carolina LGBT movement and the strategic communicative strategies organizational actors utilized to convert diverse publics. In chapter four, I examine the effects of the Amendment One campaign on the state’s broader, long-term movement in order to conceptualize the idea of catalyzing events. Finally, I conclude by arguing that the national movement must reassess and expand its conception of LGBT collective identity in the years ahead and that North Carolina serves as an exemplary case to guide this reassessment.



## **(A brief) HISTORY OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LGBT MOVEMENT**

In September 2011, North Carolina remained the only Southern state without a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. However, the General Assembly that was sworn in for the 2011-2012 session was the state's first legislature since 1870 with a Republican majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives and supporters of "traditional" marriage soon seized their opportunity to advocate for one. Beginning in May 2011, both supporters and opponents of the proposed constitutional amendment began rallying their followers, creating advertisements, holding press conferences, and lobbying their state representatives. Both sides rallied thousands of followers during the five-month run-up to the September legislative vote. As will be discussed in more detail below, though the proposed ballot initiative failed to qualify for the ballot during the regular 2011 legislative session, it passed both chambers during the Fall 2011 special session after being voted out of committee by a single vote, setting up an eight-month electoral campaign that became known as Amendment One. As this section will show, the actions of the state's G.O.P. legislators galvanized a long-establishing network of organizations, many of whom had been active in the state for decades.

Importantly, North Carolina's movement actors worked within a specific sociopolitical context in which rural, faith, and communities of color were central to any and all organizational activities. And, though people in the South express greater opposition to LGBT issues generally than does the country at large, there has been increasing support for same-sex marriage, employment nondiscrimination legislation, and anti-bullying measures. For example, according to a recent Pew Research poll, "Attitudes toward gay marriage in the South are comparable to where the country as a whole was a decade ago" (2012), but far from where they were in 2003. As is true through the South, North Carolinians tend to emphasize family and religious values, an

ethos of an “imagined, affable familiarity” with friends and strangers alike, which creates what Gray, referencing cultural theorist Raymond Williams, has labeled a “structure of feeling” (2009, p. 5). These dynamics fostered a movement focused not only on LGBT equality, but also on faith, rural communities, and the importance of protecting families and children.

Before the 1990s, gay bars served as the meeting and organizing places for North Carolina’s LGBT communities. As one activist told me, “Bars were our early LGBT centers, especially in rural areas” (Personal recording, October 26, 2012). Echoing Epstein’s (1996) narrative surrounding the explosion in LGBT activism after the start of the AIDS epidemic, many of the state’s early LGBT organizations formed in direct response to the rise of the disease, though very few of them are still in existence today. For instance, in 1994, Marty Daughtry, aided by Mandy Carty, established Down East Pride, a nonprofit focused on organizing Greenville’s LGBT community and raising awareness of the region’s AIDS epidemic. While the group disbanded within a few years, Daughtry described it as a “metamorphosis” for the LGBT community, as an evolution beyond the bar scene that had dominated the community.

Though most early organizational efforts were short-lived, Southerners on New Ground, established in 1993, bucked this trend and is still in existence today. Co-founded by Mandy Carter, a San Francisco expat who relocated to North Carolina in 1982, S.O.N.G. works explicitly across issues of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, focusing specifically on the rural LGBT experience but steadfastly aware of the necessity of organizing across identity-based boundaries. As Carter explained, “My concern is how do we make sure that when you talk about LGBTQ justice, justice based on gender, justice based on race and ethnicity, justice based on ability, that we all understand that there are so many connections, that we’ve got to do this collectively” (Personal recording, October 26, 2012). To that end, S.O.N.G.’s work prioritizes

multi-issue activism and raising awareness of the intersections between these at times divided movements. While S.O.N.G. has participated in more explicitly political battles, such as the Amendment One campaign, the majority of their work has focused on training organizational actors and facilitating discussions between organizations, most often in rural and small communities, regarding the importance of both intersectional work and incorporating LGBTQ issues into broader justice movements.

Equality NC, on the other hand, was established in 1979 as a political action committee to support pro-equality candidates and to explicitly lobby the state's General Assembly for rights and protections. To this day, it is the only LGBT organization in the state dedicated to advocating for rights and justice within North Carolina's legislatures. Before the Amendment One campaign, the organization focused most of its organizing efforts in areas surrounding Raleigh, NC, eschewing work in rural areas of the state, in order to focus on raising money and building support among elite business and political actors which organizational actors could later leverage for political gain. To that end, Equality NC assisted law makers in the passage of the state's Inclusive School Violence Protect Act and the Healthy Youth Act, as well as the maintenance of the North Carolina's HIV/AIDS Prevention & Care Funding program.

In addition to S.O.N.G. and Equality NC, the state's PFLAG groups, formerly known as Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays, constitute the longest-standing LGBT-focused organizations in North Carolina. Beginning in the early 1990s, PFLAG groups formed in communities across the state, including Raleigh, Greensboro, Salisbury, Rocky Mount, and New Bern. Almost without exception, these groups were formed by individuals whose children had come out as LGBT, but who did not have access to resources or support networks. For instance, Linda and Max Stroup started PFLAG Greensboro in 1993 when their son came out, and have

remained active ever since, holding monthly meetings and working on issue education and advocacy efforts within their local community. In many rural areas throughout the state, local PFLAG groups constitute one of the few LGBT-focused resources in their communities, making them a haven for LGBT individuals as well as their friends and families.

While Campaign for Southern Equality (CSE) has been in existence for only a few years, the Asheville-based and regionally-focused organization has played a key role in bringing national visibility to North Carolina's LGBT movement. Led by Reverend Jasmine-Beach Ferrara, CSE advocates for full federal equality for Southern LGBT citizens through direct action protests. Through the organization's We Do campaigns, CSE mobilizes couples to visit their local Registers of Deeds to request marriage licenses in order to draw attention to the unequal status of LGBT couples in states where same-sex marriage is illegal, unconstitutional, or both. While advocating for federal equality through protests in state Registers of Deeds office might seem oxymoronic, their efforts have garnered significant national media attention and drawn attention to LGBT movement work in the South.

Before the North Carolina General Assembly voted to place Amendment One on the May 2014 primary ballot, according to several organizational actors, these groups operated in virtual silos, focused almost exclusively on their own work and their targeted communities. The necessity of fighting a statewide ballot initiative, however, changed this aspect of the state's movement dynamics. In order to build a large, well-funded campaign with the expertise and resources to fight Amendment One, the state's organizations came together, donating monetary resources and staff, and built a historically unprecedented coalition, including 75 North Carolina CEOs, the Raleigh City Council, activist organizations including Equality NC and HRC, and prominent African American religious figures such as Reverend T. Anthony Spearman of the

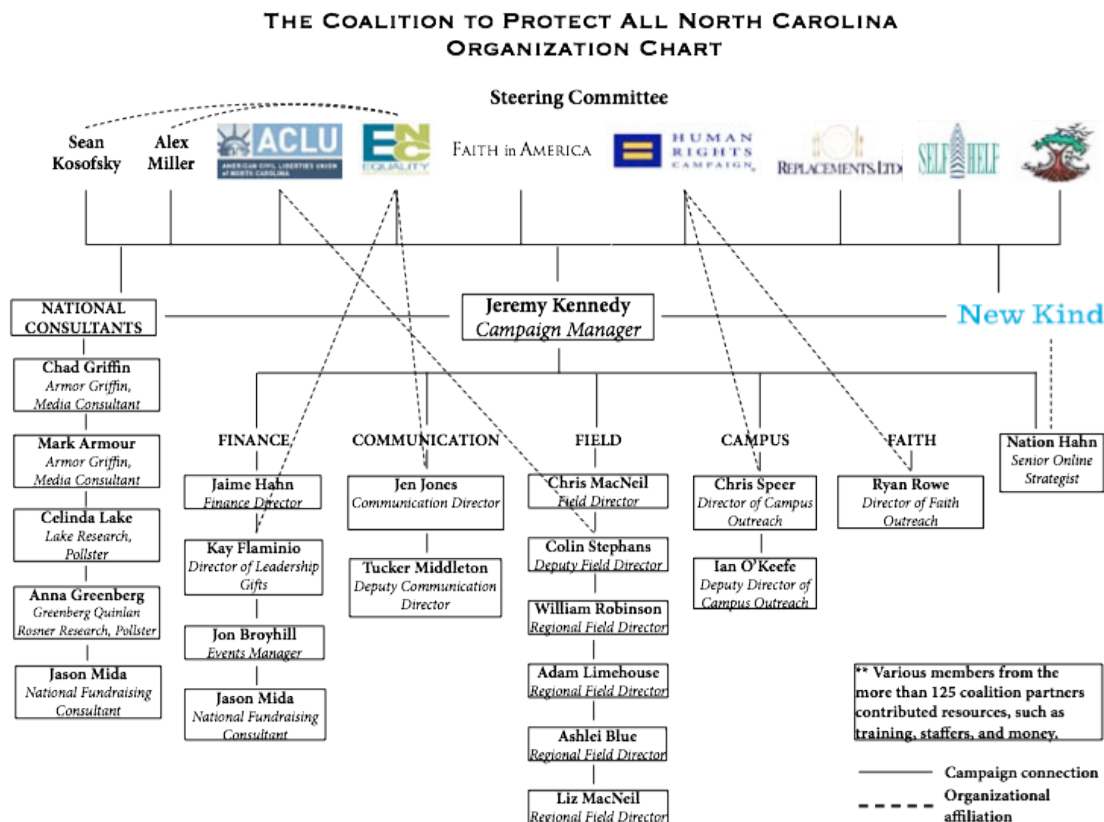
Clinton Tabernacle African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Reverend Reggie Longcrier of Exodus Missionary Outreach Church, and Reverend William Barber of the NAACP of North Carolina and Greenleaf Christian Church.

As mentioned above, in 2011 North Carolina remained the only Southern state without a constitutional amendment banning marriage equality. Beginning in May 2011, during the General Assembly's regular session, the battle to keep Amendment One off of the May 2012 primary ballot began in earnest. Equality NC's lobbyist, Alex Miller, worked within the legislature, cajoling individual lawmakers with arguments about harms to the state's reputation, and presenting arguments against the proposed language of the amendment. Equality NC, Campaign for Southern Equality, S.O.N.G., and several PFLAG groups began reaching out to their supporters via social media, gathering hundreds of them for a series of rallies against the General Assembly's proposed amendment. Concurrently, organizational actors from these groups began penning opinion pieces for newspapers in their local communities, many of which were published. The Washington, D.C.-based HRC, working with Equality NC, hired Ryan Rowe to organize faith communities against the amendment. Through Rowe's work, hundreds of pastors and ministers across the state came out publicly against the proposed ballot initiative, entering into LGBT movement work, many for the first time. This work continued from May to October 2011. Though the proposed constitutional amendment did not qualify for the ballot during the regular session, the leaders of the General Assembly called a special session for September 2011. During this session, despite the efforts of a broad and diverse coalition of LGBT, faith, business, and political leaders and activists, Amendment One was voted out of committee by a single vote and placed on the May 2012 primary ballot.

The orchestrators of the legislative battle became the orchestrators of the amendment campaign. In October 2011, on behalf of the amendment's opponents, Miller, Equality NC's lobbyist and interim executive director, and Sean Kosofosky, executive director of Blueprint NC, a coalition of progressive public policy, advocacy, and grassroots organizing nonprofits, assembled a steering committee to create and oversee the campaign against Amendment One, which became known as the Protect All NC Families campaign. Both Miller and Kosofsky participated in the legislative fight to keep the amendment off the state's ballot and so were keenly aware of the diverse communities that could be mobilized against the amendment. Further, both knew that the campaign must reach as many disparate communities and gather as many resources as possible. To that end, Miller and Kosofosky gathered a diverse group of representatives from national, regional, and local organizations and groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), Faith in America (FIA), S.O.N.G., Self-Help, Equality NC, and Replacements, Ltd.

Of these organizations, only HRC had significant experience coordinating an electoral campaign. To overcome this lack of expertise, the steering committee attempted to meld the resources of their respective organizations into a formal campaign structure (See Figure 1). Miller and Kosofsky interviewed veterans of other ballot referenda across the country, ultimately hiring Jeremy Kennedy, who had previously worked on Maine's 2008 referendum to overturn the legislative enactment of marriage equality. Steering committee organizations also sent their staffers with specialized expertise to the campaign. Equality NC "loaned" their entire staff, including communications director Jen Jones and director of leadership gifts (fundraising) Kay Flaminio. The HRC "contributed" director of faith outreach Ryan Rowe and director of campus outreach Chris Speer to the campaign. Kennedy hired Chris MacNeil as the field director and the

ACLU “loaned” Colin Stephens to serve as MacNeil’s deputy. Finally, the consultancy firm New Kind was retained to develop and execute the campaign’s social media strategy.



**Figure 1.1:** Organizational chart of the Protect All NC Families campaign

In conjunction with several national consultants and based on a series of polls enumerating the challenges facing the campaign, the steering committee created campaign messages intended to appeal to a broad swath of North Carolina voters. By and large, North Carolinians in 2011 did not support marriage equality. However, based on a proposal laid out by prominent Democratic pollster Celinda Lake, the steering committee adopted a message strategy that sought to persuade the state’s voters that despite their beliefs about marriage equality rights, this particular amendment was over broad and would produce a host of unintended

consequences. Specifically, the campaign developed a messaging strategy focused on potential harms to children, women, and unmarried couples (See Figure 2).

# VOTE AGAINST AMENDMENT ONE

On May 8, you will have the opportunity to vote against Amendment One.

**THE AMENDMENT IS POORLY WRITTEN.  
IT HAS HARMFUL UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES.**

But one thing is clear:

**IT WILL HURT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.**

The amendment reaches into the lives of hundreds of thousands of families across our state.

## THE AMENDMENT HARMS CHILDREN



All of our children  
deserve the same  
legal protection.

**Amendment One strips  
legal protections from  
children.**



A child of an unmarried parent  
could lose their health care and  
prescription drug coverage,  
putting the child's health at risk.



A child could be taken away from  
a committed parent who has loved  
them their entire life if something  
happens to the other parent.



It threatens existing child  
custody and visitation rights  
that are designed to protect  
the best interests of a child.

## THE AMENDMENT HARMS FAMILIES



The poorly written  
amendment goes  
too far.

**Marriage for gay and  
lesbian couples is  
already banned in our  
state. But the impact  
of the amendment is  
so broad that it snares  
not only gay and lesbian  
couples and their  
children in its legal net,  
but also any unmarried  
couple and their children.**



Amendment One would interfere  
with protections for unmarried  
couples to visit one another in the  
hospital and to make emergency  
medical and financial decisions if  
one partner is incapacitated.

## THE AMENDMENT HARMS UNMARRIED WOMEN



It could take away domestic  
violence protections for all  
unmarried women.

**The amendment  
is a dangerous step  
backward for domestic  
violence and stalking  
protection.**



Domestic violence protections  
could only apply to married  
couples.



In Ohio, where a similar amend-  
ment passed, this loophole has  
allowed convictions to be  
overturned.

## THE AMENDMENT HARMS UNMARRIED SENIORS



Seniors shouldn't have  
to choose between  
legal protections and  
the pensions they  
need to live.

**A single or widowed  
senior couple could  
be forced to marry  
to keep their legal  
protections, which  
would cause them to  
lose benefits such as  
pensions, health care,  
and social security.**

PROTECT CHILDREN FROM THE HARMS OF THIS AMENDMENT.

**PROTECT ALL NC FAMILIES** | **VOTE AGAINST on May 8.**

[protectallncfamilies.org](http://protectallncfamilies.org)

PAID FOR BY THE COALITION TO PROTECT NORTH CAROLINA FAMILIES

Figure 1.2: Protect All NC Families one-sheet



This decision to adopt a messaging strategy focused on the proposed amendment's potential harms to families, women, and children created a dualistic environment in which campaign staffers and LGBT activists maneuvered between a protected invisibility and a symbolic annihilation. However, choosing to focus on these particular harms also produced a political milieu in which LGBT activists could potentially ask for the support of all North Carolinians regardless of their feelings on marriage equality, providing necessary cover to a campaign that needed to convince hundreds of thousands of opponents of same-sex marriage to vote against an amendment that banned it. As the following chapters will argue, the Amendment One campaign allowed a broad and diverse coalition of progressive, civil rights, faith, and rural publics to coalesce, to evolve on issues affecting the LGBT community, and to develop a broad base of supporters new to activist politics.

The first deployment of this messaging strategy came during the campaign's 5-week *Race to the Ballot* micro-campaign, which produced the majority of Protect All NC Families' legacy and social media coverage during the early part of the Amendment One fight. Led by Equality NC's Jones and Speer, a small group of campaign staffers and documentarians organized a series of daily events from January 27 to March 2, 2012, in urban and rural cities from Asheville to Wilmington. In all this group traveled more than 2,500 miles across the state, visited 28 counties, and organized over 75 events which were attended by nearly 10,000 people, and raised more than \$100,000 for the campaign. More importantly, as will be shown in later chapters, these events helped to establish ties between movement organizations in areas all across the state.

Following the Race to the Ballot campaign, the Protect All NC Families campaign began in earnest. For example, Ryan Rowe visited dozens of faith communities to speak about the

amendment and to mobilize supporters against it. Jones organized a series of Speaker's Bureau trainings in some of the same areas she visited during Race to the Ballot and taught supporters how to talk to their friends, neighbors, and families, many of whom did not support LGBT equality. Speer targeted campus groups, helping them to organize voter registration drivers and mobilize students to vote. Kennedy attended a series of fundraisers with high-dollar donors, fielded near constant calls from press across the state, organized a series of weekly meetings with national consultants and political bloggers, and orchestrated several press conferences to introduce campaign messages. And, importantly for the long-term trajectory of the state's LGBT movement, the NAACP's Reverend Barber, through a series of rallies and press conferences, emerged as a vital coalition partner and spokesperson for the concerns of LGBT communities specifically and progressive politics generally.

In the process of detailing how the Amendment One campaign came together, I argue that we should conceptualize these organizational efforts in terms of convening and fostering multiple and diverse movement publics. All told, the campaign raised more than two million dollars, aired dozens of television and radio ads across the state, and mobilized more than 800,000 people to vote against the amendment. Nonetheless, North Carolina's constitution was amended by 61% of voters to expressly ban marriage equality. However, as the following chapters will show, while the Protect All NC Families campaign lost, it acted as a catalyzing event, allowing the state's LGBT movement to lose forward.

In the process of documenting the movement in North Carolina, this dissertation seeks to bring together and make contributions to a number of different literatures on the LGBT movement, political communication, and social movements. First, studying the contemporary movement in a Southern context provided an opportunity to reevaluate the LGBT movement

through a more nuanced, less urban-centric (Hirshman, 2012) and less religiously antagonistic (Fetner, 2008; Barton, 2012) lens to show that the movement's publics sit in church pews and live in rural spaces (Wilcox, 2003). Second, though political communication scholars have begun to examine the relationship between networked media, electoral campaigning, and social movements (Chadwick, 2007; Karpf, 2012; Kreiss, 2012), the role of networked media has been understudied with respect to state level electoral campaigning. And, while Earl and Kimport's (2011) important work on web activism and its effect on collective mobilization has shown that the Internet allows activists to create, organize, and participate in collective action at significantly reduced costs, as well as to act cooperatively despite a lack of physical proximity, we currently lack research regarding the applicability and effects of these communicative technologies on more narrowly defined geographic and cultural communities. Finally, by charting the development and strategic deployment of frames targeted to convene specific movement publics, this dissertation adds to understandings of social movements' "identity deployment" (Bernstein, 1997; Ferree, 2003) efforts by showing how multiple identities and frames can be deployed within a single campaign or movement organization to reach a range of audiences with varied social and cultural backgrounds.

## **Methods**

This dissertation grew from a more delimited project: an ethnographic study of the Protect All NC Families campaign. In the course of my fieldwork, I found a host of interesting and contradictory dynamics at play within the LGBT movement in North Carolina. The state's politics have been described as "neither red nor blue, but a shade of deep Dixie purple" (Fausset, 2014):

North Carolina is a state where the Cook Out, the popular Greensboro-based fast food chain, prints "THANK YOU GOD FOR AMERICA" on its soda cups, and where in

Durham, Merge Records, an independent music label, nurtures a stable of vanguard rock 'n' roll bands that help define the evolving aesthetic of global hipsterdom. It is a state that could elect a smooth-talking populist Democrat like John Edwards to the Senate, and also an ultraconservative Republican like Senator Jesse Helms, who died in 2008 (Fausset, 2014).

While I expected to see movement organizing and mobilization in the Durhams of North Carolina during the campaign, I was surprised by the movement work being done amongst the Helms voters during and after the campaign. I grew interested in the question of what effects the Amendment One campaign had on movement activity, organizing, and visibility in communities across the state, and specifically in rural and faith communities, before, during, *and* after the vote?

Focusing on the communicative and organizational efforts of key state and regional movement actors and organizations, this dissertation builds upon a diverse body of work that looks across discrete election cycles and social movement campaigns to analyze the work of networks of influential movement actors. For example, Kreiss (2012) argues that the Democratic Party's successful adoption of new media tools during President Obama's presidential campaign was the result of organizational and technical innovations that emerged during Howard Dean's failed 2004 primary campaign and which were subsequently disseminated across Democratic politics via a group of key Internet staffers. As Kreiss (2012) notes, this analytical and methodological approach of studying liminal spaces between campaigns and organizations opens a "black box" of tools the shape political communication. While this dissertation does not focus on Democratic electoral campaigning, it adopts the analytical and methodological approach of following key actors before, during, and, as importantly, after election cycles in order to uncover the political, social, and cultural work that takes place between and around particular campaigns.

This dissertation focuses on the Amendment One campaign to guide the identification and analysis of the work of a group of influential movement actors working within North Carolina, the majority of whom were a part of the Protect All NC Families' campaign staff or coalition (an important exception is CSE whose board voted not to join). These actors held differing commitments and loyalties both to the campaign and to their own social movement work, and they aptly illustrate the temporary and shifting nature of the alliances that form during campaigns but that are transformed after election day. Though most work surrounding the intersection of social movements and electoral politics focuses on particular campaigns or social movement work, this dissertation follows movement actors as they came together and moved through both the Protect All NC Families campaign *and* its aftermath in an effort to explore the power of a catalyzing event to transform the subsequent work of a social movement.

The socio-historical environment of North Carolina will be of particular interest to this study. While Southerners tend to be more rural, more religious, more racially diverse, and more politically conservative than the rest of the country, the size of North Carolina's LGBT population is on par with other regions. However, to date, historical studies of the LGBT movement and its collective identity focus on urban areas to the virtual exclusion of rural communities. For instance, D'Emilio (1998) argues that the anonymity of urban centers was a prerequisite for the development of LGBT collective identity from World War II to the Stonewall Riots. Bérubé (1990) similarly notes that the migration of individuals from rural areas to urban centers during the Second World War allowed for the formation of LGBT collective identity, while Fejes (2008) focuses on early ballot initiative battles to secure equal legal protections in major cities, such as Miami and Seattle. In sum, these works support the stereotype that LGBT communities are monolithically urban.

While scholars tend to ignore LGBT movement work in non-urban areas, several studies focused on rural areas inform this work. Most importantly, Gray's (2009) ethnography of queer rural Appalachian youth as they construct their LGBT identities along the boundaries of public spaces and through the affordances of the Internet provides a solid foundation upon which to examine the rural queer experience. As Gray (2009) argues, "rural youth negotiate queer desires and embodiments under different logistical realities" (p. 5). While this dissertation does not focus exclusively on identity construction, it shares Gray's perspective that there is no singular gay culture, that the spaces in which LGBT movement work occurs shapes the type of work that is possible and effectual.

To explore these dynamics, I present evidence largely drawn from extensive ethnographic fieldwork. According to Schatz (2009), there are two core principles of ethnography: participant observation and an ethnographic sensibility. The former requires the immersion of the research within a community, and the latter focuses the researcher's gaze on people's own meanings of their actions and environments. Collectively, these principles imbue ethnography with its power to generate the type of data researchers can use to question generalities and produce innovative epistemological perspectives and frameworks. For example, Ashforth's (2005) *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa* begins with the assumption that witchcraft is real, allowing the author to pose the question, "Why has the government not taken steps to protect innocent people in South Africa from witches?" This question, posed from the vantage point of members of the community, provides an analytically distinct perspective from which to understand some South Africans' reactions to their sociopolitical environment. Essentially, by focusing on people's own meanings, Ashforth (2005) shifts his perspective from seeing the

management of witches as a religious issue to an issue of public safety. This shift privileges his subjects' perspectives and allows him to question accepted understandings of the issue.

Several traditions within the social sciences have utilized ethnographic methodologies to study contentious politics, journalism, and political communication. While generally agreeing that participant observation and an ethnographic sensibility are uniform features of ethnography, differences emerge as to the degree to which scholars should be enmeshed in their field site. For example, after spending 12 months living in Fargo, ND, Ginsburg (1998) sought to understand the modern day abortion debate through immersion in a single town as movement actors navigated and contested the opening of an abortion clinic. To contextualize the activities of the people, activists, and organizations she observed, Ginsburg (1998) provided historical material that situated their actions within the broader, national abortion debate.

While Ginsburg utilized historical materials to create a distance between herself and the contemporary social debates she was observing, other scholars recognize their status as insiders in the communities or movements under investigation, but view this positionality as a positive. For instance, Gitlin (1980) leverages his insider knowledge of and experience with the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the anti-war movement of the 1960s to explore the interactions between news media and social movement organizations, ultimately leading to the destruction of the SDS. As the leaders of SDS began to understand what actions led to increased mainstream media attention and to adapt their tactics to draw it, rifts began to form within the organization, as well as the movement more generally. As Gitlin's (1980) study illustrates, insider positionality provides insights into organizational dynamics and points of contention that a study of media content alone could never replicate.

Other scholars of contentious politics and social movements have taken a broader perspective in conceptualizing their field sites. Sobieraj (2011) sought to understand “media-centered activism” through an examination of dozens of social movement organizations and interest groups during key moments of political opening. By ethnographically observing these groups at the 2000 and 2004 Republican and Democratic National Conventions, as well as the 2000 presidential debates, Sobieraj (2011) found that these groups structured their activities during such events to garner media attention (which they rarely got) at the expense of building relationships with new and current supporters (who they ignored). While she acknowledges the peculiar and fractured perspective that this conceptualization of her field site produced, Sobieraj’s method highlights the analytic power of using a broad perspective to understand the ways in which social movement and interest groups operate within the political field.

Fewer scholars, however, have utilized ethnographic methods to investigate aspects of political communication. The field’s flagship journal, *Political Communication*, rarely publishes qualitative work, and the field of political science has generally relied on quantitative methods, such as experimental design, surveys, regression models, and game theory (Karpf, Kreiss, & Nielsen, 2013). As the aforementioned work shows and this dissertation argues, political communication and social movement scholars can benefit from ethnographic methodologies for a number of reasons. Ethnography is well-suited to the study of power. As Kubik (2009) notes, political power is typically situated in multiple layers within complex structures. Participant observation and immersion in such structures allows for an examination of the workings of power within politics and social movements. Further, ethnography can help scholars reconcile normative theory with the realities on the ground, highlighting the disconnections between theory and practice and leading researchers toward more nuanced understandings. Even more,



ethnography can highlight the lack of conformity within political and social movement organizations, illustrating the reality that contention exists both within and between parties, organizations, and movements.

Drawing on the work of these scholars, this dissertation utilizes ethnography to follow the work of a key set of LGBT movement and organizational actors through a ballot initiative campaign and in the months following the vote in order to trace their organizational, mobilization, and communicative efforts both during and after the Amendment One campaign. Specifically, through campaign manager Jeremy Kennedy, I gained access to the entire campaign coalition and was invited to attend weekly campaign staff and national consultant meetings throughout March and April of 2012, as well as weekly calls with national political bloggers. Through observations of these meetings and phone calls and informal interviews with campaign staffers, movement organizational actors, and movement supporters, I inductively broadened my work to include additional field sites and a diverse group of organizations. These physical sites of field observation included the campaign's headquarters, the offices of New Kind, a Raleigh, NC-based consultancy providing services to the campaign, and steering committee members such as Equality NC, allied civil society organizations and churches, and field offices across the state. I also observed the various events these groups hosted across the state to reach legacy and social media producers, faith, rural, college, and LGBT communities, and general public audiences. These events included conference calls, rallies in churches, early voter efforts on college campuses, and debates by campaign surrogates. This fieldwork surrounding the Protect All NC Families campaign culminated with observations of the campaign's "war room" on Election Day and "victory party" on the night of May 8, 2012. For more than a year after Election Day, I continued to follow the work of several key LGBT organizations, including

Equality NC, CSE, Neighbors for Equality, Mitchell County GSA, and Eastern Carolina Equality, attending town hall-style meetings, direct actions in county Register of Deeds offices, Pride events, conferences, and fundraising galas across the state. (For a complete list of field work sites, see Appendix A).

I supplement these data sources with in-depth interviews with local, state, regional, and nationally-based movement actors (for a complete list of interviews, see Appendix B). Additionally, I qualitatively analyzed a purposive sample of 1,108 geographically representative (Riffe, et al., 1998) legacy media stories, op-eds, and letters to the editor published between January 1, 2011 and January 31, 2013 and focused on either “Amendment One,” the “gay and lesbian movement,” the “marriage amendment,” “House Bill 777,” “Senate Bill 106,” or the “LGBT movement” from North Carolina-based newspaper and television outlets, including *The Charlotte Observer*, *News & Record*, *Winston-Salem Journal*, *The Daily Reflector*, *Sun Journal*, *News & Observer*, *The Herald Sun*, *Fayetteville Observer*, *StarNews*, and *Hickory Daily Record* (see Table 1.1). I did the same with four representative national media outlets, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Los Angeles Times* (Earl, et al., 2004). Further, I analyzed the email, Facebook, Twitter, and website communications of the Protect All NC Families campaign, as well as Facebook communications from the following local, state, regional, and national activists groups: Equality NC, Southerners on New Ground (S.O.N.G.), CSE, ACLU-NC, HRC, Mitchell County GSA, Salisbury Pride, the Freedom Center for Social Justice, PFLAG Rocky Mount, and Catawba Valley Pride.

| <b>NEWSPAPER</b>             | <b>Location</b> | <b>Population</b> | <b>Number of articles</b> |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Charlotte Observer</i>    | Charlotte       | 792,862           | 129                       |
| <i>The Daily Reflector</i>   | Greenville      | 89,130            | 11                        |
| <i>Sun Journal</i>           | New Bern        | 30,242            | 10                        |
| <i>Winston-Salem Journal</i> | Winston-Salem   | 236,441           | 114                       |
| <i>Fayetteville Observer</i> | Fayetteville    | 204,408           | 84                        |
| <i>The Herald Sun</i>        | Durham          | 245,475           | 89                        |
| <i>News &amp; Observer</i>   | Raleigh         | 431,746           | 339                       |
| <i>News &amp; Record</i>     | Greensboro      | 279,639           | 206                       |
| <i>StarNews</i>              | Wilmington      | 112,067           | 34                        |
| <i>Hickory Daily Record</i>  | Hickory         | 40,361            | 27                        |
| <i>Mitchell News Journal</i> | Mitchell County | 15, 328           | 41                        |

**Table 1.1:** List of North Carolina newspapers qualitatively analyzed

As the fieldwork for this project progressed, I quickly realized that I was part of the dynamics of the LGBT movement in the South. I was born and raised in Huntington, WV, population 49,138; I grew up in a Southern Baptist church in which homosexuality was categorically condemnable; I am the lone progressive in a close-knit and supportive family of political conservatives; and, I am an out and vocal lesbian. As with many Southern LGBT people, I am most at home in small towns, amongst people who live by an ethos of familiarity and affability toward friends and strangers alike. And, as with many Southern LGBT people, I have engaged both supportive and antagonistic family, friends, and peers in seemingly innumerable conversations regarding my own sexuality as well as the concerns of the broader LGBT movement. Although I did not realize it at the time, I have been speaking to people where they are for years.

In recognizing that these conversations were happening on a much larger scale within North Carolina's LGBT movement, I saw an opportunity to combine my academic training with

the insights of my personal background. As a social scientist, my aim has been to produce a well-grounded piece of scholarship that will speak to a range of literatures in mass communication, social movement studies, political science, and new media studies. And, as a queer Appalachian, I hope to use this platform to challenge existing understandings of the LGBT movement as exclusively urban and secular, highlight oft-ignored movement actors and dynamics, and offer insight for the movement going forward.

Aside from my identity as an LGBT person in the South, while in the field I developed a relationship with Jen Jones, Director of Communications for both the Protect All NC Families campaign and Equality NC. After meeting during the campaign and beginning a relationship several months later, we married in Washington, D.C., this past August. As numerous scholars have noted, engaging in intimate relationships with informants in the field provides both advantages and restrictions with regard to what the researcher sees and the conclusions she draws (For example, see Dubisch, 1995; Goode, 1999; Irwin, 2006). In an effort to limit my own partiality with regards to Jones' role in the North Carolina movement, I have corroborated any information acquired from our in-depth interviews with insights from other relevant movement actors.

## CHAPTER 2: THE HYBRID MEDIA SYSTEM AT THE HYPER-LOCAL LEVEL

### Introduction

#### Episode 2.1

*Mitchell News-Journal*, Bakersville, NC, February 1, 2012

“The Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance’s return to Bakersville on Monday for a moderated town hall meeting at the Historic Courthouse could have hardly been more different than their initial gathering in November at the library across the street.

Last time, supporters of the upcoming ballot referendum, which if passed would amend the North Carolina constitution to define heterosexual marriage as the only domestic legal union recognized by the state, protested across the street in front of the courthouse with prayers, songs and picket signs.

This time there was peace at least, if not necessarily love and understanding as well. Those in favor and those against the amendment met together in the same room for an open discussion of how the vote on May 8 could affect unmarried couples across the state, gay and straight alike.

Audience members in support of the amendment were less confrontational than before in expressing their Biblical, scriptural objections to homosexuality.

‘I believe our nation was founded on God, and that’s what I live by,’ Rev. Cass Buchanan of Freedom Baptist said. ‘You can doctor it up how you want, but we have a word that tells us how to live. Homosexuality is a sin. God loves everybody. We’re here to tell you that God loves you, and can change you if you’ll let Him. Sin is sin, and wrong in God’s eyes.’

The six-member panel opposed to the amendment listened and said they respected the differing opinions put forward.

‘I respect your beliefs. God does love all of us, and the Constitution is supposed to protect all of us,’ Equality N.C. attorney Jen Jones said. ‘We don’t have to agree. I think it’s so powerful to be in the same room talking about this.’

Bakersville is a town of 456 people nestled in the mountains of western North Carolina.

The Appalachian town is home to a thriving arts community and a number of conservative,

fundamentalist Christian churches. As noted in the *Mitchell News-Journal*, the Mitchell County

Gay Straight Alliance, in conjunction with the Protect All NC Families campaign against

Amendment One, organized an event to bring both supporters and opponents together to talk

about the amendment. For an hour and a half, more than 100 supporters and opponents of Amendment One engaged in a dialogue about the amendment, about the LGBT movement, and about sin and salvation. The event was covered on the front page of the county's weekly newspaper. The organizers quickly produced a 20-minute video featuring highlights of the discussion and posted it to YouTube. Participants tweeted and posted comments to Facebook, many of which were shared by dozens and sometimes hundreds of followers. While the conversation may or may not have changed the views of many in the audience, it made the LGBT community more visible and asserted its presence both in the town, as well as within a broader social media network of LGBT publics.

This episode encapsulates the complex and interconnected media environment LGBT activists in North Carolina leveraged to speak to the social, political, and cultural realities of myriad Southern and national audiences. Attuned to the various publics within the state and aware of the media outlets that reached them, activists strategically employed various media platforms to assert their visibility within their communities, connect with supporters, and network with allied individuals and organizations. The conceptualization of the hybrid media system, defined as a system “built upon interactions among older and newer media logics – where logics are defined as technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms – in the reflexively connected fields of media and politics” (Chadwick, 2013, p. 4), affords an analytical lens through which to reflect on the complexity of contemporary media strategies deployed by movement actors at the state, local, and hyper-local levels.

Most scholarship on media and movements focuses on a single medium rather than the interplay between multiple media platforms, movement actors, and audiences (for an exception, see Gitlin, 1980). This chapter takes a different approach, applying the analytical lens of the

hybrid media system to the study of movements' media communications and providing a more empirically rich description of contemporary media strategies. In doing so, it advances beyond most social movement scholarship that recognizes *either* the continued importance of professional media (Gamson, 1998) *or* the ascendance of digital media within movement organizing (Stein, 2009), but that fails to integrate these complementary realities. For instance, in studying the means through which activists from ideologically diverse organizations sought to gain the attention of the wider public during presidential elections, Sobieraj (2011) focused entirely on their efforts to court professional media attention. Conversely, Earl and Kimport's (2011) work centers on activists' utilization of Internet-enabled tools only, with no consideration of their interaction with other media. In this chapter, however, I argue that broadening the scope of inquiry to include various media draws attention to such overly simplistic and ultimately false divisions between media and actors and moves us toward a richer understanding of the ways movements interact with media.

Even more, this chapter offers a novel study of state-level movement activity at the intersection of electoral politics. Despite a growing literature on the Internet's effect on national electoral campaigns (Kreiss, 2012), national advocacy organizations (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012; Karpf, 2012), and national nonprofit organizations (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Nah & Saxton, 2012; Vromen & Coleman, 2013), the role of social media has been understudied in regard to state-level electoral and movement dynamics. Further, while Earl and Kimport's (2011) important work on web activism and its effect on collective mobilization has shown that the Internet allows activists to create, organize, and participate in collective action at significantly reduced costs, as well as to act cooperatively despite a lack of physical proximity, we currently lack research regarding the extent to which most social movement

activists and organizations utilize digital media (Stein, 2009), as well as the ways these same actors appropriate digital media for offline organizing (Kang, 2012).

This chapter proceeds in three parts. I first discuss the literature surrounding professional media and social movements, the role of digital media in social movement organizing, and hybrid media systems in order to situate the actions of actors working at the hyper-local level to create and leverage a complex media system in order to make their community visible to multiple publics. I then provide three empirical sections that chronologically detail the execution of a group's media strategies from the perspective of the activists themselves operating on the ground in a small North Carolina town and trace the development of their interconnections with professional media actors, social media audiences, and state-level movement actors through a case study of the Mitchell County GSA. I conclude with a discussion of how analyzing this case through the lens of a hybrid media system complicates our understanding of the contemporary "movement-media dance" (Gitlin, 2003, p.17) and the methodological means through which we can understand it.

## **Literature Review**

### Professional Media and Movements

The majority of mass communication scholarship on social movements focuses explicitly on content in professional media outlets or movement publications. While movement scholars in fields such as sociology and political science tend to leave the actual content unexamined while asserting the relevance of it for the development and maintenance of collective identity, perhaps the most compelling area of study in the mass communication literature focuses on the content of media generated by social movements. For instance, Streitmatter's (1995) study of *One, Mattachine Review*, and *The Ladder* showed that these 1950s gay and lesbian publications



provided a voice to hidden and mostly isolated individuals and helped to nationalize a movement that had historically been centered in large urban areas such as New York and San Francisco.

Other literature in this tradition focuses on analysis of coverage of social problems or protests generally and speaks to the overarching ways that the professional media cover social movement actors. Kensicki (2004) examined the framing of diverse social problems, including coverage of pollution, poverty, and incarceration, to show that professional media outlets rarely reported on the specific causes or responsible agents. Similarly, Thrall (2006) content analyzed professional media coverage of more than 200 interest groups and correlated the amount and type of coverage these groups received with their resource levels, finding that resource-poor groups receive infrequent and more negative coverage than resource-rich groups. Finally, Boyle, McLeod, and Armstrong's (2012) content analysis of professional media coverage of 40 years of protest group activity revealed that groups employing protest tactics that more directly challenge the status quo receive more critical coverage.

While this type of work exploring larger trends in coverage of social movements and their activities provides a solid foundation on which to understand professional media coverage of movements generally, these scholars generally bracket media and movement processes, and the social, political, and cultural realities in which the content is created. The sociological literature, on the other hand, more often incorporates these features of the media-movement dynamic. For instance, Amenta, Caren, Olasky, and Stobaugh (2009) found that media coverage was highly correlated with the size of the social movement, as well as the amount of disruptive activity engaged in by the social movement. Roscigno and Danaher's (2001) study of 1930s Southern textile workers examines a moment when the strikers leveraged radio, incorporating movement information in news messages and song lyrics, in order to communicate their

strategies, tactics, and collective identity to a broader audience. Similarly, Andrews and Biggs (2006) argue that the news media were crucial for spreading information about the 1960s sit-ins that moved through the American South. And, in their study of the German Radical Right, Koopman and Olzak (2004) argue that these right-wing groups utilize violent tactics to the degree that they gain public visibility and resonance. In short, these scholars argue that interactions between social movements and political or corporate authorities is mediated.

Other scholars have noted a relationship between movement actors' understanding of media processes and the strategic development and delivery of movement messages. For example, within literature on the LGBT movement, Bernstein (1997) illustrates the balancing act social movement actors and organizations must engage in when they find themselves engaged in electoral battles. Through an examination of several LGBT rights campaigns, Bernstein demonstrated the ways in which movement actors utilize various identities in movement communications in order to mobilize supporters, convert political opponents, and garner positive media attention for their cause. Stone (2012) provides a broader analysis of these dynamics in an examination of more than 100 anti-LGBT ballot initiatives, arguing that some constituencies within the movement (ex. transgender people, communities of color) are symbolically annihilated and/or "othered" when movements and campaigns choose frames and messages that resonate with mainstream, professional media. However, whereas Bernstein (1997) and Stone (2012) examined campaigns before the ascendance of social media, this chapter focuses on the interactions between activists, professional media, and social media to reveal the ways activists navigate our contemporary media landscape armed with the affordances provided by social media tools.

Not only can a movement's relationship with professional media affect its messaging, but at times it can alter the entire trajectory of the movement. Gitlin's *The Whole World is Watching* stands as the seminal work examining the connection between media and movements. Focused on the New Left during the 1960s, Gitlin's book argues that the movement's interactions with the mainstream mass media shaped its collective identity, created factions within its organizations, and transformed its strategic goals. According to Gitlin, the movement's goals centered on gaining the media spotlight, forcing the actors involved to contort the movement's messaging and tactics to fit the frames already present in the media. Sobieraj (2011) illustrates a similar phenomenon, but does so through an examination of dozens of interest groups and social movement organizations that convened around the 2000 and/or 2004 Republican and Democratic national conventions. Explaining that these organizations were focused almost entirely on leveraging the political openings provided by the conventions into media coverage of their causes, Sobieraj argues that this media-centrism adversely affected the ability of organizations to form alliances with other like-minded groups and to meaningfully interact with potential supporters present at the convention.

### Social Media and Movements

While an interdisciplinary cadre of scholars have taken important steps to untangle the connections between social movements and social media, the increasingly ubiquitous reach of the Internet into nearly all facets of our political and cultural lives have led researchers to call for further work (see Stein, 2009). For example, as one group of scholars has noted, "As the Internet becomes an evermore pervasive feature of modern life, questions about the impact of Internet usage on the dynamics of social movement processes become more important and more controversial" (Earl, Kimport, Prieto, Rush, & Reynoso, 2010, p. 441). Arguably, this is never

more pertinent for social movements than when considering the ways social media has (or has not) provided a forum for non-elites to command attention within the broader public sphere.

Access to social media tools offers social movement actors pathways to increase their visibility and voice, freed in part from professional media gatekeepers. As Thompson (2005) writes:

In this new world of mediated visibility, the making visible of actions and events is not just the outcome of leakage in systems of communication and information flow that are increasingly difficult to control: it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be a weapon in the struggles they wage in their day-to-day lives (p. 31).

Further, new media technologies have freed visibility from historical, spatial, and temporal limitations, creating a “more intensive, more extensive and less controllable” information environment (Thompson, 2005, p. 48). Consequently, individuals connected via the Internet have been empowered to assert their voices within the broader public sphere (Tierney, 2013). Freelon and Karpf (2014) provide empirical support for this notion, at least within the Twittersphere, showing that non-political elites and non-elites were impactful network hubs for political conversation during the 2012 U.S. Presidential debates.

Additionally, scholars have argued that the Internet provides activists with new means to reach supporters and share information at little to no cost (Earl & Kimport, 2011). While acknowledging that social media use was “superimposed” on existing personal ties, Tufekci and Wilson (2012) argued that Facebook and Twitter increased “citizens’ ability to document and share, by greatly increasing the odds that misconduct by authorities would become widely known, and by overcoming barriers to individual political participation and the coordination of collective action” (p. 367). Other scholars have found that Facebook creates a space for activists to share information and explicate their politics, though this information sharing and deliberation

did not affect the organizations' decision-making processes (Mercea, 2013; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014).

Other scholars have theorized that social media are deeply entangled in the physical world of social interaction (Kang, 2012). Penney and Dadas (2014) analyzed Twitter use during offline protests, focusing on the ways activists utilized the service's tweeting and retweeting functions. Harlowe's (2011) study of the 2009 Guatemalan justice movement showed that not only did movement actors leverage Facebook to spread information without concern for time and geography, but users were able to leverage the social medium to mobilize offline movement activities, including protests. Conversely, however, Harlow and Guo (2014) found that, in organizing immigrant activists, social media worked most effectively to raise awareness of an issue but were less successful in motivating people to participate in offline events and protests.

Despite these impressive and interdisciplinary literatures on the interactions between both professional and social media and social movements, scholars have rarely examined both professional and social media platforms within the same movement, protest, or campaign. As Mattoni and Treré (2014) observe, "As far as the mainstream media literature is concerned, scholars have addressed the radio (Roscigno & Danaher, 2004), the television (McLeod & Detenber, 1999) or the press (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Kielbowicz & Scherer, 1986) but seldom the interaction between movements and several forms of media" (p. 254). Additionally, these scholars note a tendency among scholars to focus on "the latest technological platform as a fetish" when studying social movements (p. 255). Collectively, these biases within the literature on media and social movements decontextualize the interconnections between media, movements, and audiences, as well as oversimplify the complex media landscape movement actors strategically engage with to further their causes.

## The Hybrid Media System

Whether working at the transnational or the hyper-local level, movement actors utilize an array of communicative tools, including face-to-face encounters, personal networks, placards, yard signs, newspapers, radio, television, email, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more, to speak to supporters, opponents, politicians, media, and publics of varied political, social, and cultural leanings. And, in our social media age, all of these constituencies can speak back. Recognizing this reality, and in an effort to preserve this complexity, this chapter adopts Chadwick's (2013) analytical approach, viewing the movement activities of North Carolina LGBT activists through the lens of the hybrid media system concept. As Chadwick (2013) argues,

Hybridity offers a powerful mode of thinking about media and politics because it foregrounds complexity, interdependence, and transition. Hybrid thinking rejects simple dichotomies, nudging us away from "either/or" patterns of thought and toward "not only, but also" patterns of thought. It draws attention to flux, inbetweenness, the interstitial, and the liminal. It reveals how older and newer media logics in the fields of media and politics blend, overlap, intermesh, and coevolve. Hybrid thinking thus provides a useful disposition for studying how political actors, publics, and media of all kinds interact (p. 4).

According to Chadwick (2013), older media technologies such as radio and print newspapers operated by the logics of transmission and reception. Essentially, media producers spoke and audiences listened. However, in our contemporary media world, the newer logics of circulation, recirculation, and negotiation generated by digital and social media are complicating our understandings of the ways media systems operate and the actors who wield power. While elite media producers continue to exert immense power, grassroots activists now have an increased ability to intervene in the production, distribution, and framing of information. This ability has fundamentally altered the ways in which communicative power is leveraged and created contingency where little existed before.

Chadwick (2013) argues that contemporary power in political communication is exercised by those actors able to produce, disseminate, and leverage information to their own ends across myriad platforms. Further, since these actors operate in a dynamic, contingent environment, scholars must proceed prudently when attempting to predict the behaviors of actors based on past goals and previously used messaging strategies. Though Chadwick (2013) is focused on political communication at the national level, his approach will benefit analyses in “any context in which it is important to try to make sense of political communication by exploring the interactions between older and newer media logics” (p. 22), where logics are defined as “technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms” (p. 4).

Bringing Chadwick’s (2013) hybrid media system into the study of social movements serves multiple purposes. First, by applying it in a hyper-local context, this chapter will add empirical support to an analytical approach that has to date been applied to national issues and media (Freelon & Karpf, 2014; Jungherr, 2014; Kreiss, forthcoming; Chadwick & Collister, 2014). Second, by bringing the hybrid media system more explicitly into the study of social movements, this chapter will introduce a lens through which scholars can consider the multi-faceted and dynamic contexts in which social movement actors work without having to minimize the complexity by studying only one facet of the media-movement dynamic. Third, through a focus on multiple media, this chapter will show the ways in which movement activists, from fledgling grassroots groups to established state-level organizations, strategically deploy identity across media in order to connect with a multitude of audiences. And, finally, this analytical strategy will illustrate the complex communicative strategies employed by grassroots activists working in hyper-local environments normally hidden from scholarly view.

## Findings

### Entering the Hybrid Media System

In the western part of the state, between the liberal strongholds of Asheville and Boone, NC, surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains, is Mitchell County, population 15,579. The county is served its mass media news by the *Mitchell News-Journal*, a weekly newspaper, and a single AM station, reflecting the unique, delimited media environment local activists negotiated to further their goals. Bakersville is the county seat and one of ten townships in the county. Though an hour's drive along a short series of county roads connects the three cities, Mitchell County's conservatism seemingly negates their proximity, creating wide – and for most residents, welcome – gulfs between the towns' citizens. While Asheville is home to more than 20 breweries, Mitchell County was dry until 2009. Though Boone's 17,774 residents rival the population of Mitchell County, its churches do not. Boone has less than 20; Mitchell County has more than 60. A quick reading of the paper's letters to the editor gives an idea of the social leanings of the town. Search for homosexual, gay, or LGBT on the paper's website and you will see headlines for letters to the editor, such as “New Testament is against homosexuality, also” (Turner, H., 2012, May 9), “As Christians we do not think about what God ordains, we know” (Basini, S. F., 2013, July 31), and “Democrats are fulfilling promises for homosexuals and abortionists” (Reilly, B., 2009, February 4). Read through them and you will find passages, such as:

This is the first time in N.C. history the term ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘gender identity’ have been included anywhere in N.C. state laws. Homosexual groups are using this ‘Bullying Law’ to promote sexual and gender confusion in public schools to destroy our kids nationwide! We must talk with our local school board members about this issue. It depends on parents and other taxpayers to protest the misuse of this ‘Bullying Law’ that is used to promote dangerous behavior for our youth. We must not let this take place in Mitchell County!” (Buchanan, R., *Mitchell County News-Journal*, 02/03/10).



Amid this environment, two local residents decided to organize an LGBT equality group.

Amy Waller owns a pottery studio in downtown Bakersville and is a member of the small but vibrant arts community that has developed in the area. Allison Bovée moved to Bakersville in 2000 with her partner Mary Vogel, after having lived in Atlanta for decades. The two developed a friendship soon after Bovée moved to town, sharing an interest in the arts, as well as politics. Though both Waller and Bovée had previously participated in various protests and activist groups, the Mitchell County GSA was their first foray into LGBT organizing. Bovée describes being prompted to do something out of frustration with the letters to the editor, but mostly by the looming Amendment One campaign:

At some point in 2011, there were all these letters that were going back and forth in the local paper. I can't remember what came first, but some guy wrote a letter saying he had seen two women kiss each other and it made him puke. Ha! I think Mary wrote a letter back to him and some other people wrote some letters to him...I read a lot. I keep up with current events, so I knew that by this time, they put Amendment One on the ballot in 2011 for 2012. But in the spring of 2011, before they had actually drawn it up, I knew it was coming down the pike because I'd been reading all about it, so I contacted my state senator, Ralph Hise, and asked if he would meet with me. Amy and I had lunch with him at that little coffee shop downtown and we talked to him about Amendment One, about the coming Amendment One. He was very cordial, very nice, but it was like talking to a brick wall. 'I understand but my religion teaches me that marriage is between a man and a woman,' he said. And I said, 'But we don't live in a theocracy.' But he never really, he just didn't get it (Personal comments, June 21, 2013).

So, exasperated with the dialogue surrounding LGBT issues in the local paper, angry about the impending Amendment One campaign, and disappointed with their political leadership, Waller and Bovée decided to get involved. As Bovée tells it, "Amy said that we need to do something, so I said, let's do it. So we decided to start a group" (Personal comments, June 21, 2013).

In our contemporary digital media age, amid arguments for the diminished role of social movement organizations (Earl & Kimport, 2011), the formation of the Mitchell County GSA reminds us of the continued importance of established movement organizations that act as

repositories of expertise and as advisors for fledgling grassroots groups. Even before getting together for their initial planning meeting in October of 2011, Waller and Bovée reached out to Equality NC for guidance. On phone calls and over email, the two Bakersville residents worked with former Director of Organizing Sam Parker and Communications Director Jen Jones to get ideas regarding the benefits and drawbacks of 501(c)(3) versus 501(c)(4) statuses, social media strategies, and suggestions for events to mobilize their community. Based on this advice from Equality NC, as well as their own experience with activism, Waller and Bovée created the Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance.

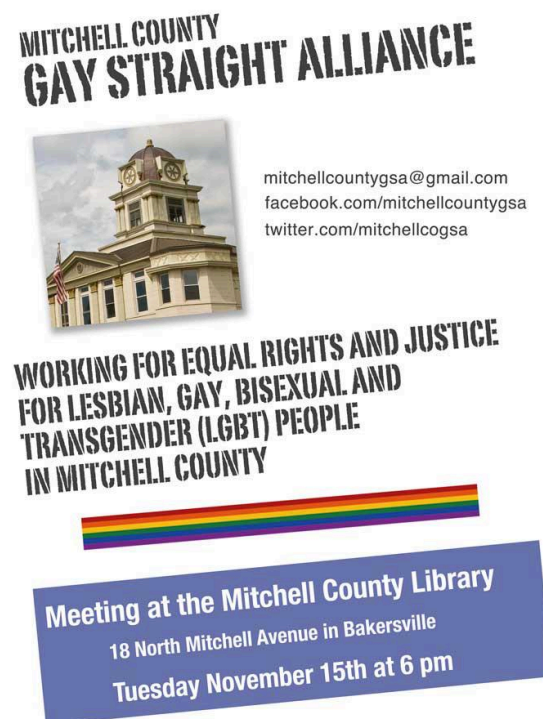
From its inception, the two grassroots activists wanted their group to act as a vehicle to make the LGBT community more visible within Mitchell County and they utilized media platforms that could help them accomplish this. To that end, Waller and Bovée utilized media tools they deemed to be most prominent to local Mitchell County audiences who mostly lacked an understanding of LGBT issues but who largely convened around their local papers. Their first order of business was a name for the group. According to Bovée, “We thought about calling it Equality Something or something or something before we finally decided that we’d all it a Gay Straight Alliance. Although that name is normally reserved for groups at school, we wanted people to understand what it was. So that’s what we did. To make it real clear” (Personal comments, June 21, 2013). All three women recognized that straight allies would be central to their work both for reasons of inclusivity but also for sheer practicality. As the women explained to me, there simply would not be a critical mass of open LGBT folks in a place the size of Mitchell County.

A critical mass of residents, however, did convene around the county’s local paper, which served as the community’s most widely shared public forum. Though local papers are typically

considered for their role as community informers when they are considered at all (Reader, 2012), in this case they also serve as blank slates upon which readers spoke directly to other readers. Bovée and Waller, recognizing this reality and seeking to assert themselves into the heart of their local community's dialogue, penned a letter to the editor during this initial meeting, which they later placed in both the *Mitchell News-Journal* and Asheville's *Mountain Express*. In it the two articulated their goals for the group: "We hope that by being more visible in our community, we may make Mitchell County more welcoming to gay people and their friends and family members who care for them" (*Mountain Express*, 2011, December 6). Additionally, they began taking advantage of the *Mitchell News-Journal*'s "Activities" section, where local residents can post information regarding their events free of charge, posting weekly about their group and its events. For instance, a typical post from the group read, "Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance NOW FORMING. Our goal is to work toward ensuring equal rights and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in Mitchell County and to educate ourselves about the proposed marriage amendment to the N.C. Constitution. For more information, email MitchellCountyGSA@gmail.com" (*Mitchell News-Journal*, 2012, January 11), and ran beside announcements for the Disabled American Veterans Chapter 58, Carolina Style Chorus, Cribbage Club, Blue Ridge Bridge Club, Calvary Baptist Church, Mitchell-Yancey Tea Party Meeting, and the Appalachian Republican Women.

In addition to highlighting the continued importance of local papers within the hybrid media system, the initial promotion of the Mitchell County GSA reveals the persistent relevance of material media within communities and the ways in which they can be used to promote newer social media platforms that are more specifically tailored to the an organization's concerns. Concurrently with the announcement of their group via local newspapers, Waller and Bovée

created a Facebook page, Twitter account, and email account, placing their group’s mission statement at the top of each social media page: “The Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance works toward ensuring equal rights & justice for LGBT people in Mitchell County.” To promote both their group and its social media presence within the town, the three women created a sign featuring the group’s name, mission statement, social media addresses, and the specifics of their first official meeting (see Figure 2.1). Bovée and Vogel posted them in buildings all over town, including the library and “any stores that would let us.”



**Figure 2.1:** Mitchell County GSA’s Poster

While the inclusion of the Mitchell County GSA’s social media information on posted signs throughout Bakersville and Spruce Pine speaks to their goal of alerting local residents to these pages, their actions offline speak to the necessity of personal networks and shared geographic space in increasing a group’s social media reach. In an effort to immerse themselves

in the existing network of LGBT activists working in their area of the state, Bovée, Vogel, and Waller traveled to Asheville on October 20, 2011 to attend Neighbors for Equality's "Coffee and Conversations" event. Billed as a chance "to talk more about 'Amendment One,' the best ways to take action to defeat the amendment, and discuss how we can work together over the coming months, in preparation for the election in May," the founders of the GSA met activists from Neighbors for Equality, a group focused on LGBT organizing in rural communities, and Campaign for Southern Equality, an Asheville-based group focused on LGBT organizing in Southern states. By the end of that week, all of the founders of these groups followed one another on Facebook and Twitter. In all, the Mitchell County GSA's Facebook page had nearly 80 "likes" before their first official meeting, significantly expanding the audiences of social media users alerted to the existence of their group.

#### Leveraging Myriad Media

The following episode reveals the intricate connections between offline events, individual social media work, and professional media, highlighting the increasingly tangled interactions between movements and media, and drawing attention to the ways social media can amplify a local event for both geographically dispersed social media audiences and professional media outlets. On November 15, 2011, Bovée, Waller, and Vogel met in the Mitchell County Library in downtown Bakersville a little before 6 p.m. to set up for their first meeting of the GSA. Because of their work promoting the meeting in the *Mitchell News-Journal* and on signs posted all through town, word of the meeting had reached both supporters and opponents. The day before the meeting, the town's sheriff had stopped by the library to ask about the event because he had heard about some protests being organized. While Bovée, Waller, Vogel and 25 supporters met inside the library, dozens of protesters stood outside, holding signs exhorting "Christian values"

and giving voice to fears that the group would work to “force their lifestyle” upon the town. Several signs read simply, “This Ain’t Asheville.”

As it turns out, these protesters were central to the mobilization of the Mitchell County GSA and to its expanded visibility both inside the county and out. A local artist and supporter of the group’s efforts recorded the protests, ultimately creating a seven-minute YouTube video featuring him talking with the protesters, asking them about why they had come out. One woman replied, “They need to read the Bible and hear the real word of God.” Another said, when asked why she was holding a “This Ain’t Asheville” sign, that she was a Christian but that “Asheville is a gathering for gays!” A local minister asked, “Do they expect to force their lifestyle upon Bakersville?” The video concludes with short interviews from Bovée and Waller. While the protesters’ accusatory replies were laced with anger, Bovée calmly explained the groups’ mission: “Our thought is to try to change the culture here in Mitchell County, make it more open, make it so that people feel more safe here, more a part of the community, and have the community get to know us.” Waller followed her by saying, “For me, one thing that’s really important is that it be a local organization here in Mitchell County, that we be visible in Mitchell County, that we raise awareness, and seek justice for gay and lesbian people in Mitchell County.” Collectively, Bovée and Waller’s reasoned and seemingly untroubled responses provided a dramatic juxtaposition between the protesters and the activists.

The video was quickly posted to YouTube. Reflecting a contemporary case of intermedia agenda setting, in which one medium sets the agenda for another (Meraz, 2009), after seeing the YouTube video a journalist from one of Asheville’s local television stations, WLOS, came to Bakersville to interview Bovée. The station broadcast a story about the meeting and the protests a day later. A reporter from Asheville’s *Mountain Xpress* saw either the YouTube video or the

WLOS story and quickly produced one of their own, which ran on November 17. The GSA posted the WLOS and *Mountain Xpress* stories, as well as the YouTube video itself, to their Facebook page. All told, the video was viewed more than 3,000 times. Its coverage in professional media and reach through social media quickly expanded the GSA's visibility. According to Bovée, by the time of the group's second meeting in December, they had accumulated more than 200 Facebook supporters and were in regular contact with other organizations working within the state.

Whereas in the mass media era Bovée and Waller would have incurred considerable cost creating and mailing letters and newsletters to existing and potential supporters in order to stay connected between their monthly meetings, the organizers leveraged the affordances of an active Facebook presence to remain visible and increase their reach. The two posted several times a week from December 2011 to May 2012, linking to a variety of state and national resources and stories, including Equality NC's Amendment One materials, a letter from the North Carolina Council of Churches in support of LGBT rights, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's U.N. speech, "Gay Rights are Human Rights." On January 9, they began promoting a "Town Hall Meeting," billed as an,

an opportunity for discussion about the proposed marriage inequality amendment to the NC Constitution. The vote on this amendment is scheduled for May 8. There will be a panel of speakers, including a lawyer from Equality NC, representatives from The People's Alliance for American Liberty in Boone, The Campaign for Southern Equality, the Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance, and a minister from our local area. Residents of Mitchell County and surrounding areas are invited to attend and participate in a moderated discussion. We welcome all citizens who want to learn about the amendment.

This event proved to be one of the iconic moments in the formation of the GSA and one returned to again and again by organizers working across the state.

The Protect All NC Families campaign scheduled a stop on their Race to the Ballot tour in Bakersville, organizing a panel discussion featuring Jones, Bovée, Jasmine Beach-Ferrara from Campaign for Southern Equality, and a LGBT-supportive minister from the area. For an hour and a half on January 30, supporters and opponents of Amendment One gathered at the Bakersville Historic Courthouse to discuss their views on the amendment. The panelists sat at the front of the room at two large folding tables that had been pushed together. Folding chairs had been arranged sixteen to a row, with a path through the middle where people could walk and where a microphone stand was set for the Q&A period. On one side of the room sat the GSA's supporters, many of them members of the local arts community. On the other sat the amendment's supporters, mostly evangelical Christians, many holding Bibles.

For an hour and a half, the two sides engaged in a democratic debate about the amendment, about the LGBT movement, about sin and salvation. Opponents of the amendment spoke of the pain it would cause their families, the need to protect all citizens' constitutional rights, and the harms the amendment would bring to both straight and gay couples. Supporters, on the other hand, spoke of the necessity of being true to their Christian faith, their desire to love their neighbor but not their sin, and their anger over a perceived attack on traditional marriage. Judging from the questions asked at the end of the panel, the conversation did not change the views of many in the audience, but it did make the LGBT community and its allies more visible and asserted their presence in the town.

Before the panel began, Waller, Bovée, and Jones decided that all panelists must remain "non-confrontational" and respectful of the religious nature of the community, arguing that to appear otherwise would alienate potential supporters in Mitchell County and across North Carolina. The organizers recognized that merely hosting this conversation was a radical act for



the majority of Mitchell County citizens and that focusing on aspects of shared identity provided the best path toward understanding and potential ideological change. To that end, the organizers quickly produced a 20-minute video focused on the deliberative nature of the debate and highlighting the religious figures on the panel who opposed the amendment, and posted it to the campaign's website and to YouTube. Participants and organizers tweeted and posted to Facebook an array of comments, many of which were shared by dozens and sometimes hundreds of supporters. The event was covered on the front page of the *Mitchell News-Journal*. Finally, Bovée and Waller penned an op-ed for the local paper, reiterating the purposes for the meeting, asking people to vote against Amendment One, and giving them specific voting instructions:

This meeting was held to discuss the antifamily, marriage-inequality amendment that has been proposed to the North Carolina Constitution...Please vote against Amendment One. The vote is on May 8, in conjunction with the primary elections. Early voting is also available. Republicans, Democrats and unaffiliated voters are all encouraged to vote against this amendment. This is not a party issue; this is a people issue. Anyone who would like to help us defeat this badly written amendment can come to the next meeting of The Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance. Our next meeting is Feb. 21, at 6 p.m., at the Spruce Pine Public Library” (Bovée and Waller, *Mitchell News-Journal*, 02/15/2012).

Throughout the Amendment One campaign, Bovée and Waller utilized the GSA's social media accounts and monthly meetings, the *Mitchell News-Journal*, and hand posted signs to mobilize their supporters. On March 9, the GSA posted a link to a Protect All NC Families' event in Asheville which read, “ProtectNCFamilies is training people for their speakers' bureau. Maybe some of us can carpool. There's a training in Asheville, on Thursday, March 15. Email us if you would like to go [mitchellcountygsa@gmail.com](mailto:mitchellcountygsa@gmail.com).” Later in the month, the GSA posted a link to a Pam Spaulding's Pam's House Blend blog post regarding fundraising for the campaign which asked supporters to “read this excellent piece, and click on the moneybomb!” In another Facebook post, Waller and Bovée provided their followers with the email addresses of the

Mitchell County Board of Commissioners who would be voting on an Amendment One resolution that evening.

Importantly, their social media pages were also spaces in which the GSA called its members to support allied organizations. For instance, on January 17, 2012, Waller and Bovée asked their followers to, “Send a message of support to our friends at the Campaign for Southern Equality, and the couples in Greenville, SC who are applying for marriage licenses today and tomorrow as part of the expanding We Do Campaign,” and provided a link to the CSE homepage. On April 17, the GSA’s Facebook page featured a link to a CSE video highlighting their upcoming We Do campaign actions. Soon after the Amendment One vote, Waller and Bovée posted a link to the ACLU’s home page featuring a story about that organization’s marriage equality case and the need to be involved. This simultaneously allowed them to keep their supporters engaged in movement work and to draw in new followers for their own group.

As they continued to utilize the “Activities” and Letters to the Editor sections of the *Mitchell News-Journal*, and as their group continued to grow, Waller and Bovée found increased opportunities to work through the paper to rally people to their events and reach new supporters. On June 20, 2012, the paper placed a notice for an upcoming GSA event in the News section, which read,

The Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance will be hosting a town hall meeting at 6 p.m. on June 26, at DT’s Blue Ridge Java in Spruce Pine. Supporters of LGBT equality are invited to join Equality North Carolina and the Mitchell County GSA to find out how you can build a state of equality. For more information, visit [facebook.com/mitchellcountygsa](https://facebook.com/mitchellcountygsa) or send an email to [mitchellcountygsa@gmail.com](mailto:mitchellcountygsa@gmail.com).”

Throughout 2012 and into 2013, the GSA received consistent coverage in the news section of the paper. For instance, the *Mitchell News-Journal* featured a story focused on the GSA on March 20, 2013, running a piece entitled “Mitchell County GSA film night,” covering the group’s

upcoming showing of “Edie & Thea: A Very Long Engagement” and celebration of Edie Windsor’s case reaching the U.S. Supreme Court.

### Strategically Exploiting the Hyper-local

Within a few months of the creation of the Mitchell County GSA, it became synonymous with rural LGBT organizing for both the group’s members, as well as other activists working within the state. As is true throughout the South, North Carolinians tend to emphasize family, community, and religious values, an ethos of an “imagined, affable familiarity” with friends and strangers alike, which creates what Gray (2009), referencing cultural theorist Raymond Williams, has labeled a “structure of feeling” (p. 5). Despite the conservatism of Mitchell County, this structure of feeling exists there just as it does elsewhere in the South. Recognizing this reality and seeking to leverage it to the advantage of their community, the GSA strategically deployed their community identity through both local, professional and social media, emphasizing members’ community ties, love of family, and North Carolina roots.

During the Amendment One campaign, the Mitchell County GSA ran full-page advertisements in the *Mitchell News-Journal* and the *Yancey County News* featuring the names of nearly 400 North Carolina residents, including dozens from Bakersville and Spruce Pine (See Figure 2.2). In white text against a black background, the ad reads, “The proposed amendment to our state constitution is discriminatory and will hurt children and families. It will harm citizens in Mitchell County and all across North Carolina.” Not only was this localized advertisement deployed in the local paper, the organizers leveraged Facebook to further their reach, posting a picture of the advertisement on their page, which was shared, liked, and commented on dozens of times. Similarly, after the Amendment One vote, Waller and Bovée co-authored a piece that ran in the *Mitchell News-Journal*, “U.S. Supreme Court to decide on DOMA,” which presented a

sympathetic, pro-LGBT-leaning story about the marriage equality cases that were soon headed to the Supreme Court. Importantly, the two were careful to localize their piece, writing, “We know there are thousands of loving couples like Edie and Thea all over the United States, including across North Carolina and right here in Mitchell County.” When the two posted this piece to the group’s Facebook page, it was liked and shared by people from as far away as Decatur, GA, Oakland, CA, and Pahoe, HI. Not only was the group able to work through their community’s newspaper, but Waller and Bovée were able to leverage social media to reach people beyond their geographic locale and expand assumptions of where LGBT communities reside.

**The proposed amendment to our state constitution is discriminatory and will hurt children and families.**

**It will harm citizens in Mitchell County and all across North Carolina.**

**We will be voting AGAINST Amendment One on May 8<sup>th</sup>**

|                            |                       |                               |                                |                           |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Carol Woodard              | Stephanie Ott         | Louise Hembree                | Jamison Reid                   | Jane Willis               |
| Alan Trinner               | Barbara Aycock        | Randy Hembree                 | Wendy Reid                     | Matt Willis               |
| Jim Fuller                 | Susan M. Bell         | Charles F. Stover             | Carol M. McCroskey             | Jessica Willis            |
| Thom Kittredge             | Amy Waller            | David Johnson                 | James Stinson McCroskey        | Gregg Johnson             |
| Dorothy J. Hobbs, MD       | Kathleen Turczyn      | Alice Johnson                 | Wanda J. Smith                 | Harriet Wallace           |
| Mary Ruglio                | Kate Groff            | Jennifer Bryant               | Michael J. Smith               | Laura Mitchell            |
| Jim Plato                  | Bruce Rard            | Jack Kaack                    | Ruth Pope                      | Keith L. Miller           |
| Leslie Neel                | David Hooper          | Howard C. Martin, Jr.         | Fergal Pope                    | Kat Durham                |
| Carol Clark                | Gloria Hooper         | Richard Boulter               | Alexa Bryant                   | Lisa Blackburn            |
| Angela Bulbach             | Judith A. Knight      | Lydia Weiler                  | James K. Rose                  | Carl Fennell              |
| Mary and Ron Vinson        | Stacie Vallierie      | Gilbert C. Johnson            | Paul Feldman                   | Carol Goettman            |
| Jane Hatcher               | Cindy Boone           | Jaann Collins                 | Schell McCall                  | William Goettman          |
| Dorothy T. Morgan          | Ann P. Kramlich       | Paul Collins                  | Bonnie Lutz                    | Benjamin Ziedell          |
| Dr. Scott Rogers           | Cole Gardner          | Jay Boothe                    | Annie Barnes, FNP              | J.R. Ziedell              |
| John Lara                  | Jennifer Haggard      | Marla Britton                 | Frank Gaudin, OGNP             | Rub Pulley                |
| Nancy Kerr                 | Sarah Elliott         | Katlyn Powell                 | Hilary M. Hayle                | Marrion Thompson          |
| Jo Ann and Charlie Hodshon | Timothy Elliott       | Alex Steele                   | Jerry Cade                     | Judge Frank F. Hughes III |
| Dr. Allison Rogers         | Louise Leland         | Norman Rabak                  | Donny Laws                     | David L. Oyer             |
| Jane Crowe                 | Ann Crowder           | Claudia Richards              | Emery Laws                     | Russell Walker            |
| Jasmine McFayden           | Leslie Neel           | John D. Richards              | Chris Hoyle                    | Lindsay McKahan           |
| Lynn McClure               | Margaret Tibbitts     | Robert Levin                  | Elizabeth Turner               | Dana Fehsenfeld           |
| Tom and Suzie Dimock       | Todd Kinberg          | Jane Stover                   | Hag Turner                     | Zac Lopez-Ibanez          |
| John Forlizzo              | Paul Cope             | Jade Pierce                   | Sarah Turner                   | Elsa D'Elia               |
| Kathryn Gremley            | Jeff Morgan           | Minnie Powell                 | Gary Adams, local conservative | David Etchelberger        |
| Linda McFarling            | Ben McCann            | Nancy Raskin                  | Finola Adams                   | Dawn McMahon              |
| Ned Prime                  | Robert Johnson        | Nancy Raskin                  | Chuck Young                    | Barbara Little            |
| Gene Lewis                 | Matthew Tibbitts      | Richard Jay Peck              | Deanna Blanchard               | Beth Ann Byerly           |
| Rebekah Cook               | Came Blackwell        | Katie Blackwell               | Mary Jane Beall                | Philip Lord               |
| Miles Dreyer               | Bethany Rountree      | Kent Dauleman                 | Cass Beall                     | Sam Sirois                |
| Nicole DeCagliano and      | Pat Bernard           | Paul Shoemaker                | Lisa Fox Davis                 | Rita Fox                  |
| Gaelen Concone,            | Greg Bernat           | Jaanne Stuart Tipperek        | Teresa Fox                     | Howard Larsen             |
| Green Toe Ground Farm      | Mika Robert           | Bonnie Rauli                  | Doris Hunter                   | Joseph Converse           |
| Pat and John Ford          | Theresa Anderson      | Gwendolyn Yegello             | Wanda Woodley                  | Carol Converse            |
| Michelle Moode             | Bill Weir             | Anne Castro                   | Barbara Engle                  | Jennifer Rambo            |
| Tatelia Hughes Tolison     | William Bernstein     | Matthew Henson                | Rose Ray                       | Kirk Banner               |
| Mary Vogel                 | Robert McGulley       | Jerry Jackson                 | Bob Gibson                     | Susan Feagin              |
| Kate Boyd                  | Mary Eldridge         | Marsha McLawhorne             | Vicky Alderman                 | Pete McCune               |
| Cynthia Bringle            | Patricia Tompkins     | Christopher D. Buchanan       | Rio Alden                      | Elissa Brown              |
| Kathy Weisfeld             | Alan Curry Stephenson | Brette Barclay Barron         | Tai Galton                     | Sarah Grady               |
| Allison Bowle              | Phillip Mitchell      | Jane Peier                    | Bridget O'Hara                 | Amanda Blair              |
| Estelina Bringle           | Jay Jacobson          | Frances and Bruce Koran       | Pete McCune                    | John Powell               |
| David Trophie              | Cappy Kemmon          | Shannon Moon                  | Lauren Lindahl                 | Linda Powell              |
| Deb Korash                 | Kent McLaughlin       | Billy Briggs                  | Heine Purser                   | Dan Greene                |
| Sandy Payson               | Donna O'Toole         | Rebecca Justice               | Nicholas Maldonado             | Pat Connor-Greene         |
| Elizabeth Peeverall        | Bob Barnes            | Channing Justice              | Heather Dawes                  | Chad Mohr                 |
| Nancy B. James             | Rachel Weir           | Nancy Stewart                 | Boggy Patton                   | Teresa Onofrio            |
| Suze Lindaby               | Gilbert Barnes        | Dorothy Presley Styles        | Jason Sterling                 | Sean Ewing                |
| Susan McDaniel             | Joyce D. Johnson      | Cassandra Styles              | Michelle Benfield              | Adora Lee                 |
| Ron and Jane Greene        | James Stockwell       | Audrey Earp                   | Alma Rymer                     | Ashlyn Talley             |
| Raven Tate                 | Gail Bredelshoff      | Glenda Hensley                | Erica Pennell                  | George Brasington         |
| Shane Mickey               | Carol W. Bailey       | Marie Beach                   | Susan Fink-Codergren           | Sam Eram                  |
| Gretchen Travers           | Diantha W. Stevenson  | Nancy Leggett                 | Ron Rollett                    | Jessica Ruegg             |
| Jan Hamilton               | Nancy Byrd            | Wes Stitt                     | Donna Jean Dreyer              | Dorothy T. Morgan         |
| Paul Shoemaker             | Linda Hasi            | Valerie Schnauffer            | Day Ostson                     | Jim Keen                  |
| Judith Anne Smith          | James B. Goldthwait   | Wendy Dunn                    | Kristen Flournoy               | Keenan Phillips           |
| Raymond Bell               | Judith A. Schaeckel   | Carolyn Riley                 | John Hagy                      | Jon Blood                 |
| Bill and Lisi Szymczyk     | Nancy Moore           | Kathryn Andree                | Lisa Goldstein                 | Michael Fishbach          |
| Jane B. Zivkov             | Linda Loudon          | Lynda Gayle Banner            | Tim Evans                      | Brenda Harvey             |
| Denise Cook                | Pat Loudon            | Olga Ronay                    | Ruth Stagg                     | Stephanie Johnson         |
| David Etchelberger         | Ruth W. Durlie        | Bill Weeks                    | Berry Stagg                    | Kurt Johnson              |
| Janet Verrell Welch        | Lucy Doll             | David Chatt                   | Amber Field                    | Don Walker                |
| Peter Bobbe                | Margaret I. Emerson   | Beverly Hill                  | Dorothy O'Guizman              | Anna Wislocky             |
| Mike Davis                 | Michelle Camp         | Larry Joe Greene              | Gloria Schulman                | William Burley            |
| Tessa Wittman              | Johnelle Paulay       | Alan Gratz                    | Marie G. Wilson                | Lisa Cassens              |
| Marilyn P. Sandy Verrell   | Scott Pulver          | Suzie and Steve van der Vorst | Lauren Rudy                    | Kate Eckhardt             |
| Michelle Camp              | Britt Kaufman         | Susan F. Basini               | John Gird                      | Bruce Greene              |
| Kim Oberhammer             | Chad Smoler           | John Britt                    | Clay Crews                     | Brenda Phetteplace        |
| Drug Singer                | Jonathan Ward         | John Gird                     | Barbara Crews                  | Thomas Trout              |
| Barbara Kahn               | Gwendolyn Ward        | Wendy Gratz                   | Robert B. Lynum                | Christina Morrison        |
| David Wiseman              | Jim Ludwig            | Suzie and Steve van der Vorst | Brandon Mitchell               | Steve Hill                |
| Louise Loveland            | Diana Donovan         | Jim Carroll                   | Kevin C. Betts                 | Susan Larson              |
| Beth Davis                 | Laura Wainous         | Bronwyn May                   | Cheryl Broughan                | Mark Boyd                 |
| Kent Deudelman             | Laura Swelbach        | Megan Flugel                  | Cass Faller                    | Kate Boyd                 |
| Sandi Dawson               | Chris Dakota Gabriel  | Peg Chamberlain               | Susan Zeidell                  |                           |
| Neil Edling                | Elizabeth Ayers       | Mika Rollett                  | Corbilla Fox                   |                           |
| Janine Bennett             | Bev Carroll           | Bradley Ward                  | Lisa Mickey                    |                           |
| Stacey Lane                |                       |                               |                                |                           |
| Sally Fero                 |                       |                               |                                |                           |
| Ian Henderson              |                       |                               |                                |                           |

*Paid for by* Mitchell County gay straight alliance

**Figure 2.2:** Mitchell County GSA’s Amendment One Advertisement

Members of the GSA were not the only activists leveraging the “Mitchell County GSA” or “Bakersville” as a component of their media strategies. Larger, more established LGBT organizations transformed the success story of the Mitchell County GSA into a powerful symbol of the possibilities and realities of rural organizing. For instance, in a video produced to promote their We Do actions, Campaign for Southern Equality carefully pointed out that, “We took action in eight towns and cities across North Carolina, from Wilson in the east to Bakersville and

Marshall in the west.” Similarly, Equality NC’s Jen Jones consistently evoked “Bakersville” in front of urban audiences and in media interviews. For instance, in an interview with Pam’s House Blend, Jones said, “We call it the ‘Bakersville Effect,’ as everyone from anti-gay protesters to Penland Arts community progressives came together for one night to put down their signs, speak openly and honestly and actually discuss the measure coming up on the May 8 ballot. In fact, we’ve seen this throughout our journey, with many hearts and mind changed in the process.” While CSE’s leaders also led actions in Asheville, Charlotte, and Durham, they specifically mentioned Bakersville, Wilson, and Marshall. Though Jones admitted later that few minds were seemingly changed during the town hall she mentioned, the fact that a discussion was held in Bakersville mattered. And it mattered because deploying “Bakersville” creates dissonance in many minds when it is connected to LGBT organizing and this dissonance can lead to an expanded idea of where LGBT communities exist. However, it is vital to remember that this discursive tool would not be available if Bovée and Waller had not created a vibrant and active organization in Bakersville and had not leveraged multiple media tools to enter into a broader dialogue.

## **Discussion**

As Chadwick (2013) has persuasively argued, political communication requires a new, more holistic approach to studying the contemporary media environment and the political, social, and journalistic actors operating within and through it. His notion of the hybrid media system balances the older logics of “transmission and reception” associated with professional media and the newer logics of “circulation, recirculation, and negotiation” identified with digital and social media, reflecting an emergent openness in news making, one in which grassroots activists can

intervene in the news-making process (2013, p. 208) as Allison Bovée, Amy Waller, and their supporters did through the Mitchell County GSA.

The Mitchell County GSA recognized that information does not stay confined to particular media silos, but rather flows between and among them, reflecting Chadwick's (2013) notion of hybridity as a "means of capturing and explaining the significance of processes the might be obscured by dichotomies, essentialist, or simply less flexible orientations" (p. 9). This chapter argues that future scholarship should foreground complexity and engage with analytical perspectives that highlight the connections and interactions between media and actors, as well as the liminal space between them, in order to fully explain the interactions between movements, media, and audiences.

Further, as the findings above detail, social movement actors, even at the local level, are aware of the complexity of the contemporary media environment and are leveraging multiple technologies, both old and new, in order to affect political, social, and cultural change in their communities. While existing scholarship utilizing Chadwick's (2013) analytic approach has focused on events and actors operating at the national level (Freelon & Karpf, 2014; Jungherr, 2014; Chadwick & Colliser, 2014), this chapter shows the hybrid media system at work in a hyper-local setting, a layer of the system reliant upon interactions among media logics distinct from those operating at the national and transnational levels.

At the hyper-local level, media seemingly of a bygone era remain relevant, including hand-posted signs, homemade fliers, and weekly newspapers. For instance, the *Mitchell News-Journal* finds its way into more than 70% of the homes in Mitchell County. For comparison's sake, less than 35% of Raleigh, NC, households read that city's paper, the *News & Observer*. Further, the role of personal, face-to-face networks endures as a cornerstone of movement

organizing and mobilization. And, as the findings above detail, these “bygone” media were central to the adoption and expansion of the group’s social media presence. In short, at the local level, a cacophony of offline and online, individual and organizational, and professional and digital media merge to create new information flows and amplify unfamiliar voices – albeit through media logics and interactions that differ from other levels of the hybrid media system.

At the same time, we can read the development of the Mitchell County GSA through the lens of Gamson’s (1998) discussion of the mass media as a master forum, which he describes as “a master forum in the sense that the players in every other forum also use the media forum, either as players or as part of the gallery” (p. 59), in order to measure the cultural impact of the group’s efforts in Bakersville. In our scholarly rush to take up the latest communicative technological advance (Mattoni & Treré, 2014), this case reminds us to recognize the centrality of local newspapers in many communities. However, this case also reminds us that contemporary pathways into a community’s master forum are significantly more varied and numerous than when Gamson (1998) initially proposed the concept. Whereas newspaper editors were strict gatekeepers in the mass media age, non-elite actors now have avenues in which to garner widespread attention, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, which can translate into professional media attention.

Nonetheless, as Gamson notes, the professional media is the “most important forum for understanding cultural impact because it is the major site in which contests over meaning must succeed politically” (p. 76). Viewed from this perspective, the Mitchell County GSA’s efforts to insert themselves into Mitchell County’s master forum (i.e., *Mitchell News-Journal*) moved the community’s cultural understandings regarding LGBT issues. Before the group’s founding, positive representations of the LGBT community were effectively absent from this forum. Any



references made to the community were made by those who viewed homosexuality as immoral, sinful, or destructive. For instance, when the North Carolina General Assembly was debating a hate crime bill, a local Bakersville resident wrote to the paper to describe the bill as “the pro-homosexual bullying bill” and argue that it would “stop preachers from preaching God’s word” (Buchanan, R. *Mitchell News-Journal*, 08/05/09).

Since their inception the Mitchell County GSA has utilized multiple layers of the hybrid media system to work their way into the *Mitchell News-Journal*, including the letters to the editor, editorial and opinion, and announcement sections, to promote their perspectives and to reshape the monolithic narrative surrounding LGBT issues within their community. Following Gamson (1998), this chapter closes by noting that, “when a cultural code is being challenged, a change in the media forum both signals and spreads the change” (p. 60). The Mitchell County GSA’s communicative efforts intervened in their local news-making processes, reshaped the dialogue in their community, and effectively reshaped ideas of where LGBT communities call home, both locally and beyond. By leveraging several layers of the hybrid media system in targeted ways to reach local, state, and national audiences, the Mitchell County GSA moved the LGBT movement forward culturally by asserting its visibility where silence and exclusion had long reigned.

## CHAPTER 3: MOVEMENT PUBLICS

### Introduction

#### Episode 3.1

Protect All NC Families' Speaker's Bureau Training, Topsy Teapot, Greenville, NC, April 4, 2012

**Jones:** This is to teach people how to convince other people not to vote for the amendment. This is basically a training session, where I give you everything I use working for Equality NC and Protect All NC Families and on Race to the Ballot where we were running across the state trying to educate people about the harms. This is what we told them. This is what convinced them. We have five weeks left. We need to convince 508,000 people. It's not bad. Does everyone know about the amendment? What it says and a little bit about what it does? Because we're going to go a little deeper into the harms.

**Audience member:** Yeah, we want to do that, go deeper.

**Jones:** So, we know it's bad. We want to give people a deeper background.

**Audience member:** Including people that are religious and believe. My daughter, she's been in a congregation since she was eight-years-old, but now she goes to a church where they're preaching against homosexuality, so I asked her to come to this so she could actually hear what this is about.

**Jones:** And faith is a big part of this. Obviously, going out into North Carolina and talking about this in faith communities is difficult.

**Audience members:** Yep. Yeah. Definitely.

**Jones:** Mostly difficult for the gay and lesbian population of the state but everybody really. Last night we were in Wilmington and we talked to the League of Women Voters, people who were in their 60s and 70s who wanted to go out into their churches and talk about this and we think we provided them cover for them to do so.

As a lawyer representing the ACLU of North Carolina explained at an Equality NC event after the campaign, "North Carolina has the land mass of Connecticut and Mississippi. It also has the demographics and cultural understandings of Connecticut and Mississippi." Scenes like the

one above reveal what LGBT movement work looks like when activists work to connect the oftentimes disparate publics that exist within the state. The woman who asked for a way to speak to her Christian daughter wore a rainbow bracelet, said she did not attend church herself, and never let go of her girlfriend's hand. The women from the League of Women Voters were straight allies, committed to their Christian faith, and convinced that they could change the minds of their fellow parishioners — if they could speak to them where they were.

This episode encapsulates the discursive strategies LGBT activists in North Carolina used to speak to the social, political, and cultural realities of Southern audiences. Recognizing that a singular, monolithic message such as 'equality' would be ineffective amongst some cultural groups within the state, activists targeted their messages, and the messengers that delivered them, to multiple publics, including those historically understood in both popular and scholarly minds to be antagonistic to the movement's goals: farm country, churches, and communities of color. In short, they spoke to people where they were. And, in doing so, these actors facilitated the organization, mobilization, and deployment of what I am calling *movement publics*. Defined as *discursive groupings of individuals and organizations that share a set of political, social, and/or cultural sensibilities in relation to the movement*, the conceptualization of movement publics affords a lens through which to reflect both on the cultural diversity of the LGBT movement itself *and* the strategic communicative strategies activists utilize to organize these diverse publics. Further, as the following empirical sections will show, the conceptualization encompasses individuals currently engaged with the movement, as well as potential supporters who share characteristics with particular movement publics but who have not been formally engaged by them and who may or may not hold oppositional stances toward the broader LGBT community.

To date, the LGBT movement has typically been associated in both the activist and academic mind with urban environments. D’Emilio (1998) provides the definitive history of the origins of the movement and its collective identity, situating its beginnings around World War II with the creation of gay and lesbian communities in large, urban areas. Other works have examined the development of these nascent communities in cities such as New York (Chauncey, 1995), Chicago (Faderman, 1991), and San Francisco (Gallo, 2006), as well as less cosmopolitan but nonetheless sizable cities such as Detroit, Buffalo, Washington, Birmingham, and Flint (Beemyn, 1997). In addition to an urban bias with regard to conceptions of LGBT collective identity, the continued oppositional interactions between the movement and the Christian right (Fetner, 2008) are illustrative of the fact that a secularist worldview has also become an expected feature of the movement for the vast majority of both supporters and opponents (Wilcox, 2003). In short, the recognizable LGBT public is urban and secular.

Despite such myopic assumptions about urbanity, religiosity, and the LGBT movement, however, a vibrant, though specific, movement exists below the Mason-Dixon line. In arguing that North Carolina’s LGBT movement is made of diverse and distinct but often overlapping publics, this chapter draws on Fraser’s (1992) idea of “subaltern counterpublics,” as well as Warner’s (2002) claim that “publics exist only by virtue of their imagining” (p.8), in an effort to productively complicate our understanding of the actors that constitute a movement. While public sphere scholars have moved toward multiplicity in “recognition of social complexity and sociocultural diversity” (Asen, 2000, p. 425), there has been far less recognition of such diversity within the social movements literature. Most social movement scholars readily acknowledge that movements are not monoliths, but many seem to presume that they are dichotomous. For instance, within the LGBT movement, scholars have pointed to intramovement fighting between

those in the movement's mainstream and the radicals or queers (see Sullivan, 1995; Warner, 1999). This chapter, however, argues that conceptualizing movement publics draws attention to such overly simplistic and ultimately false divisions and moves us toward a richer understanding of the groups that constitute a movement.

Further, through the conceptualization of movement publics, this chapter uses communication theory to provide another approach to understanding the social movements. Specifically, viewing social movements through the lens of the discursive concept of movement publics offers a new framework through which to analyze both the constitution of a social movement *and* the successful communicative strategies organizational actors leverage to mobilize them. Social movement scholars have historically conceived of social movements as collections of organizations seeking to accumulate resources and mobilize people to seek social change (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), the result of the interactions between movement organizations and political opportunities (McAdam, 1982), or meaning-making contests between social movement actors, media, and the state to influence audiences of supporters, opponents, and the disinterested (Benford & Snow, 2000). The role of organizations in forming, convening, and mobilizing multiple publics, however, has been left unspecified. Additionally, while sociologists have begun to incorporate collective identity into their understandings of social movements, we still know little about “the relationship between personal and collective identities” of social movement actors and adherents (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 299).

This chapter also argues that by recognizing diverse movement publics as groups of individuals with varied political, social, and cultural concerns and understandings, we can recalibrate our perception of effective discursive strategies. For instance, the South is more rural, more racially dichotomous, more religious, and more ideologically conservative than the rest of

the country, though the proportion of its citizens that identify as LGBT is in line with the national average (Gates & Newport, 2013). Leveraging this understanding of the “factions” in the state’s LGBT movement, North Carolina’s LGBT organizations created communicative strategies that reached people *where they were* rather than understanding movement communications as decisions regarding “celebration” or “suppression” (Bernstein, 1997) or “resonance or radicalism” (Ferree, 2003). As this chapter will show, there are times in which being resonant is a radical act, and places in which suppressing parts of your identity allows you to celebrate others. In doing so, this chapter will add to scholars’ understandings of social movements’ “identity deployment” (Bernstein, 1997) efforts by showing how multiple identities and frames can be deployed within a single campaign or movement organization to reach a range of specific audiences.

At the same time, this chapter illustrates the role of media in constituting movement publics, contributing to an emergent body of literature that seeks to untangle the connections between new media technologies and social movements. While some scholars have noted a tendency for this literature to collapse into overly simplistic utopian or dystopian visions of the Internet’s possibilities (Papacharissi, 2010), more recent work has recognized the complex interconnections between these media technologies, organizations, and social movements (Karpf, 2012; Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012; Lim, 2012), as well as the continued role of older media technologies in our contemporary media environment (Chadwick & Collister, 2014; Harlow & Guo, 2014; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014). As Tierney (2013) notes, “Divisions between digital and nondigital spaces are becoming less distinct, resulting in an entanglement of media platforms and practices, formations and allegiances across space and time” (p. 22). Foregrounding the complex hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013) in which contemporary movement actors

operate, this chapter seeks to explicate the role of social media in constituting, targeting, and mobilizing movement publics.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. I first discuss the literature surrounding publics and social movements, discursive strategies, and the role of digital media in social movement organizing, in order to develop the idea of movement publics. I then provide three empirical sections that detail specific movement publics of the North Carolina LGBT movement, the communicative strategies organizational actors employed to create and target them, and the ways in which these actors leveraged movement publics to speak to broader audiences. I conclude with a discussion of how conceptualizing movement publics productively complicates our understandings of who constitutes a movement and the role of organizations in effectively reaching and organizing individuals from disparate political, social, and cultural groups.

## **Literature Review**

### Publics and Social Movements

One constructive way in which sociologists have approached the question of who constitutes a movement is through the idea of “political generations.” Following Mannheim’s (1952) seminal work on political generations, Whittier (1997) defines the concept as “being comprised of individuals (of varying ages) who join a social movement during a given wave of protest” (pp. 761-762). Noting the differences that emerge within factions of a single political generation, Whittier elaborated the idea of “micro-cohorts,”<sup>1</sup> defined as “clusters of participants

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<sup>1</sup> Other scholars have adopted Whittier’s conceptualization of micro-cohorts to explore generational differences within North American feminism (Reger, 2014a; Reger, 2014b), movement continuity between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> wave grassroots feminists (Reger & Staggenborg, 2006; Whittier, 2006), activist retention in contemporary social movements (Bunnage, 2014), the composition of the Estonian national movement (Johnston & Aarelaid-Tart, 2000), and the contemporary trends in protest attendance and petition signing (Caren, Ghoshal, & Ribasa, 2011). None of these studies incorporated the concept of publics nor did any of them focus explicitly on the intrinsic social, political, or cultural characteristics of individuals. However, several studies point to additional influences on cohort identity formation, including society-wide cultural norms (Crawley, 2001), movement opponents’ depictions of activists (Einwohner, 2002), and meso-level organizational dynamics (Reger, 2002).

who enter a social movement within a year or two of each other” (1997, p. 762), who are transformed by the political context they encounter when they first immerse themselves in protest activities, in order to account for these differences. Consequently, according to Whittier, members of micro-cohorts develop a political consciousness and a distinct collective identity reflective of both the external and internal contexts of the movement when they enter into its orbit.

While conceptualizing political generations and micro-cohorts undoubtedly adds to our understanding of who constitutes a movement, the ideas essentially ignore the intrinsic social, political, and cultural sympathies individuals bring with them into the movement. In effect, the idea of political generations assumes that individuals are blank slates when they enter a movement, completely determined by factors external to themselves, and destined to remain fixed within these static identities. Porting the idea of publics into social movements productively complicates our understanding of who constitutes a movement. Movements are not monoliths. Rather, movements are constituted of disparate activists, organizations, and publics (Breese, 2011), with varied demographics and cultural understandings, who take advantage of myriad message strategies and media platforms (Bernstein, 1997; Ferree, 2003). To date, however, literature surrounding social movements has left the various groups within a single movement underspecified.

For instance, existing historical studies of the LGBT movement and its identity formation have focused almost exclusively on communities in urban areas. As an example, D’Emilio’s (1998) seminal work traces the emergence of the gay and lesbian movement in the U.S. from World War II to the Stonewall Riots, positing that the anonymity of urban centers was requisite to the formation of a collective identity. (However, Chauncey (1994) argues that a vibrant and



visible community existed in New York City during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Other historical works have focused on the service of gays and lesbians in the military (Bérubé, 1990) and the federal government (Johnson, 2004), as well as on the early fight to secure equal protection under the law (Fejes, 2008). Collectively, these works support the assumption that LGBT communities are monolithically urban and secular.

Despite the dearth of scholarship on LGBT movement work in non-urban areas, Gray's (2009) study following the identity work of rural Appalachian youth as they navigate the boundaries of public spaces, such as public libraries, churches, and websites, to assert their visibility provides much needed insight into the contours and complexities of LGBT movement identity. As Gray notes, "Examining the assumptions that tether LGBT identities to cities and closets to rural communities opens the door to critique the privileging of some queer identities over others" (2009, p. 4). In essence, Gray argues that there is no singular gay culture. By recognizing that North Carolina is more rural, more racially dichotomous, more religious, and more ideologically conservative than the rest of the United States, but that it is also home to a sizable number of LGBT people, this chapter builds upon Gray's work by arguing that studying the role of movement organizations in representing and convening multiple publics within a single, overarching movement productively complicates our understanding of contemporary LGBT movement identities.

To do so, this chapter draws on Fraser's (1992) concept of "subaltern counterpublics," which informs much contemporary work on the public sphere, specifically work focused on describing multiple publics. Originating in a critique of Habermas' (1991) notion of a singular bourgeois public sphere founded on consensus and the suppression of difference, Fraser defined

subaltern counterpublics<sup>2</sup> as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (1992, p. 123). According to Fraser, these counterpublics are places of both withdrawal from and entry into dominant public spheres, a discursive space in which marginalized individuals can come together to deliberate on “their needs, objectives, and strategies” and to broaden the reach of their discourse. Further, Fraser argues that a multiplicity of publics, armed with a means to speak and be heard, promotes the democratic ideal of participation in ways that a monolithic public is unable to do.

I argue that the concept of movement publics enables us to see differences between movement factions while maintaining a focus on the movement’s rough continuity. The conceptualization places a focus on discursive space as both sanctuary and access point into the broader movement. Further, the conceptualizations stresses relationality between movement publics rather than competition. In other words, movement publics are best conceptualized as rays of light refracted through a single prism. Just as white light is composed of all visible colors in the electromagnetic spectrum, a movement is composed of all groups working within its broader framework, regardless of their recognizably distinct political, social, and cultural sensibilities and their periodic disparities in cooperation, power, and status.

Arguing that Fraser’s (1992) conceptualization of subaltern counterpublics leaves “counter” and “oppositional” underspecified, Warner (2002) argues for a strong idea of

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<sup>2</sup> Considering the wide reception of Fraser’s (1992) “Rethinking the Public Sphere” amongst political theorists and philosophers, relatively few communication, mass communication, or social movement scholars have taken up her conceptualization of subaltern counterpublics and even fewer have provided empirical cases to support the theory. Further, those that do typically focus on public spheres rather than publics. A notable exception is Squires (2002) who proposed an alternative vocabulary to describe marginalized groups, which includes three types of marginal publics (enclave, counterpublic, and satellite) that differ based on their desire to engage with a broader public and their ability to get their discourse in front of a wider public audience. Additionally, Breese (2011) proposed conceptualizing publics as existing along two axes, scale and content, in their orientation to the state or civic life and political or social change.

counterpublics, one that is more “than simply comprising subalterns with a reform program” (119). Rather, Warner contends that counterpublics are aware of their subordinate status, comprised of discourses considered hostile by the dominant public, and socially stigmatized by their participation. Not all movement publics are necessarily focused on their subordinate, stigmatized status, while they are often attentive to the aspects of their identity shared by a wider public. Regardless, they are all creations of discourse. Similarly, acknowledging that a public can be a material entity, capable of witnessing itself in physical space, Warner (2002) focuses on another sense of a public, “the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation” (p. 66).

Left undefined in both Fraser’s (1992) and Warner’s (2002) work is the role of formal movement organizations in forming, convening, and mobilizing different publics. I argue in this chapter that movement publics are brought into being through discourse, specifically through texts that resonate with particular political, social, and cultural understandings, and that movement organizations play a central role in organizing them. Further, the conceptualization of movement publics allows for a reevaluation of successful message strategies and identity deployment as movement activists in North Carolina reached out to these publics by speaking to audiences where they were.

### Discursive Strategies

Following Warner, publics can be discursively created through a seemingly infinite array of channels in the context of a campaign, including conversations, Facebook pages, letters to the editor, t-shirts, essays, conferences, yard signs, tweets, speeches, newspaper articles, books, and political buttons. However, for a movement public to come into being, the substance of these

discourses must be collective identities. For the purposes of this chapter, the term “collective identity” refers to:

An individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity. A collective identity may have been first constructed by outsiders (for example, as in the case of “Hispanics” in this country), who may still enforce it, but it depends on some acceptance by those to whom it is applied (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285).

Further, as Polletta and Jasper (2001) note, collective identities are not fixed. Instead, they emerge relationally through the interactions of different audiences, ranging from supporters to opponents, activists to bystanders.

In order to describe the use of collective identity within the political realm, Bernstein (1997) introduced the idea of “identity deployment” to describe the expression of “identity such that the terrain of conflict becomes the individual person so that the values, categories, and practices of individuals become subject to debate” (pp. 537-538). According to Bernstein, identity deployment is the “collective portrayal of the group’s identity in the political realm” (p. 538), and movement organizations working within the electoral realm must decide whether political contexts dictate the deployment of a collective identity that either celebrates or suppresses the group. This dichotomy, however, diminishes the complexity of social movements and overlooks a broader range of identities that movement actors could deploy and the myriad ways in which they could deliver them. Bernstein’s move away from the essentialism that characterizes movements’ identity deployment as either cultural or instrumental is a vital one, but by focusing solely on campaigns’ written materials and failing to focus on the delivery of the message and the in situ reaction of audiences, she is unable to show how the message, the

messenger, and the audience interact and how that interaction affects the deployment of collective identities.

Like Bernstein, Ferree (2003) focuses on the discursive strategies employed by movement activists. Positing that activists will choose a message that is either resonant with or radical to hegemonic discourse depending on the goals sought by these actors, Ferree argues that speakers will choose resonance when they attempt to influence popular discourses, but will choose radicalism if they want to challenge such discourses. Though Ferree's work productively illustrates the power of culture to determine the discursive opportunity structure, her focus on an either/or choice of resonance or radicalism oversimplifies the conceptualization of identity deployment and misses the instances in which multiple identities can be deployed within a single campaign. The idea of movement publics moves us beyond this binary and alerts us to the greater range of targeted claims that can be made within a campaign or movement. Conversely, this idea also alerts us to the restraints on messages that can be successfully delivered to certain communities.

In their study of the reception of *The Vagina Monologues* among feminists in two dissimilar college campuses, Reger and Story (2005) reveal the complexity of defining any one movement, or "wave" of a movement, in absolute terms. Based on case studies of the feminist community at "Woodview State University," who experienced a "dearth of visible feminists" and "an overt hostility to feminism," and one at "Evers College," who experienced a culture that "encouraged questioning and critique of sexuality and gender norms" (p. 157), the authors revealed ways in which community context affected the experience of the play, arguing that distinct micro-cohorts of activists, distinguished by their community's dominant political ideology, create movements that are not easily categorized, defined, or described. While Reger

and Story limit their conclusions to micro-cohorts' effects on third-wave feminism, the conceptualization of movement publics extends their work by acknowledging that the individual actors that constitute particular micro-cohorts are shaped not just by their community's politics but also by the individual political, social, and/or cultural sensibilities they bring with them into the movement.

### Role of Social Media

In this chapter I situate movement publics within literatures concerned with untangling the relationship between new media technologies and social and protest movements, focusing specifically on work exploring the role of new and social media in creating more diverse voices, facilitating greater targeting of supporters, and affording groups more visibility within the public sphere. Downey & Fenton (2003) theorize that new media are central to the process of creating "inexpensive virtual counter-public spheres" (p. 198), capable of destabilizing the larger public sphere and providing a platform from which new voices could both speak and be heard. Other scholars have provided empirical support for these ideas, showing instances in which new media technologies have allowed "lone-wolf organizers" to bring wider attention to rarely-seen issues (Earl & Kimport, 2011) and non-political elites and non-elites to become prominent hubs of political commentary surrounding presidential debates, transforming the typical journalistic pack into a diverse viewertariat (Freelon & Karpf, 2014).

Some scholars have detailed the affordances new media technologies provide activists in targeting their communications across geographic and social barriers (Papacharissi, 2002; Thompson, 2005; Garrett, 2006). As Thompson (2005) argues, "Individuals are able to acquire information and symbolic content from sources other than the persons with whom they interact directly in the course of their day-to-day lives" (p. 34). In her study of the Guatemalan justice

movement, Harlow (2011) showed how activists utilized Facebook to widely distribute information to tens of thousands of “friends” and mobilize more than 50,000 supporters to attend an off-line protest. Even more, Earl and Kimport (2011) argue that new media technologies allow for “collaboration without copresence,” making the need to gather in physical space dispensable, and rendering organizations less necessary in many forms of movement organizing (p. 126).

Other scholars have noted, however, the “weak ties” created by the Internet (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010), and the continued necessity of face-to-face, personal networks tied to geographic spaces (Baker & Ward, 2002; Uslaner, 2004; Tierney, 2013). Further, Karpf (2012), argues that the Internet facilitates not “organizing *without* organizations,” but “organizing *through different* organizations” (p. 3). By focusing on the “organizational layer of American politics,” Karpf (2012) details the changes in membership and fundraising the Internet has brought to advocacy organizations such as MoveOn, Democracy for America, and DailyKos. Similarly, Bimber, Flanagan, and Stohl (2012), in their analysis of the American Legion, AARP, and MoveOn, argue that new media technologies allow for more avenues for engagement between the organizations and members.

An interdisciplinary group of scholars have focused their work on the role social media play in circumventing the mainstream media and offering a heightened visibility to social movement actors (Garrett, 2006; DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2014; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014). For instance, Penney and Dadas (2014) evaluated the case of Occupy Wall Street to demonstrate “how the digital circulation of texts allows protesters to very quickly build a geographically dispersed, networked counterpublic that can articulate a critique of power outside the parameters of mainstream media” (p. 88). Many scholars, however, have noted the

continued importance of the mainstream media for moving this information in front of a broader public audience (Harlow & Guo, 2014; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014; Chadwick & Collister, 2014). Despite this impressive and evolving literature surrounding new media and social movements, we know little about the media-movement dynamic in hyper-local, local, or state-level settings, nor do we have a clear understanding of the ways social movement actors at these levels utilize social media to organize and target specific publics.

## **Findings**

### Movement publics as discursive groupings

Perhaps no region of the country affords us a better vantage point from which to explore the myriad publics of a single movement than the South. As DuBois (1903) reminds us, “The South is not ‘solid’; it is a land in the ferment of social change, wherein forces of all kinds are fighting for supremacy” (p. 32). This ferment stems in part from the region’s demographic diversity. While African Americans comprise 12% of the population nationally, 22% of North Carolinians are black and this numbers continues to grow (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Though the country as a whole is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country, evangelical, Mainline Protestant, and historically black churches thrive below the Mason-Dixon line (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). Finally, more than 40% of North Carolinians identify themselves as conservative, while just 20% label themselves liberals (Saad, 2012). Despite these aspects of Southern distinctiveness, however, North Carolina is remarkably similar to the rest of the country in regards to at least one thing: the size of its LGBT community.

The size of North Carolina’s LGBT population, coupled with the state’s demographics, has led to the formation of diverse LGBT-focused organizations catering to individuals who share a particular set of political, social, and/or cultural sensibilities in addition to their



identification with the LGBT movement. While these groups share a belief in LGBT equality writ large, they are differentiated not only by organizational goals and strategies but more importantly by the types of discursive spaces they create, the individuals who populate these spaces, and the communicative strategies activists use to reach these individuals. Before highlighting some of the complexities of movement publics, this chapter first presents an overview of a sample of these groups and their leaders in order to highlight the diversity of LGBT movement organizations that represent and convene different publics within North Carolina's LGBT movement.

For instance, while scholarly and popular conceptions of the movement highlight the antagonism between the religious and the queer (Barton, 2012; Fetner, 2008; Moscovitz, 2013), a sizable portion of North Carolina's LGBT population and allies identify as Christian. Some of the members of this "faith" public are represented by, and/or are active in, the Campaign for Southern Equality, an Asheville-based organization led by Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. In describing the motivations behind her organization's actions, Beach-Ferrara (2012) has written, "As a minister, I appeal to the higher authority of my faith, which says that LGBT people are fully equal children of God and that there are times when you are called to resist unjust laws rather than submit to them... They do so accompanied by friends, family, and clergy who lead public prayer services for reconciliation as part of the actions."

Many, if not most, of Campaign for Southern Equality's supporters share Beach-Ferrara's religious identity, as evidenced by the group's social media pages. The organization has hosted events aimed at religiously-oriented supporters including "A Community Conversation on Faith and Sexual Identity," a "CSE Day of Service Project," and a series of "Family Dinners" modeled

after churches' monthly community dinners. Many of their supporters belong to a host of denominations, including Cathy McGaughey and Diane Ansley who recently posted pictures of their wedding officiated by their reverend and attended by members of their church family on CSE's Facebook page.

Other LGBT leaders within the state are even more explicit in the promotion of their Christian identities. Especially up front with his Christian faith is Bishop Donagrant McCluney, formerly an organizer with S.O.N.G. and currently an associate bishop at the Affirming Pentecostal Church International. He begins each and every public talk with the same straightforward introduction: "I'm a same-gender loving Pentecostal preacher." Similarly, Michelle Mathis, former director of the Community Alliance for Equality in Hickory, NC, and current co-chair of Equality North Carolina – Foothills, positions her faith as central to her identity. On her Facebook page, under "Religious Views," Mathis describes herself as "Christ Follower: Spiritual, not religious. Believer in Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, the Light." Under "Professional Skills," she lists "Activism, Harm reduction, Homelessness, and Ministry of Jesus." And, in describing her activism within Facebook's "About" section, Mathis writes, "Our mission is to share the love of our Creator through word and deed."

Likewise, communities of color are also served by LGBT leaders and allies that reflect aspects of their racial identities. Arguably, no leader within North Carolina has had a greater impact on the LGBT movement than Reverend William Barber. As the leader of the Greenleaf Christian Church in Greensboro and President of the North Carolina NAACP, Barber emerged as a vocal opponent of Amendment One before advocating for LGBT rights as the leader of the "Moral Monday" movement. Importantly, his call for LGBT equality is consistently couched in the language of civil rights, a subject on which he has legitimacy to speak — and to be heard.

While Barber works as an advocate for LGBT equality through his position with the North Carolina NAACP, other organizations within the state focus more exclusively on issues affecting LGBT communities of color. Southerners on New Ground, co-founded by Mandy Carter, an African American lesbian who also co-founded the National Black Justice Coalition, works to “build a political home across race, culture, gender, and sexuality,” while remaining focused on the “shared interests of women, LGBT people, people of color, and immigrants.” Similarly, the Freedom Center for Social Justice, led by Bishop Tonyia Rawls, an African American lesbian and leader of Sacred Souls Community Church, a “diverse congregation of progressive Christians,” is to “enhance the quality of life by increasing the number of healthy options & opportunities available to low income communities, communities of color, sexual minorities and youth.”

Other groups were established by natives of rural areas in order to advocate for LGBT communities in rural regions. Collyn Warner, of Shelby, NC, population 20,323, and Tyler McCall, of Brevard, NC, population 7,609, formed Neighbors for Equality in an effort to organize their friends and neighbors in rural, undermobilized communities. Eastern Carolina Equality was formed by Rich Elkins, of Wilson, NC, population 49,628, and Thomas Passwater, of Bear, DE, population 17,593, to grow an LGBT presence in Greenville, NC, and surrounding areas. Finally, Sandhills Pride formed to represent the ten townships of Moore County, population 91,587, with the mission to be a “support network and educational advocacy group dedicated to increasing awareness and acceptance of the LGBT community in the Sandhills region of North Carolina.”

### Movement publics as sanctuaries

The organizations and activists introduced in the previous section are by no means an exhaustive list of active groups working within the state, nor do they represent all of the movement publics present in North Carolina. However, individuals who share aspects of their identity with North Carolina's larger faith, communities of color, and rural publics represent a significant portion of state's citizenry and so are often the target of LGBT movement actors. As more than one activist told me during the Amendment One campaign, "You can't win in the South without faith." Likewise, you cannot effectively represent North Carolina's LGBT movement by ignoring the state's demographics, specifically its faith communities and racial diversity. Consequently, organizational actors working within the state consistently convened faith, African American, and rural movement publics through a variety of online and offline communication strategies.

The starkest, more straightforward example of movement actors convening movement publics can be seen through activists' use of social media. Whereas in the not so distant past, movement organizations would have had to go to tremendous expense to call together specific movement publics and to cross geographic divides, social media's affordances allow these groups to attain some of the sophisticated targeting typically reserved for more established, resource-rich organizations. Consequently, organizations leveraged social media platforms to develop sanctuaries where individuals could virtually convene to gather relevant information and to express shared aspects of their identities. For instance, during the Amendment One campaign, Protect All NC Families created a host of Facebook pages to target specific publics, including Protect All NC Families, People of Faith Against Amendment One, Protect All NC Families – Charlotte, and Protect All NC Families – Durham. While Twitter has become an increasingly

popular way for activists and organizations to share relevant information and news items, North Carolina's LGBT organizations' use of Facebook currently dwarfs that of Twitter. For example, Equality NC currently has around 12,000 followers on Twitter but more than 60,000 on Facebook. For that reason, this section focuses on movement actors' Facebook pages.

Throughout the Amendment One campaign and its aftermath, LGBT groups typically utilized Facebook as a convener through which participants gathered and shared information in order to develop their distinct political, social, and cultural sensibilities. For instance, on the day a federal district judge struck down Amendment One, Campaign for Southern Equality effectively convened a faith movement public by posting a simple message: "BREAKING: Amendment One has been struck down in North Carolina. Marriage Equality is here!" (See Figure 3.1). The post was liked more than 2,700 times and nearly 80 people posted comments. Further, since Campaign for Southern Equality's activism centers on faith and religious concerns, more than 600 people shared the message on their own Facebook pages with religiously-focused language, such as "OH YES OH YES!!!!!! THANK YOU GOD!!!!!! AMEN!!!!!!!" "Celebrating. Expansion of Spirit is inevitable!" and "Thank God, glad for all." Ann Marie Alderman, a Unitarian Universalist minister and Campaign for Southern Equality supporter, shared the organization's post along with a message of support: "Any same sex couples wanting to come by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro on Tuesday (after you have time to get your license!!!!) I will be performing weddings that day for free starting at 10 am to celebrate marriage equality in North Carolina!!! Free Cake, too!" This message was in turn liked by 95 Facebook users.

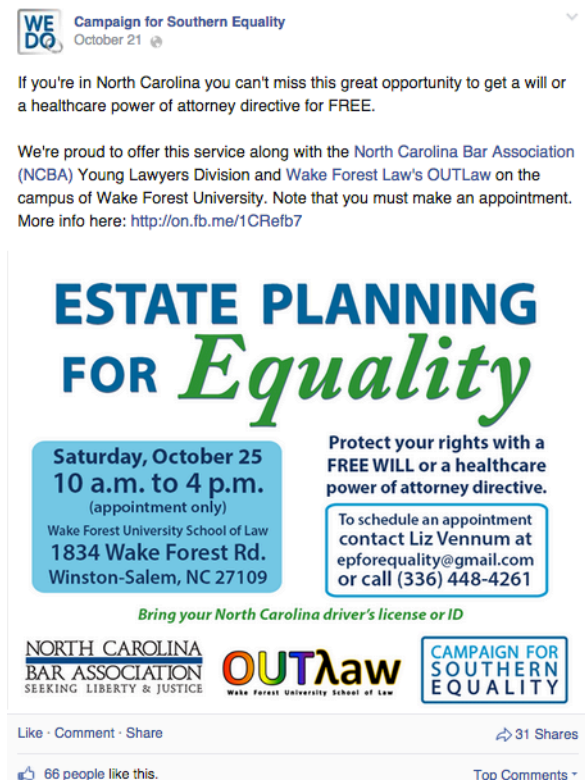


**Figure 3.1:** Campaign for Southern Equality Facebook post

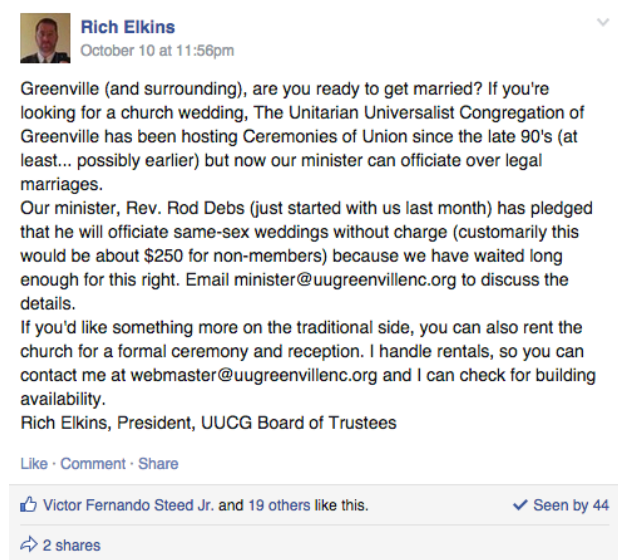
Through Facebook organizations are able to share information relevant to particular movement publics. The Freedom Center for Social Justice, whose mission to reach queer communities of color includes a strong focus on their transgender members, regularly posts information of particular import to the transgender community (See Figure 3.2). Campaign for Southern Equality frequently posts information of concern to couples and families who are drawn to the group's focus on faith and family, including on legal issues surrounding will, healthcare power of attorney directives, and estate planning (See Figure 3.3). In the wake of the recent judicial dismantling of Amendment One, several groups took to Facebook to post information concerning open and affirming officiants, churches, caterers, photographers, and wedding planners in their local areas, including Eastern Carolina Equality (See Figure 3.4).



**Figure 3.2:** The Freedom Center for Social Justice Facebook post



**Figure 3.3:** Campaign for Southern Equality Facebook post



**Figure 3.4:** Facebook post on Eastern Carolina Equality's page

Additionally, the Facebook pages of these organizations consistently serve as repositories of LGBT-related news of consequence to the groups' targeted movement publics, often incorporating news items from local legacy media sources, further highlighting the interconnections between media sources of hybrid media system discussed in the previous chapter. For example, C.A.F.E. posts stories such as a CNN story entitled "Will Christians condemn persecution of gays?," the Freedom Center for Social Justice shares pieces such as "Why 'Living Visibly' as Transgender is The 'Antithesis of Coming Out'" from the Huffington Post, and Campaign for Southern Equality tends to focus on stories like a Huffington Post piece entitled "Episcopal Church Votes to Bless Same-Sex Couples." Even more, much of the news posted to these pages reflects the continued importance of geographic dominance in organizing, even through contemporary social media channels. Asheville-based Campaign for Southern Equality often posts stories from the local *Citizen-Times* (See Figure 3.5), while Shelby-based Neighbors for Equality tends to share news items from *The Shelby Star* (See Figure 3.6).





**Figure 3.5:** Campaign for Southern Equality Facebook post



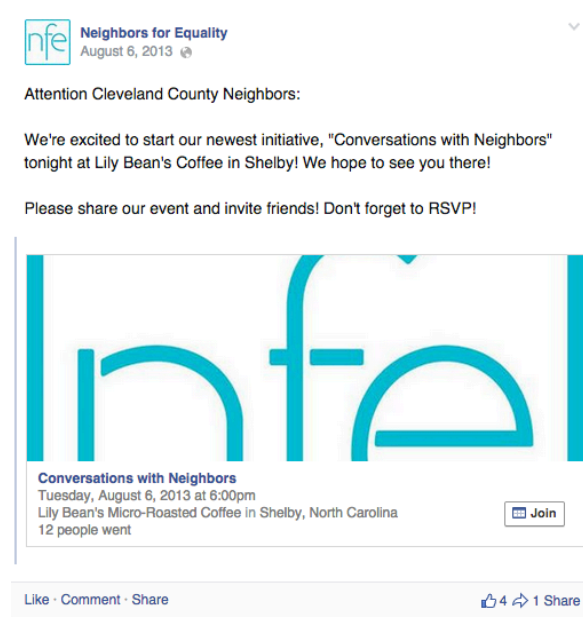
**Figure 3.6:** Neighbors for Equality Facebook post

### Movement publics as access points

Facebook not only served as a platform through which movement publics encountered, circulated, and debated pertinent information, the social media site acted as an access point through which the state's movement groups could invite individuals to attend offline events that were either relevant to their specific movement public or being held in their local areas or both. For instance, when the Mecklenberg County commissioners scheduled a vote in October 2013 on whether to add transgender workers to the county's equality protection policies, the Freedom Center for social justice posted a story regarding the vote and encouraged its supporters to attend the meeting. The next month, the group asked its followers to attend an event surrounding the Transgender Day of Remembrance, posting the following: "Tomorrow, November 20<sup>th</sup> the

LGBT Community Center of Charlotte is holding a Transgender Day of Remembrance Memorial from 6:30-8 p.m. We urge everyone in the community to participate in this important event.”

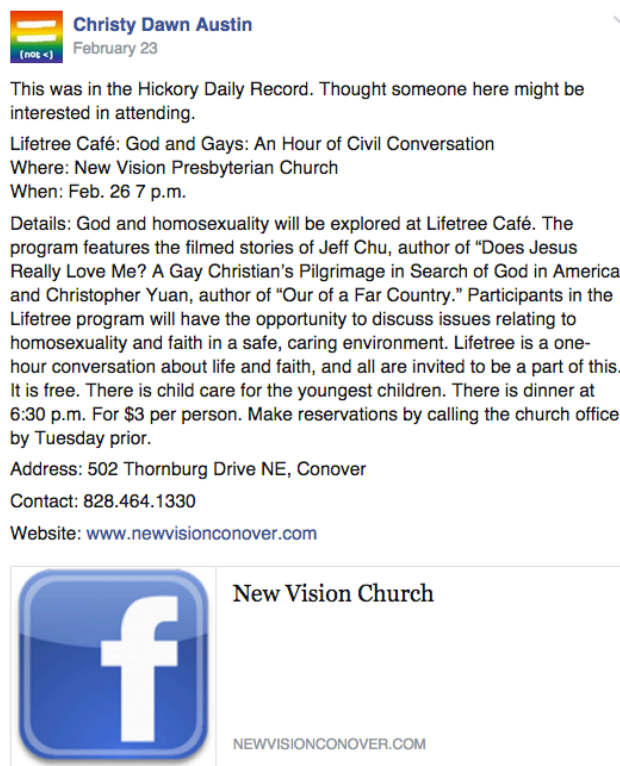
Several organizations consistently steered their supporters toward events in which they could learn more about issues that specifically affected their movement publics. In representative posts, Neighbors for Equality asked “Cleveland County Neighbors” to attend their “Conversations with Neighbors” event addressing issues of rural LGBT communities (See Figure 3.7); Campaign for Southern Equality posted information concerning a panel discussion surrounding a religious freedom lawsuit aimed at repealing Amendment One, “Taking on Amendment One Through Faith” (See Figure 3.8); and, C.A.F.E. encouraged its followers to attend an event sponsored by a local church where participants would discuss issues surrounding “God and homosexuality” (See Figure 3.9). At other times, these groups invited supporters to attend events designed specifically to be social outings. For example, Eastern Carolina Equality hosted monthly movie nights, while Campaign for Southern Equality held monthly family dinners.



**Figure 3.7:** Neighbors for Equality Facebook post



**Figure 3.8:** Campaign for Southern Equality Facebook post



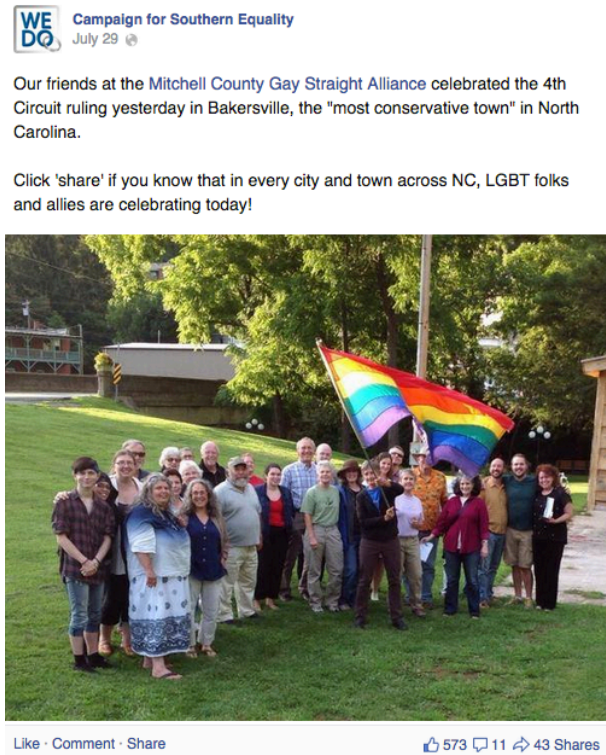
**Figure 3.9:** Facebook post on C.A.F.E.'s page

Finally, LGBT organizations in the state frequently utilized their Facebook pages to tout news and upcoming events from allied movement organizations, reflecting the ways movement publics intersect with one another. Just as rural North Carolinians are more likely than their

urban counterparts to identify as Christian, groups focused on rural or African American issues often posted about faith issues, and vice versa. For instance, Neighbors for Equality frequently posted on behalf of Campaign for Southern Equality (For example, see figure 3.10) while Campaign for Southern Equality consistently shared news from the rural-focused Mitchell County GSA (For example, see figure 3.11) and the North Carolina NAACP (For example, see figure 3.12).



**Figure 3.10:** Neighbors for Equality Facebook post



**Figure 3.11:** Campaign for Southern Equality Facebook post



**Figure 3.12:** Campaign for Southern Equality Facebook post

## Resonance through identity deployment

Beyond organizing through social media, organizational actors relied extensively on spokespeople whose background reflected the collective identities of diverse audiences in order to convene and mobilize specific movement publics. In short, organizations deployed people they believed would resonate with multiple publics in an effort to reach people where they were. Following Schudson (1989), this chapter defines resonance as a “public and cultural relation among object, tradition, and audience” (p. 170), highlighting instances in which organizational actors acted as objects upon whom audiences saw aspects of their social and cultural selves, and effectively altered the delivery of a particular message. In other words, this chapter highlights the power of spokespeople to convene movement publics through resonant identity deployment.

Though the state’s LGBT organizations consistently rely on resonant spokespeople in all of their work, empirically focusing on the Amendment One campaign, specifically the structure of the campaign’s staff, brings this aspect of movement public formation into sharp relief. While strategically deploying specific spokespeople to particular audiences is straightforward campaign public relations, it simultaneously moved the broader movement forward by expanding movement publics within the state. In essence, for the duration of the Amendment One battle, the campaign and the movement were indistinguishable. As will be detailed in the following chapter, LGBT organizations active during the Amendment One campaign saw their membership bases soar and social media supporters increase exponentially.

Aware of the necessity of reaching as many disparate communities and gathering as many resources as possible, The Protect All NC Families’ steering committee co-chairs gathered a diverse group of representatives from national, regional, and local organizations and groups, including Equality NC, S.O.N.G., and the Human Rights Campaign. In turn, the steering

committee hired staffers from within these organizations to fill positions designed to focus on specific movement publics. In an effort to mobilize faith communities across the state, Ryan Rowe was hired as Director of Faith Outreach. Rowe's background included work with the Reconciling Methodists of North Carolina, a group seeking to make the United Methodist Church open and affirming of LGBT individuals. To reach the state's large campus population, the campaign hired Chris Speer as the director of campus outreach and Appalachian State University student Ian O'Keefe as her deputy. Communication Director Jen Jones, an out and outspoken queer person from a small North Carolina town, was used to target rural and LGBT communities. Though Rowe, Speer, and Jones were hired to target specific pockets of voters for the purpose of winning an election, their work simultaneously expanded movement publics within the state, as evidenced by the tremendous growth of movement organizations' communicative reach post-Amendment One discussed in detail in the following chapter.

While the campaign's official messaging focused on harms to women, children, and families, the campaign's staffers represented the communities they were asked to target through their own personal identities and their presence in front of these groups legitimated, and at times transformed, the message. In front of LGBT-friendly audiences, Jones frequently went off-message, especially during one-on-one conversations after events, emphasizing equality for the LGBT community and clear support for same-sex marriage. In an oft-used line, Jones frequently connected with LGBT-friendly audiences with lines such as, "Very soon, marriage equality is going to rain down upon us like so many rainbow unicorns." Coupled with her ubiquitous Equality NC gear, unmistakably "butch" appearance, and pronounced Southern accent, Jones was received as a legitimate spokesperson for rural and/or LGBT publics, which allowed her to deliver and contextualize the campaign's messaging. For instance, at a campaign-sponsored

message training session in Greensboro on April 4, 2012, Jones explained the choice of the campaign's "harms" strategy as follows:

The majority of people in North Carolina do not want marriage equality. They don't. Poll after poll tells us that between 56 and 68 percent of people in North Carolina do not want gay and lesbian couples to get married. We don't win talking about marriage equality. Because, we don't get it. We don't get it, regardless of what happens... Fortunately, the good news is people don't want children to lose their healthcare. You can ask anyone from your church or your book club and what have you if they want children to have healthcare, if they want families who currently have prescription drug benefits to keep them, if they want other protections for unmarried couples that the state automatically provides? Yes. And that provides a cover for all of us to go to those places and talk to people about Amendment One. It's not a scary thing where we are talking about gay rights. It's a thing where we talk about healthcare, something we can probably all agree on... This bridges the gap for us.

Rowe regularly fielded scriptural-based questions from audiences and was able to answer them before moving people back to the harms language that the campaign preferred but in a way that resonated with faith communities. To do so, Rowe began each talk in front of faith publics with nods to a shared collective identity. For instance, at a faith speakers' training event at Pilgrim United Church of Christ in Durham, Rowe opened his remarks by telling the audience, "I feel very blessed to be here and I want to do my very best to serve you and your calling to know how to defeat Amendment one," before transitioning to a discussion regarding Christians' call to love their neighbors:

There are a lot of people who are hungry to not let any issue prevent them from seeing Christ in another person, to disconnect themselves so much from their neighbors that they lose the core principle and motivation for being a person of faith in the first place and that is to love your neighbor, to love each other as God has loved you. What does it mean that any issue would take you to the brink of disagreement where you stop seeing that in one another. I think about this with Amendment One. You do not have to be affirming of same-sex marriage to be against Amendment One. What you have to be against is harming children and families and enshrining that into the constitution of North Carolina... We're going to talk about ways that we talk about this with each other and this broader vision of marriage equality but also ways that we can meet our neighbors where they're at and talk to them in a way that doesn't get into the requirement of changing an entire paradigm and worldview around this issue (Personal recording, March 27, 2012).



After situating himself as a fellow Christian, as a man at home “with my UCC brothers and sisters,” Rowe turned toward explaining how the campaign’s messages reconcile the challenges faced by people of faith opposed to the amendment who wanted to “witness” to family, friends, and neighbors:

Again, in terms of storytelling, people start preparing themselves for stories around, ‘What do I do if someone argues about the Bible with me?,’ but what I need you to do is to tell a story to that person which says, ‘You know, Amendment One, that’s terrible.’ You need to have an emotional appeal and tell them why you couldn’t stay home, why you needed to volunteer. So that point of action that your story needs to be around is, I think, why you did something. Tell them about that one moment when you realized that you couldn’t just sit here and do nothing. That’s the conversations we need to be having (Personal recording, March 27, 2012).

Whereas Jones and Rowe attempted to balance the campaign’s messages with the positions of multiple movement publics, in the case of college students and the convening of campus publics, the message was transformed completely. As Speer described to me:

**Meadows:** You weren’t necessarily coming in to raise a rainbow flag. Rather you were coming in with a harms message. How did that affect your organizing during the campaign?

**Speer:** From an organizing perspective, and as someone who focused heavily on college campuses, it did not work. It was not the message that students wanted to hear. And, not what they wanted to talk about. They wanted to talk about gay marriage.

**Meadows:** And so you did that?

**Speer:** Yeah. With college students, I was given the approval. This is what they want to talk about. This is what motivates them. This is what gets them inspired. Let them craft their own message because they’re speaking to each other.

**Meadows:** You said you got approval. Who did you get approval from?

**Speer:** Jeremy Kennedy. And then with, certainly with the faith groups and, for the most part, the straight allies, the harms messaging seemed to resonate.

These episodes point to the power of a spokesperson to alter the delivery (and, presumably, the reception) of a political message. While a campaign’s official message may seem straightforward and easily categorized, the choice of a spokesperson charged with convening a movement public has the capacity to transform the communication through an appeal to a shared identity and/or cultural understanding and to expand movement publics. For

instance, while Jones represented the Protect All NC Families campaign, she simultaneously spoke for the rural and more explicitly-LGBT publics served by Equality NC. In part through her work, between October 2011 and May 2012, Equality NC grew its membership from 29,000 people to more than 125,000 and its Facebook followers from 10,000 to more than 60,000.

### Engaging latent movement publics

As noted previously, the conceptualization of movement publics encompasses individuals currently engaged with the movement, as well as potential supporters who share characteristics with particular movement publics but who have not been formally engaged by them and who may or may not hold oppositional stances toward the broader LGBT community. In order to reach these potential supporters, LGBT movement actors in the state targeted the state's overwhelming majority heterosexual citizens, most explicitly through the master forum of the local newspaper (Gamson, 1998). In fact, over the past three years, local papers throughout the state have been the milieu on which opponents and advocates of LGBT equality have deliberated the issue, with equality supporters targeting their writing to appeal to specific straight movement publics. Some of these writers focused on an encompassing North Carolina public, engaging North Carolinians' historical pride in being a progressive beacon within the South, appealing directly to people's conceptions of what it means to be a North Carolinian. For instance, in Greensboro's *News & Record*, Rosemary Roberts writes:

Recently, I have been upset about my adopted state of North Carolina, where I've lived for years. I've enjoyed the comforting thought that North Carolina is a fair minded, forward-looking state. Barack Obama, after all, carried the state in the last presidential election and may do so again. It is also a state with a distinguished higher education system, an appreciation for the arts and the world-class Research Triangle. But when a friend in New York phoned the other day, I found myself repeating what I used to say during the civil rights era about benighted Alabama: 'We're not all like that.'

The editorial board of Greenville's *Daily Reflector* addressed this public in an even more direct way, writing: "Earlier this year, North Carolina voters put the state on the wrong side of history when they approved a constitutional amendment defining marriage as being only between one man and one woman. That represented an unbecoming brand of ignorance" (December 11, 2012).

Other actors took to the opinion pages of these papers to engage with the state's faithful, often employing arguments directly from Christian Scripture. A representative piece from Raleigh's *News & Observer* quoted the leader of North Carolina's Episcopal Church on his stance toward Amendment One: "I opposed it because I believe, as the scripture says, all people are created in the image and likeness of God and that all are therefore to be accorded the rights and dignity that befit a child of God" (May 10, 2012). Similarly, David Jones, a lawyer, Christian, and Charlotte resident, wrote in the *Charlotte Observer*:

I am no theologian, just a garden variety church-goer who tries to pay attention...A search of the Gospels won't yield any direct evidence regarding how Jesus viewed gay marriage. All we are left with is, as lawyers say, circumstantial evidence. What does that tell us? Jesus lived his life as a homeless, itinerant rabbi, or teacher...Jesus lived among and ministered to society's outcasts. He was their friend and advocate...John and Thomas...The conclusion I draw is that He would have blessed them and would have walked with them through the difficult days that would undoubtedly lie ahead (May 13, 2012).

Others attempted to connect to a potential faith movement public through appeals to their own religious journey and the place of the Church in their lives. For instance, after the Amendment One campaign, the *News & Record* published a piece in which a local citizen writes, "Only I didn't know where home was anymore. I was deeply wounded. So I went to an evening service at my church. I needed communion – the circle and the sacrament" (Ore, June 14, 2012). Likewise, in reaction to a pro-LGBT rally held shortly after the Amendment One vote, a Winston-Salem resident wrote the following in the local paper: "Many participants were

children, ranging from toddlers and teenagers, arriving in family groups and church vans to proclaim that God loves everyone. It was healing to return here and see so many messages of love and not hate” (Detter, *Winston-Salem Journal*, May 30, 2012).

Still others leveraged their identities as heterosexuals to appeal to similarly positioned readers and potential members of an ally movement public. Emblematic of this targeting strategy is a *News & Observer* piece in which the author writes, “Like many of you, I have friends, colleagues and relatives who are gay, and I don’t view their relationships as shaking their fist at God” (White, June 9, 2012), and a *News & Record* item where the author states, “No, I’m not gay. I’m happily straight, a person of moral conviction and a bit conservative. However, Christianity and my personal desire to serve an awesome God doesn’t give me the right to grab a microphone and ignite hatred toward those who choose a different path” (Currie, July 14, 2012). While this rhetoric falls short of a radical call for equality or an unequivocal denunciation of bigotry, within the political, social, and cultural context of a Southern state, it is insurgent language, and a necessary first step toward expanding the state’s LGBT movement.

## **Discussion**

This chapter argues that the conceptualization of movement publics offers a novel means through which to consider the complex constitution of the LGBT movement, moving scholars away from narrowly portraying the movement as one split between mainstream and radical factions (Sullivan, 1995; Warner, 1999) whose adherents share an urban, secularist sensibility (D’Emilio, 1998; Fetner, 2008). Even more, the concept complicates the communicative strategies organizational actors leveraged to convene, mobilize, and deploy multiple publics. Rather than a choice between celebration or suppression (Bernstein, 1997) or resonance or radicalism (Ferree, 2003), North Carolina’s movement actors developed messaging strategies

that allowed them to speak to people where they were, and to consequently expand the state's movement publics.

Indeed, the findings above suggest that scholars need to reassess understandings of the LGBT movement's collective identity in order to create space to accommodate the meaningful movement work being done in the South. Through the conceptualization of movement publics and the analysis of North Carolina's movement actors and organizations, this chapter argues that the larger LGBT movement can benefit from adopting a "Southern strategy" to speak to people where they are in order to build a coalition of movement publics capable of reshaping the social, political, and contexts of their communities. While the movement has experienced unprecedented progress over the last three years, the fact remains that issues and challenges beyond marriage equality exist for the movement, including employment nondiscrimination protections, safe school laws, adoption restrictions, and medical decision-making policies. Further, the right for expanded LGBT rights and cultural equality must necessarily be joined in states such as North Carolina, where the keys to victory including convincing rural, religious, and conservative communities of the rightness of the cause. In short, the path to full legal and cultural equality remains a long one. Nonetheless, though the political, social, and cultural work left to be done is immense, North Carolina's model of speaking to people where they are, of convening and mobilizing movement publics in communities typically ignored by the broader movement, provides a pathway to transform the LGBT politics of Mississippi into those of New York.

At the same time, this chapter suggests that scholars consider the role of organizations in convening, mobilizing, and deploying publics. Though political communication scholars have begun to examine the relationship between networked media, electoral campaigning, and social

movements (Chadwick, 2007; Karpf, 2012; Kreiss, 2012), the ability of organizational actors to foster and develop movement identities, especially at the state level, has been understudied. And, while Fraser's conceptualization of "subaltern counterpublics" has effectively dismantled the notion of a singular public sphere and focused scholarly attention on the centrality of communication in forming and negotiating identities, the capacity for established movement organizations to foster discourse through the creation of offline and online spaces has not been specified.

In conclusion, while the LGBT movement has amassed a substantial number of marriage equality victories over the past several years, they have been confined to liberal states or federal courthouses. The path to full LGBT equality, however, runs through locations and publics historically understood to be antagonistic to the movement's goals: the countryside and church pews. Through the lens of movement publics, North Carolina provides an exemplary case to navigate the road ahead.

## CHAPTER 4: CATALYZING EVENTS

### Introduction

#### Episode 4.1

*News & Observer* Front Page Headline, May 9, 2012

MARRIAGE AMENDMENT ADDED TO N.C. CONSTITUTION – STATE TO BECOME 31<sup>ST</sup> TO CONSTITUTIONALLY FORBID SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

#### Episode 4.2

Equality NC's Facebook page, May 9, 2012

 **Equality NC**  
May 9, 2012

The fight is not over. The passage of Amendment One is a temporary setback.

An unprecedented coalition came together to fight Amendment One. The partnerships developed in this campaign were deep and wide. The Coalition to Protect NC Fam... [See More](#)




Like · Comment · Share

👍 562 💬 25 ➦ 150 Shares

### Episode 4.3

Mitchell County GSA's Facebook page, May 9, 2012

**Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance**  
May 9, 2012

The Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance will be continuing our work here in Mitchell County.

Evan Wolfson from Freedom to Marry said this morning on MSNBC "there has not been enough conversation about gay families in North Carolina. Now there will be." We agree. People all over the country were inspired by the fight against Amendment One, one of the largest grassroots campaigns in North Carolina history.

We are grateful that our community came together so strongly to work against the amendment, and we look forward to the future, starting with our participation in the WE DO Campaign this Friday in Bakersville. It is more important than ever to let LGBT people and their families, and especially LGBT youth, know that we will continue to stand up for equality.

The real victory is in our commitment to each other. We look forward to the future.

Like · Comment · Share

22 2

### Episode 4.4

Neighbors for Equality's Facebook page, May 11, 2012

**Neighbors for Equality** shared a link.  
May 11, 2012

We're excited to announce our expansion following the passage of Amendment One!



**Neighbors for Equality Is Growing!**  
us2.campaign-archive1.com  
ASHEVILLE & SHELBY, NC — Neighbors for Equality (NFE) is excited to continue its work of supporting LGBTQ individuals across North Carolina this summer following the passage of Amendment One. The initiative plans to immediately begin

Like · Comment · Share

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## Episode 4.5

Salisbury Pride's Facebook page, May 12, 2012



## Episode 4.6

Letter: No Way to Pray Away Gay, *The Daily Reflector*, May 14, 2012

Regardless of the shameful, loathsome results of the vote for Amendment One, you can't pray gay away. Gay is alive and well in North Carolina, and wishing and postulating won't change that. In fact, quite the opposite. Gay has been brought to the forefront and changes are coming sooner than they would have if this hadn't happened. The fact that 11,717 people in Pitt County voted against hate being written into our constitution is heartening. I am so glad to be a part of that loving number of thinking people.

On May 8, 2012, after a months-long, multi-million dollar campaign, the vast majority of North Carolina voters cast ballots to constitutionally amend their state's constitution to define marriage exclusively as the union of one man and one woman. Despite this clear loss at the ballot box, however, North Carolina's LGBT movement was fundamentally –and, in many ways, beneficially – transformed by the electoral battle. On May 9, 2012, President Barack Obama announced his support for marriage equality, telling Robin Roberts of ABC News, "It's important for me to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married." The same day, led by Reverend Jasmine Beach-Ferrara of CSE, six North Carolina couples requested and were denied marriage licenses from the Wilson County Register of Deeds because of the state's existing laws prohibiting same-sex marriage and the newly passed

constitutional ban, initiating a series of direct actions in counties across North Carolina that garnered attention from national media outlets such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and MSNBC. And, later that day, drag queen Roxy C. Moorecox posted to the Facebook page of Rowan County, North Carolina-based Salisbury Pride, “OK! So here’s to making every NC Pride event the BIGGEST EVER! Pride Charlotte, Salisbury Pride, OBX Pridefest, etc. Who’s with me?”

As these actions and events attest, and as the messages above reveal, in the days after the Amendment One vote, North Carolina’s LGBT movement awoke to a dynamic political landscape it helped create, armed with unprecedented visibility, and an enlivened base of support. In effect, the Amendment One campaign reconfigured the course of the state’s movement through the creation of new, and the revitalization of existing, organizational, material, and cultural resources. In this chapter, I argue that the Amendment One campaign served as a *catalyzing event* for the statewide LGBT movement, which I define as *a political happening that fundamentally alters the trajectory of a social movement*. Building upon Sewell’s theory of events, which focuses on the power of an event to alter a society’s cultural practices, resources, and understandings, the conceptualization of catalyzing events provides a distinct perspective through which to examine the trajectory of a social movement and the experiences, interactions, and events that alter its course.

As Sewell (2005) notes, the course of social life is transformed by significant happenings or complex interactions of social, political, and cultural processes. This chapter, specifically the conceptualization of catalyzing events, follows Sewell’s (2005) idea that historical events are happenings that fundamentally transform social structures, where structures are conceived of as either cultural schemas or material resources. By examining the trajectory of the North Carolina

LGBT movement through the lens of a catalyzing event, this chapter provides a new framework through which to examine the effects of a political event on a social movement's organizational, cultural, and material resources. Even more, the conceptualization offers a distinct perspective through which to examine the intersection of institutional and non-institutional politics. Further, in acknowledging the idea that political, social, and cultural movement work takes place between and around particular campaigns, examining a movement through the lens of a catalyzing event focuses our scholarly gaze on the opportunities that emerge for social movement actors when their work intersects with electoral environments, not just for the duration of a campaign (Stone, 2012), but for the months and years following Election Day.

Although social scientists typically ignore the transformative effects of historical events on social life (Kreiss, forthcoming), the conceptualization of catalyzing events is implicit in a number of seminal works in both social movement and political communication scholarship. For instance, McAdam (1988) powerfully argues that the volunteers who participated in the Freedom Summer campaign to register African American voters in Mississippi during the summer of 1964 were fundamentally transformed by the experience. As McAdam (1988) notes:

The events of the summer effectively resocialized and radicalized the volunteers while the ties they established with other volunteers laid the groundwork for a nationwide activist network out of which the other major movements of the era – women's, antiwar, student – were to emerge. In short, Freedom Summer served both as the organizational basis for much of the activism of the Sixties as well as an important impetus for the development of the broader counterculture that emerged during the era (p. 5).

Similarly, Mansbridge (1986) contends that the efforts to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment during the 1970s effectively galvanized the women's movement, often in states that did not ratify it and had previously had little to no movement presence, by brining thousands of women into politics for the first time. By focusing attention on women's issues, Mansbridge argues that the campaigns to ratify the ERA fostered a national discussion, aided in the development and

expansion of movement organizations, and provided openings for the formation of organizational alliances.

To date, however, most work surrounding the intersection of social movements and electoral events focuses on discrete campaigns (Stein, 2002; Fejes, 2008; Ginsburg, 1998) *or* social movement work (Sobieraj, 2011; McAdam, 1998; Polletta, 2002). This chapter, on the other hand, seeks to build upon a diverse body of work that looks across discrete election cycles and social movement campaigns to analyze the work of networks of influential actors and organizations. For example, Kreiss (2012) argues that, “What takes place in the interstices of presidential politics has generally been ignored by scholars who focus narrowly on electoral cycles” (190). While this dissertation obviously does not focus on presidential election cycles, the idea that focusing on the liminal spaces between and around campaigns can reveal hidden dynamics that shape the trajectory of social movements drives this chapter.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. I first discuss the literature surrounding the LGBT movement at the ballot box before examining a broader swath of literature on movements and electoral politics in order to develop the idea of catalyzing events. I then provide three empirical sections that demonstrate the long-term effects of Amendment One on North Carolina’s LGBT movement. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how conceptualizing catalyzing events provides a fuller understanding of the role political events potentially play in the evolution of social movements.

## Literature Review

Recent social movement scholarship argues that the barrier between institutional and noninstitutional politics should be considered permeable at a minimum (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Meyer, 2007). According to this line of scholarship, social movements contribute to political parties, public policy, and elections, and vice versa, though research addressing these dynamics has not kept pace with this recognition. Consequently, as Goldstone (2003) argues, scholars must continue to address a host of understudied aspects of the interactions between social movements and electoral politics, especially in regional and political settings typically ignored by social movement theorists.

### The LGBT Movement at the Ballot Box

During the 2014 Midterm Elections, driven in part by labor unions and organizations, four states approved ballot measures to raise the minimum wage, highlighting the fact that movements operating within the electoral realm are a fact of our democracy. Perhaps no movement has battled so explicitly, nor so consistently, at the ballot box as has the LGBT movement. Consequently, the movement provides an excellent vehicle through which to study the effects of elections on social movements. In fact, as the following (very brief) history shows, the LGBT movement's initial experiences in the voting booth fundamentally shaped its contemporary organization.

Popular conceptions of the rise of the LGBT movement focus on the Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969. As the story goes, the transsexuals, queers, lesbians, and gay men hanging out on a June night at the Stonewall Inn in New City's Greenwich Village neighborhood rose up to protest police brutality and oppression and effectively started a movement. But, as D'Emilio (1983) notes, the LGBT movement, like any large-scale civil rights movement, did not

rise from the ether. Rather, the movement was cultivated by individuals, activists, and organizations over the course of decades. While it is certainly not true that the Stonewall Riots mark the beginning of the LGBT movement (Chauncey, 1994; Faderman, 1991), it is one of several seminal political happenings that permanently altered the trajectory of the movement.

The Second World War stands as the paramount event in the history of the movement as it allowed for a massive enlargement of the population able to participate in gay and lesbian communities. As D'Emilio's (1983) seminal work shows, the mobilization necessary to fight the Second World War led to an influx of both men and woman from rural into urban areas, to increased freedom from oversight and enforcement of strict, traditional gender roles, and to expanded economic opportunities and resources, especially for women. These social changes allowed for the formation of gay and lesbian communities in many urban areas, including New York and San Francisco, and for the establishment of commercial institutions to serve as social and political hubs for these growing communities.

Though the movement continued to grow throughout the repressive 1950s and the social, sexual, and cultural revolutions of the 1960s (Johnson, 2004), the trajectory of the movement dramatically changed during the 1970s and 1980s, arguably marking the beginning of the movement's modern era. Specifically, a series of referendum campaigns focused on gay rights laws were held in cities across the country during the late-1970s, effectively marking the beginning of the battle between the Religious Right and the LGBT movement, and essentially serving as catalyzing events for the movement. Fejes (2008) charts these campaigns, focusing specifically on the battle in Dade County, Florida, and argues that they constituted the first major national discussion about gay and lesbian rights. Though Fejes does not explicitly acknowledge these campaigns as catalyzing events, the implicit recognition of their effect is evident. For

instance, while the nondiscrimination legislation at issue in Dade County was ultimately defeated, the LGBT movement “lost well,” according to Fejes (2008), in that the existence of an enemy produced an upsurge in material resources such as fundraising for the movement and an expansion of local, grassroots activist organizations. Further, the campaign garnered significant national attention in the mainstream media and helped to nationalize both the Religious Right and the LGBT movement, effectively transforming the cultural dialogue surrounding LGBT issues.

### Leveraging Election Cycles

One constructive, but underdeveloped, line of research examining the intersection of social movements and electoral politics concerns the ways in which social movement actors leverage election cycles in an attempt to insert themselves into broader public debates, namely through the mainstream media. As Dayan and Katz (1992) note, the types of media events that occur in conjunction with elections, such as debates and conventions, are ripe for “hijacking” by activists in search of a larger platform. In this way, elections are milieus in which social movement organizations seek to commandeer the attention of mainstream media outlets, regardless of their political focus.

However, the efficacy and rate of adoption of this strategy remains an open question. Blee and Currier (2006) focused on the extent to which fledgling local groups in a medium-sized U.S. city developed actions plans surrounding the 2004 presidential election campaign. Holding the size of these ideologically similar organizations constant, the authors found a broad range of strategic plans, ranging from principled abstention to ambivalence to efforts to leverage the attention surrounding the election to their benefit. Sobieraj (2011) provides the most in-depth look at this aspect of social movement organizing, examining fifty organizations and their efforts

to garner mainstream media attention over the course of the 2000 and 2004 presidential election cycles. According to Soberiaj, while elections do create opportunities for both explicitly political and nonpolitical groups, activism that is dominated by efforts to influence mainstream media reportage fails in the vast majority of cases in that groups receive little to no coverage *and* a barrier gets created between group members and potential supporters.

### Movements in the Electoral Field

Other scholars have focused on the interactions between social movements and political opponents when movements enter explicitly into the electoral realm. In the definitive history of the women's rights movement's work to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, introduced in 1972 and failed in 1982, Mansbridge (1986) contextualizes its "death" within two broad changes in American political attitudes: "growing skepticism about the consequences of giving the U.S. Supreme Court authority to review legislation, and the growing organizational power of the new Right" (p. 4). Further, Mansbridge (1986) argues that to win 50 plus one percent of the vote in each state, the amendment's proponents would have had to compromise some of their core values, effectively showing the intricate, delicate, and unwieldy dance movement actors have to engage in when attempting to fuse movement strategies and political realities.

Conversely, in their examination of the forces constituting the Tea Party movement, Skocpol and Williamson (2012) illustrate a social movement's effects on election outcomes. Arguing that grassroots activists, wealthy conservative activists, and right-wing media have collectively worked through the Tea Party to redirect the Republican Party, their work demonstrates the centrality of the Tea Party to the GOP's electoral victories in 2010, through heightened media coverage of conservative issues, increased local network-building, and more efficient fundraising. Importantly, Skocpol and Williamson (2012) also note the many instances



in which Tea Party actors captured seats on local and state committees responsible for determining election cycle procedures and allocating resources.

Most works focused on the intersection of social movements and electoral politics, however, examine a particular campaign's messaging strategies, most notably in studies of the LGBT movement's battles at the ballot box. For instance, Bernstein (1997) sought to explicate the role of identity in the construction of campaign messages through an examination of ballot initiative campaigns in Vermont in the 1980s, Oregon in 1992, and New York City in 1971, arguing that activists developed messages featuring particular identities based on the interplay between dominant social movement organizations, political actors, and opponents. Importantly, Bernstein (1997) notes that, "Essentialist characterizations of social movements as either cultural and expressive or instrumental and political miss the reality that goals and strategies...are related to concrete institutional dynamics and to the structural location of actors" (p. 560). Bernstein (2003) returned to this theme in a later study comparing efforts by movement activists to decriminalize sodomy between 1961-1977 and 1986-1991, highlighting the cultural and political trade offs activists must negotiate when they choose message strategies focused on either challenging heteronormative assumptions or effectively reinforcing them in order to win politically.

Several scholars have specifically examined the role of the Religious Right in shaping LGBT movement organizing and messaging. Through an analysis of organizational materials and published statements concerning public education from various national groups, including the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, the ACLU, and the Family Research Council, Miceli (2005) notes that these groups argue "from completely different realms of politics" (p. 590). While gay rights groups consistently focused on discourse pertaining to identity politics,

the Christian Right communicated through the context of morality politics, effectively foreclosing the possibility of deliberative progress. Klarman's (2013) exploration of same-sex marriage litigation, from *Romer* (1996) to *Lawrence* (2003), traces the give and take between the LGBT movement, the Religious Right, and national politicians, providing a detailed accounting of the ways in which a victory for the movement in court would invariably lead to heightened oppositional organizing and subsequent policy stands from politicians.

Relatedly, Fetner (2008) provides a broader historic examination of the interactions between the Religious Right and the LGBT movement from 1977 through the beginning of the twenty-first century, and asserts that the movement's chosen message strategies, frames, and goals reflect LGBT activists' interactions with their opponents. In short, Fetner (2008) shows that the Religious Right dictated the terrain of the battle: the ballot box. And, as Stone (2012) contends in her detailed history of nearly three decades of anti-gay ballot referenda and the interactions between the movement and the Religious Right, the LGBT movement's fights at the ballot box have fundamentally altered the trajectory of the movement and frequently defined its goals through the creation of a model messaging strategy focused on winning on election day.

While the aforementioned studies all address important aspects of the relationship between social movements and electoral politics, few studies to date focus on the consequences of elections on long-term social movement organizing. This chapter, however, follows work that builds across election cycles and particular social movement campaigns to analyze the repercussions of electoral politics that are too often black boxed. For example, Ginsburg (1989) describes the conflict over abortion in Fargo, ND, from a 1972 statewide referendum through the aftermath of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision to the opening of an abortion clinic in October 1981, focusing on the aftermath of the referendum and the creation of "social and symbolic divisions

around abortion that endured, developed, and emerged anew in 1981” (p. 68). Similarly, Stein (2002) situates a political referendum regarding the rights of gay and lesbian citizens in a small Oregon town within the broader contexts of economic upheaval, the rise of the Christian Right, and the town’s changing demographics. While Stein (2002) does examine the referendum campaign itself, much of the study’s focus remains on the social and political context in which it was fought. In the same way, through an examination of the effects of the Amendment One campaign on the larger North Carolina LGBT movement, this chapter argues for the power of a catalyzing event, such as a ballot referendum, to reconfigure the trajectory of a social movement through the formation of new movement resources and coalitions and the revitalization of existing ones.

## **Findings**

### Organizational Growth

When North Carolina legislators placed Amendment One on the May 2012 primary ballot, they sparked an unforeseen explosion in the state’s LGBT organizational capacity. Angered by the legislature’s actions, and faced with the formidable prospect of mobilizing thousands of voters within a relatively short timespan, activists within the state quickly ramped up their mobilization efforts through the expansion of existing organizations and the formation of new ones. Of the established organizations, none grew as exponentially as Equality NC. Established in 1979 to support the state’s LGBT community and to lobby the General Assembly for expanded rights, the organization had toiled for decades with a modest budget and a stable but static supporter base. The efforts of the organization’s staff to fight Amendment One, however, transformed the group into a virtual behemoth within the state’s movement.

In anticipation of the upcoming legislative and electoral battles around Amendment One, and aware of the necessity of reaching a broader audience of potential voters, Equality NC hired Jen Jones to serve as the group's first communication director. Leveraging the upcoming electoral battle, Jones and the rest of the staff successfully worked through digital media to expand the group's base of support, as evidenced by the numbers of followers for each of Equality NC's media accounts. Before Amendment One was placed on the primary ballot, just 4,000 people followed Equality NC's Facebook page. Afterward, more than 60,000 people did. The group's Twitter account grew by over 120 percent, while the number of people signed up to receive emails expanded from 25,000 to more than 125,000. While these supporters undoubtedly helped the campaign's electoral efforts, in the long run, Equality NC's followers positioned the organization as a go-to communicative resource within the movement. For instance, when a federal district judge struck down North Carolina's marriage ban on October 10, 2014, tens of thousands of social media users followed, tweeted, and retweeted information from Equality NC's Twitter account, specifically utilizing the group's #DayOneNC hashtag, which became the world's number one trending topic on Twitter in the hours after the ruling.

In addition to the expansion of their communicative reach, Equality NC also leveraged its mobilization efforts during the campaign to increase its offline organizational capacity in areas across the state. For instance, immediately after the Amendment One vote, from May 23 to June 25, 2012, in collaboration with a host of progressive organizations, Equality NC's staff organized a series of "What's Next?" town hall meetings in ten towns, many of which had been historically underserved by LGBT organizations, in order to discuss the group's next steps and to maintain relationships with local activists formed during the campaign. During these meetings, which

were attended by anywhere from 35 to 150 people, Jones always opened her remarks focused on shared experiences from the campaign:

We wanted to come back to places outside of Raleigh, where the bad things happen, and talk to people just like us about the good things that can happen in our state. While Amendment One passed, we had hundreds of thousands of people knock on doors, make phone calls, give money, and do a very effective job of riling up an entire state around an issue that was not quite equality but will get us on our way. Are you with me for the next time? (Personal recording, Greenville, NC, May 23, 2012).

Importantly, the answer to Jones' question, "Are you with me?," was a consistent and resounding yes. The presence of Equality NC representatives galvanized local activists. As more than one of these local activists told me, "This is the first time any organization has paid any attention to us, so we're excited to be here."

At a representative meeting in Hickory, NC, on June 25, 2012, organized by Equality NC and local activist Michelle Mathis, staff from Equality NC, the ACLU of North Carolina, and the NAACP of North Carolina gathered with nearly 50 local LGBT activists in a sweltering fellowship hall in a local church to talk about the amendment and to talk about next steps. For more than two hours, the activists gathered sweated through a discussion about Equality NC's upcoming push to elect pro-equality candidates, the ACLU's imminent lawsuit challenging the state's second-parent adoption ban, and the NAACP's plans to fight back against the GOP-led General Assembly. Conversely, the leaders of these organizations listened to local residents' concerns about school bullying, supporting open and affirming churches, and working with reporters from the local paper for better coverage of their issues.

Before the campaign, and particularly before Race to the Ballot, there were few, if any, connections between Equality NC and local activists in a host of underserved communities, such as Hickory, Greenville, Siler City, Rocky Mount, and Spruce Pine. After the campaign, however, Equality NC had built relationships with a coterie of local activists in these communities eager to

continue their work both at the local and state levels. For instance, in addition to organizing a meeting in an oft-ignored community, Mathis and the Equality NC staff have since collaborated to form an affiliate, Equality North Carolina Foothills, to focus more directly on concerns of the community in and around Hickory. Similarly, in conjunction with activists in the greater Wilmington area, Equality NC has launched a second affiliate, Cape Fear Equality, to serve the Cape Fear region in the eastern part of the state. Collectively, in the post-Amendment One movement, through an expansive use of social media and the formation of a large network of offline supporters and allies, Equality NC's organizational capacity is dramatically larger than it was before the electoral fight.

In addition to the expansion of the state's existing LGBT organizations, the Amendment One campaign inspired the creation of a host of new groups, nearly all of which formed in communities historically underrepresented within the LGBT movement.

Allison Bovée and Amy Waller, local residents of Bakersville, NC, formed the Mitchell County GSA in direct response to Amendment One being placed on the ballot. As Bovée said, "One day in October of 2011, Amy said that we need to do something. So, I said, let's do it. So we decided to start a group." Importantly, before the Mitchell County GSA formed, there had never been a formal LGBT presence in Mitchell County. While the organizing efforts of the Mitchell County GSA were recounted extensively in chapter 2, it is worth noting that while the group formed in response to Amendment One, the activists have stayed organized in the years since the vote, sponsoring a host of events, including a reading of '8' the Play starring 21 local residents at the Bakersville Historic Courthouse, a viewing of "Edie & Thea: A Very Long Engagement" at the Penland School of Crafts in Bakersville, and a Decision Day gathering to celebrate the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling striking down Virginia's marriage ban at Bakersville's Creek

Walk Park, all of which were covered via social media and through the town's local newspaper (See Figure 4.1.)

## CELEBRATING COURT RULING



On July 28, the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Virginia's ban on same-sex marriage is unconstitutional. Because North Carolina is part of the 4th Circuit, this decision could affect North Carolina as well. Following the ruling, North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper announced that he will no longer defend North Carolina's constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, also known as Amendment One. The Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance hosted a Decision Day gathering to celebrate this news at the Bakersville Creek Walk on the day of the ruling. Pictured are members and friends of the Mitchell County Gay Straight Alliance at the Bakersville Creek Walk on the day of the 4th Circuit ruling.

**Figure 4.1:** Mitchell County GSA's Decision Day event article

Similarly, Neighbors for Equality formed in Shelby (population: 20,325) in direct response to the actions of North Carolina legislators. According to the group's Facebook page, "Neighbors for Equality was founded by Tyler J. McCall and Collyn Warner in the late night hours of Tuesday, September 13, 2011 – the day the North Carolina General Assembly voted to allow North Carolinians the opportunity to write discrimination into the North Carolina Constitution." And, similarly, in short order, Neighbors for Equality leveraged its growth and offline activities into local and social media attention.

On September 16, after Warner reached out to several local reporters, the *Shelby Star* published a front-page story on the formation of the group, "Group gathers opposition to same-

sex marriage ban: Neighbors for Equality.” By September 19, just six days after launching, Neighbors for Equality’s Facebook page reached 100 likes. After hosting a “Kick Off Event for Neighbors for Equality” on October 1, where about 30 participants filled out petitions, wrote letters to their local legislators and media, and listened to guest speakers from both Equality NC and HRC, the group again made the front page of the *Shelby Star*. Continuing this pattern throughout the campaign, by May 8, 2012, Neighbors for Equality had gathered more than 750 Facebook followers and was a mainstay of the local paper.

More important for the long-term trajectory of the local movement, after the Amendment One campaign, the group shifted their priorities to focus more specifically on issues of concern to their geographic community. For instance, on June 20, 2012, the group announced a new initiative calling for updated policies in Cleveland County schools to protect LGBTQ students. To that end, Warner attended several local school board meetings, speaking each time to commissioners regarding the concerns of the local LGBT community. Additionally, the group provided its supporters with sample letters asking school officials to take action on the matter and provided the names and email addresses of the county’s superintendent, as well as several commissioners opposed to their demands. Collectively, the work of Neighbors for Equality opened a space within the local community for an LGBT presence. While cultural change is particularly difficult to measure, by June 27, 2014, Shelby held its first gay pride event. As the *Shelby Star* reported, “Beach Boys music floated through the crowd of more than 120 attending Shelby’s first gay pride picnic, # ShelbyLoves, held Friday night at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer.”



### Heightened Media Visibility

In addition to an expansion in the organizational capacity of North Carolina's LGBT movement, the Amendment One campaign triggered discussions through both national and local media outlets, bringing discussions of Southern LGBT issues to broader audiences unfamiliar with the region's movement. Before the campaign, the LGBT movement in the South generally, and in North Carolina particularly, received little to no coverage on the national level. In essence, the Southern LGBT movement was effectively absent in both the popular and academic mind, symbolically annihilated through a dearth of representation. As Gray (2009) notes, "To advocate publicly for the right to recognition, LGBT-identifying people and their allies must mobilize the social, political, and literal capital that affords them the privilege to visibly claim and prioritize their sexual and gender identities over other identities or alliances" (p. 165). In the aftermath of the Amendment One campaign, for the first time, North Carolina's movement entered the bloodstream of national conversations surrounding LGBT equality through articles in newspapers such as *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *USA Today*.

For instance, before North Carolina legislators voted to place the marriage amendment on the ballot, the *New York Times*, the nation's "newspaper of record," had published exactly two stories on the state's movement. Since the vote on May 8, 2012, there have been dozens. For instance, immediately after election day, the newspaper published articles focused on contextualizing the movement in the state, including "In North Carolina, Gay Rights Not a Simple Issue," which examined the balancing act of fighting for LGBT equality in a devoutly religious region. According to the article, "While some residents pointed out that most states had passed amendments similar to this one, others lamented that outsiders — and even people who live in the liberal enclaves within the state — just did not appreciate the difficult morality of the

issue for a population that remains deeply religious” (Robertson, May 11, 2012). Another article, “Unions that Divide: Churches Split Over Gay Marriage,” examined the issue through the lens of church debates surrounding the morality of LGBT relationships (Goodstein, May 13, 2012). And, in an opinion piece published months after the vote, UNC-Charlotte professor Karen L. Cox writes in “We’re Here, We’re Queer, Y’all,” that, “Still, as Alana’s Uncle Lee has shown America, there are gays living in the rural South who don’t all set out for the big city. They lead rich lives and have families, and sometimes even communities, that love them and accept them for who they are” (October 3, 2012). Collectively, these stories – and their headlines – work to dismantle assumptions regarding the absence of a Southern LGBT movement *and* the to highlight specific issues facing the region’s movement.

At the local level, as activists stayed mobilized, and as national events continued to focus media conversations on LGBT issues, local papers increasingly covered the movement, placing the issue of LGBT equality in front of divided audiences and prompting communities to deliberately engage with one another on the issue. In the immediate aftermath of the Amendment One vote, residents of communities throughout the state took to the Letters to the Editor sections of their local papers to debate the merits of the constitutional amendment. On May 19, 2012, Wilmington’s *StarNews* published a series of letters, including “The People Have Spoken,” “We’re All Equal Under the Law,” and “No Shaking These Beliefs.” On June 5, 2012, the *Hickory Daily Record* paired “Taking a Stand Against Sin” with “Amendment One Shouldn’t Have Passed” to represent the poles of the debate.

Examining these letters in more depth reveals communities debating the issue – often more extensively than at any time in the past – in language reflective of their region’s cultural understandings. For instance, in the pages of *The Daily Reflector*, Greenville’s paper of record,

both LGBT supporters and opponents spoke through the language of faith, morality, and North Carolina history. In a letter entitled “Bible-based Arguments Fall Short,” one Greenville resident writes, “In response to the recent writings about Amendment One’s passage and the writing saying God hates sin, since when do finite beings get to determine what God says or doesn’t? The argument that ‘the Bible says...’ is not sufficient” (May 14, 2012). In a series of letters debating the merits of President Obama’s support of marriage equality, Moahad Dar writes:

Do we want our children to grow up in a society where anything goes? I do not and encourage other people of conscience to stand up and be counted during the November election. I’m an independent and am not a big fan of Republicans or Democrats, but I am a firm believer that we need to uphold the moral fabric of our society. I can’t justify voting for a man who is giving moral and political cover to same-sex marriage (June 11, 2012).

Four days later, another resident responds directly to Dar, challenging his delineation between civil rights and morality, writing:

Moahad Dar claims gay marriage is not a civil rights issue, but a moral one (Public Forum, June 11). He’s half right. Civil rights are also about morality. Was it not immoral to force racial segregation? To keep women from voting? To allow children to work in sweatshops?...If we can learn to overlook the Bible’s support of slavery and female submissiveness, can’t we also learn to overlook its sanctions against homosexuality? Unlike Dar, I’m glad President Obama’s views on the subject have evolved beyond the morality of the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (June 15, 2012).

These types of deliberations were also occurring within the papers’ opinion and editorial sections. In especially conservative regions of the state, editorial staffs typically supported the need for civil debate and open dialogue. For example, the *Hickory Daily Record*’s editorial staff wrote, “People of faith often disagree. Differences of opinion can become heated. Divergent opinions have split congregations and even denominations. That’s what happens in a free society in which the government is prohibited from taking sides...Everybody got their say last Sunday, and that’s the way it should be in America” (May 29, 2012). Similarly, the editorial staff of the *Daily Reflector* argued, “Civility in the political arena may be a thing of the past, but surely

citizens can do better. This debate may not have ended with the vote. In fact, the issue may never be settled for good. But the discourse must be more civil, more tolerant and more understanding of different opinions if North Carolina hopes to move forward” (May 24, 2012). While such sentiments obviously fall far short of calls for full equality, they reflect progress for conservative, religious communities’ evolving on the rights of LGBT citizens.

In the state’s more progressive regions, newspapers’ opinion writers leveraged the Amendment One campaign and its aftermath to make more explicit calls for equality, while continuing to write with an understanding of the region’s cultural understandings . For example, on the op-ed page of the *Greensboro’s News & Record*, a guest columnist wrote:

“On the evening of the election, the boys couldn’t sleep. Luca came out of bed five times. ‘I don’t understand,’ he said. ‘Why would they say that people aren’t equal?’ Sage followed seconds after. ‘It doesn’t make any sense,’ he said. ‘I mean, everyone’s the same, right? Why would they pass such a mean law?’ As was the case with a thousand other questions over the past year, neither Kimberly nor I had a reasonable answer for our children” (Khanna, May 31, 2012).

Likewise, a *News & Observer* staff writer opined:

But I’m hard-pressed to see what’s so radical about gay people wishing to have the right to enter into a government-sanctioned partnership with someone who happens to be of the same gender. We rightly encourage male-female couples to enter such partnerships, whether or not they intend to have children or even are capable of having them. Why deprive a same-sex couple of that privilege?” (Ford, May 13, 2012).

In the days and months following the Amendment One vote, these types of debates occurred in a host of North Carolina papers, including *The Fayetteville Observer*, the *Shelby Star*, and the *Winston-Salem Journal*, forcing a consideration of previously established and uncontested beliefs for broad-based, conflicted audiences, an important development within a region that remains morally and politically conflicted on issues surrounding LGBT equality.

## Coalition Growth

The necessity of fighting a ballot initiative drew together a diverse coalition of LGBT and progressive organizations and churches. Beginning in May 2011, opponents of the proposed constitutional amendment, many of whom took part in the formal Amendment One campaign, began rallying their followers, creating advertisements, holding press conferences, and lobbying their state representatives. These opponents included established activist organizations such as Equality NC, HRC, and ACLU-NC, prominent African American religious and civil rights figures such as Reverends William Barber and Curtis Gatewood of the NAACP of North Carolina, Reverend T. Anthony Spearman of the Clinton Tabernacle African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and Reverend Reggie Longcrier of Exodus Missionary Outreach Church, and – ultimately – newfound organizations such as Neighbors for Equality and the Mitchell County GSA (See Figure 4.2). Importantly for the long-term development of the state’s LGBT movement, these coalitional partners stayed together long after the Amendment One vote, cementing a broader, more diverse Southern progressive alliance that remains active and engaged to this day.



**Figure 4.2:** Neighbors for Equality Facebook post

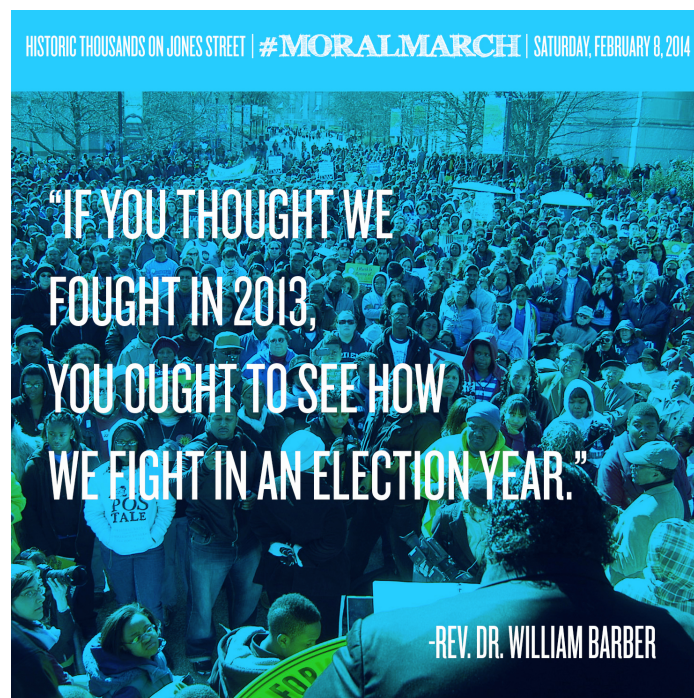
Further, while LGBT-focused organizations certainly established stronger connections to one another, collaborating on events such as Equality NC's "What's Next" town hall meetings after the campaign and cross-posting information through their respective social media pages, the strongest evidence for the power of a catalyzing event to build coalition and subsequently alter the direction of a movement can be seen through the partnership of the NAACP of North Carolina with the state's LGBT organizations. During the Amendment One campaign, the most galvanizing opponent of the constitutional amendment was the NAACP's Rev. Barber. He worked tirelessly throughout the campaign, holding press conferences, speaking at rallies, and preaching in churches. After the vote, Barber was responsible for drafting the language used by the national NAACP to affirm their support of marriage equality, which reads:

The NAACP Constitution affirmatively states our objective to ensure the "political, educational, social and economic equality" of all people. Therefore, the NAACP has opposed and will continue to oppose any national, state, local policy or legislative initiative that seeks to codify discrimination or hatred into the law or to remove the Constitutional rights of LGBT citizens. We support marriage equality consistent with equal protection under the law provided under the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. Further, we strongly affirm the religious freedoms of all people as protected by the First Amendment.

Additionally, in the aftermath of the campaign, NAACP-NC representatives, such as Rev. Gatewood, attended LGBT-sponsored events to affirm the organization's support. In a beautiful summary of the NAACP's position vis-à-vis LGBT Equality, Gatewood closed his remarks at Equality NC's town hall meeting in Hickory by saying:

We are here every day working for the cause of justice. Therefore, we are with you. We are with anyone who wants to stand for justice. We are with everyone who stands for justice. And we want you to see us as a partner. We want you to see us as a brother, as a sister, in the fight for freedom. And we are just so grateful to have you here tonight and doing such great work here in Hickory, North Cackalacky. God bless you (Personal recording, June 25, 2012).

In turn, LGBT-focused organizations have worked to support the NAACP's efforts in the state. Equality NC's Jen Jones joined the "Social Media Committee" for the NAACP-NC's Moral March on Raleigh event held on February 8, 2014, which brought together tens of thousands of progressive activists and organizations opposed to the actions of the North Carolina General Assembly, designing and disseminating promotional materials to the tens of thousands of social media followers of Equality NC (See Figures 4.3 and 4.4). Allison Bovée and Amy Waller, co-founders of the Mitchell County GSA, collaborated with the leaders of the state's NAACP to start a chapter in the mountains of North Carolina, Yancey Mitchell NAACP, focused on uniting rural voters for "social, economic and environmental justice" (Facebook post, August 14, 2013). Finally, in April 2014, Equality NC hired a full-time Freedom Moral Summer Organizer who worked jointly with the organization and the NAACP-NC to mobilize LGBT supporters for the civil rights organization's protest and voter registration efforts.



**Figure 4.3:** Moral March 2014 meme



**Figure 4.4:** Moral March 2014 meme

## DISCUSSION

As Sewell (2005) argues, historical events transform structures, which he defines broadly as either cultural schemas or material resources. Carrying this conceptualization into studies of social movements and political communication, this chapter developed the concept of catalyzing events, defined as a political happening that fundamentally alters the trajectory of a social movement. Through this conceptualization, this chapter provides an original perspective through which to examine the effects of political happenings on the trajectory of social movements, specifically in terms of their organizational, communicative, and cultural resources. Whereas scholarship typically explores either discrete campaigns *or* social movement work, this chapter utilizes the lens of catalyzing events in order to draw attention to the intersections of institutional and non-institutional politics and to illustrate the ways in which social movements are transformed through their work in explicitly electoral environments. As this chapter reveals, the necessity of fighting the Amendment One campaign galvanized existing organizations, spurred



the creation of new ones, and increased the movement's communicative reach on the local, state, and national levels.

This chapter's findings suggest that scholarship might benefit from a focus on the permeable barriers between institutional and noninstitutional politics. Though McAdam (1988) reveals the ways in which the Freedom Summer campaign effectively transformed the political lives of the participants in the decades following the effort and Ginsburg (1986) argues that state-level campaigns to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment fundamentally revamped the women's movement, a specific conceptualization of the power of events to transform social movements has to date been missing from the literature. This chapter argues that the catalyzing events concept provides this framework.

Relatedly, this chapter argues for more scholarship that explicitly examines the interconnections between social movement work and electoral happenings. Over the past five years, social movement organizations focused on LGBT rights, women's reproductive rights, labor, and environmental justice have participated in campaigns for and against state-level ballot initiatives. As these interactions attest, it is difficult, if not impossible, to extricate social movements from the political. However, this facet of social movement work remains understudied (Goldstone, 2003). By casting a broad analytical net and following a group of influential organizational actors through a campaign *and* its aftermath, this chapter and its conceptualization of catalyzing events highlights the work that takes place between electoral cycles and the scholarly value of focusing on liminal spaces in and around specific events.

## CHAPTER 5: LOSING FORWARD

At 5:32 p.m. on the evening of October 10, 2014, Wake County Register of Deeds Laura Riddick announced to a skeleton crew of activists, ministers, and reporters that North Carolina's ban on marriage had fallen: "Judge Max O. Cogburn, Jr. has declared the ban unconstitutional and the other associated laws and registers can begin issuing marriage licenses." Less than three years after Amendment One had passed, marriage equality was the law of the land in the Old North State. Nearly 200 people had been waiting in the Wake County courthouse since 10 a.m., but many had left a few minutes after 5 p.m. when no ruling had come down. By 6 p.m., most of them were back, many were crying, and nearly all were bear hugging friends and strangers alike. Among them were the first gay couple to receive a marriage license in the county, Wake County Sheriff's deputy Chad Briggs and his partner Chris Creech.

Briggs had been around all day, in uniform, directing the crowd, hugging friends, speaking with reporters, and looking joyously anxious. Pictures of him appeared on the websites of the *News & Observer* and WRAL, as well as on Twitter with the #DayOneNC hashtag where it was retweeted dozens of times (See Figure 5.1). After Equality NC tweeted the picture from its account, it was seen and forwarded hundreds of times. Under the headline "Historic ruling brings gay marriages to North Carolina," the *News & Observer* printed a picture the next day of the two kissing in front of a small crowd of cheering onlookers and the bright lights of several news cameras. Three days later, the *News & Observer* posted a video of the two, which was viewed more than 12,000 times and prompted dozens of online comments and letters to the editor, some of them congratulatory and some not.

One of those who had spent the day waiting around the courthouse was Briggs' fellow officer, Chris Jackson. When I saw him crying, I asked him how he knew the couple and he said:

I've known these guys for years, I knew them both before I knew about their relationship. And once I got to know them – I grew up Catholic – once I got to know them, I couldn't help but be happy for them and their family. I did a 180 in terms of what I thought about it. I'm not proud of that but I just didn't really know anything about it. But now I'm so happy for them, and so proud to be a part of this movement. Maybe I shouldn't say that, but I'm glad that I get to be here.



**Figure 5.1:** Laura Meadows' tweet, October 10, 2014.

This episode serves as a microcosm of North Carolina's movement. Recognizing that a vibrant, though specific, LGBT movement operates in the more religious, rural, and conservative South, this dissertation examined the Amendment One campaign and its aftermath in order to explore a series of understudied questions: How do social movement organizations build the diffuse bases of support necessary to succeed in a politically-antagonistic electoral setting? How do these organizations tailor their messaging and organizing strategies to speak to the social and cultural contexts of their supportive and antagonistic audiences, as well as the general public. How did the campaign's decisions regarding its distinct message strategy focused on harms to women, children, and families affect movement work in rural/conservative versus urban/liberal environments? Did the activist groups organized during the campaign leverage the heightened mobilization and visibility to continue their work in rural and faith communities after the vote? If so, what did that movement work look like? Finally, what can we learn about the upcoming challenges facing the broader LGBT movement in the decades to come from studying the movement in North Carolina?

In doing so, the dissertation brought together and made contributions to a number of different literatures on the LGBT movement, political communication, and social movements. Analyzing the present-day LGBT movement in a Southern state provides an opening through which to reevaluate the broader LGBT movement, the development and deployment of the movement's collective identity, and movement actors' strategic communication strategies to reach multiple publics both within and outside the movement. Further, while political communication scholars have begun dissecting the interconnections between digital media, electoral politics, and social movements (Chadwick, 2013; Karpf, 2012; Kreiss, 2012), the role of social media in state level campaigns and social movement work has been understudied. Even

more, this dissertation adds to scholarly understandings of social movements' "identity deployment" (Bernstein, 1997; Ferree, 2003) strategies by illustrating how identities and frames were deployed within a single campaign in order to reach multiple audiences with divergent social and cultural backgrounds.

Specifically, this dissertation highlights the interconnected, composite media environment that North Carolina's LGBT organizations navigated to speak to the social, political, and cultural realities of diverse Southern and national audiences. Organizational actors on both the local and state levels recognized the intricate connections between media and strategically leveraged multiple media platforms in order to assert themselves into their communities' dialogues, connect with supporters, and network with allied organizations. By examining the case of the Mitchell County GSA through Chadwick's (2013) conceptualization of the hybrid media system, this dissertation presented an analysis of contemporary movement media strategies deployed by organizational actors at the hyper-local level, illustrating their connections with allied local, state, and national organizations, and highlighting the continued importance of traditional mass media, especially in small or rural communities.

In doing so, this dissertation reveals the ways in which hyper-local movement actors can intervene in the news-making process in order to assert their presence in front of broader audiences and heighten their visibility within a community. Allison Bovée and Amy Waller, co-founders of the Mitchell County GSA, intuitively understood this process and so were able to leverage multiple media technologies to give voice to their organization's concerns. The pair penned opinion pieces for their local community's weekly newspaper, the *Mitchell News-Journal*, built an online base of support through Facebook and Twitter, posted homemade fliers throughout the town of Bakersville, and organized a series of offline events. Importantly, they

directed information across and between all of these platforms, highlighting the idea that networked and physical publics are not in competition so much as they are complementary (Tierney, 2013).

Further, through the conceptualization of movement publics, this dissertation provides a new framework through which to reflect on the cultural diversity of the LGBT movement *and* the strategic communicative strategies organizational actors leverage to speak to multiple movement audiences. Whereas previous work conceived of the LGBT movement as urban and secular (D’Emilio, 1998; Fetner, 2008), an examination of North Carolina’s movement reveals a vibrant, though specific, coalition of urban, rural, faith, African American, and conservative publics. Even more, organizational actors utilized complicated communicative strategies to convene, mobilize, and deploy these publics, highlighting the fact that a movement’s messaging strategies are not necessarily a choice between celebration or suppression (Bernstein, 1997), but rather can be seen as instrumental tactics to speak to audiences where they are.

To be clear, as Bernstein argues, “the tension between political and cultural goals will always be an issue for social movements, not just for the lesbian and gay movement” (Bernstein, 1997, p. 560). Undoubtedly, movement organizations must navigate this tension when developing communicative strategies, especially in an electoral setting. However, when identity deployment is conceptualized as being *either* political *or* cultural, and when scholars focus on exclusively on campaign materials and news accounts but ignore the in situ interactions between message, messenger, and audience, they risk obfuscating the cultural work that gets done within the political. For instance, while Protect All NC Families’ goal was to win an electoral campaign, cultural work got done because the campaign prompted conversations between individuals and groups and through social and mainstream mass media. The campaign forced communities to

consider LGBT issues and their effects on individuals and families, in many places for the first time, but they did so by talking with people where they were. Bisecting movement work into distinct political and cultural categories deceptively simplifies a complex process. The conceptualization of movement publics offers a novel perspective through which to avoid this analytical misstep.

Finally, this dissertation conceived of the Amendment One campaign as a catalyzing event, defined as a political happening that fundamentally alters the trajectory of a social movement, in an effort to reveal the ways in which a political event can reconfigure the course of a movement through the creation of new, and the revitalization of existing, organizational, material, and cultural resources. This conceptualization provides a bridge between institutional and non-institutional politics and a new perspective through which to examine their intersections. Even more, it reflects the idea that political, social, and cultural work happens in the interstices between and around specific campaigns, and moves scholars beyond thinking of social movement work as either campaign-based or cultural.

Collectively, the chapters of this dissertation reveal a social movement that participated in a failed electoral battle but underwent a revitalization in terms of increased organizational, material, and cultural resources. Existing groups such as Equality NC experienced exponential growth in membership. New groups such as the Mitchell County GSA and Neighbors for Equality formed in communities that had previously had no formal LGBT presence. Coalitions between LGBT organizations were strengthened and new partnerships with progressive allies were established. In short, North Carolina's LGBT movement lost forward.

## **The Fight Ain't Over**

To date, more than 30 states have secured marriage equality rights through state legislatures, the ballot box, or the courts. Both the Defense of Marriage Act and the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy were effectively abolished by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012. National public opinion polls consistently reflect incrementally increasing support for marriage equality. As more than one pundit has noted, "The debate is essentially over, in the sense that the trajectory is immutable and the conclusion foregone" (Bruni, 2014). However, as Amy Ray aptly sings, "Tolerance, it ain't acceptance."

According to a recent Pew Research Center poll, cultural acceptance of homosexuality trails opinions regarding the legality of equal marriage rights (2013), indicating a need to be cautious about conflating increased support for gay marriage with an accompanying increase in support for the morality of LGBT relationships. This same poll shows that especially religious individuals hold the strongest opinions regarding the immorality of homosexuality. Specifically, 78% of white evangelical Protestants believe it is a sin, while 67% of regular churchgoers do. Further, evangelical support for LGBT rights and equality trails other demographic groups in terms of its generational change. Whereas there is an 18-point gap between all millennials and adults, with the younger generation favoring marriage equality, evangelical millennials hold far less favorable views of the LGBT community.

In addition to these numbers regarding the perceived morality of LGBT individuals, the movement faces a host of challenges in securing equal civil rights protections, especially in the South. For instance, LGBT citizens in 29 states can be legally fired from their jobs for their sexual orientation or relationship status, including all of the Southern states. When attempting to secure housing, same-sex couples face greater discrimination than their straight peers, and the



rates of discrimination are slightly higher in the South. Unfortunately, the federal Fair Housing Act does not prevent this type of discrimination. Even more, North Carolina and Arkansas are the only two Southern states with statewide anti-bullying laws and policies for LGBT youth.

Perhaps most relevantly to the movement going forward, more LGBT adults live in the South than in any region of the country. In fact, more than 30% of LGBT adults live below the Mason-Dixon line. And, according to the 2010 U.S. Census, more gay couples are raising children in the South than anywhere else in the country. Yet, Southern LGBT organizations receive just three or four percent of domestic LGBTQ funding. To put these numbers in perspective, for every \$1 of LGBTQ funding, \$0.04 goes to Southern LGBT communities or organizations. (As these numbers attest, there are material costs for movement publics who have been ignored, denied, and symbolically annihilated in both popular and scholarly accounts.)

Despite these challenges, however, change is possible in any region of the U.S.

According to a recent Pew Research Center report:

All regions have seen growing support for same-sex marriage over the past decade. For example, while 44% of people in the South now favor gay marriage, that number was just 25% in 2003. The 19-point increase is comparable to the growth in support in the East (21-point jump from 40% to 61%), Midwest (22 points, 30% to 52%), and West (18 points, 40% to 58%) over the same time span (2014).

This increased support can be attributed in part to generational change, according to Nate Silver (2013), but roughly half of the net change in public opinion comes from individuals within the American electorate who have changed their minds regarding the issue.

Therefore, a central challenge facing the movement moving forward surrounds the manner in which activists, allies, and organizations will work to change opponents' minds. The larger LGBT movement will benefit from adopting a "Southern strategy" to speak to people where they are in order to build a coalition of movement publics capable of reshaping the social,

political, and cultural contexts of their communities. To do so, movement actors, pundits, and scholars must reassess their conceptions of the LGBT movement's collective identity in order to create space to accommodate the meaningful movement work being done in the South and to recognize that movement successes differ based on a community's culture. For example, in places like Bakersville, Greenville, and Salisbury, simply having a visible LGBT presence that takes part in the community's dialogue is a cultural victory.

While scholars such as Hirshman argue for the beginnings of a post-LGBT society, writing that while "New York is not Kansas," "the New York vote [for marriage equality] may be the turning point for this last, hardest fought issue" (2012, p. 341), this dissertation demonstrates that though meaningful work is being done in Southern and rural contexts, more work will be needed over the coming decades. Crucially, North Carolina's model of speaking to people where they are, of convening and mobilizing movement publics in communities historically ignored by the broader movement, provides a pathway to transform the LGBT politics of Kansas into those of New York. While the LGBT movement has amassed an unprecedented number of victories of the past several years, the path to full political and cultural equality runs through locations and publics historically understood to be antagonistic to the movement's goals: farm country, churches, and communities of color. North Carolina provides an exemplar case to navigate the road ahead.

# APPENDIX A: EVENTS ATTENDED DURING ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

| EVENT                                      | ORGANIZING<br>GROUP/ACTOR  | LOCATION         | DATE     |
|--|--|------------------|----------|
| National blogger call                      | Protect ALL NC Families (Jeremy Kennedy, Nation Hahn)                | Conference call  | 03.11.12 |
| National blogger call                      | Protect ALL NC Families (Jeremy Kennedy, Nation Hahn)                | Conference call  | 03.18.12 |
| National blogger call                      | Protect ALL NC Families (Jeremy Kennedy, Nation Hahn)                | Conference call  | 03.26.12 |
| Faith speakers' training                   | Protect ALL NC Families (Faith)                                      | Durham, NC       | 03.27.12 |
| National consultant messaging meeting      | Protect ALL NC Families  | Conference call  | 03.27.12 |
| New Kind Staff Meeting                     | New Kind   | Raleigh, NC      | 03.29.12 |
| Senior campaign staff meeting              | Protect ALL NC Families  | Raleigh, NC      | 03.29.12 |
| National consultant meeting                | Protect ALL NC Families  | Conference call  | 04.03.12 |
| National media consultant meeting          | Protect ALL NC Families (Jeremy Kennedy, Nation Hahn)                | Conference call  | 04.03.12 |
| Speaker's bureau training                  | Protect ALL NC Families (Communications)                             | Greenville, NC   | 04.04.12 |
| New Kind staff meeting                     | New Kind   | Raleigh, NC      | 04.12.12 |
| Speaker's bureau training                  | Protect ALL NC Families (Communications)                             | Fayetteville, NC | 04.13.12 |
| Jack Crum Conference on Prophetic Ministry | North Carolina Chapter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action | Raleigh, NC      | 04.14.12 |
| Speaker's bureau training                  | Protect ALL NC Families (Communications)                             | Rocky Mount, NC  | 04.15.12 |
| National blogger call                      | Protect ALL NC   | Conference call  | 04.15.12 |

|                                   |  |                 |          |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------|----------|
|                                   | Families (Jeremy Kennedy, Nation Hahn)   |                 |          |
| Rally Against Amendment One       | Greensboro People of Faith Against Amendment One and Protect ALL NC Families (Faith) | Greensboro, NC  | 04.16.12 |
| 'Legalize Gay' screening          | NC State Campus Pride  | Raleigh, NC     | 04.17.12 |
| Wilmington Pride March            | Wilmington Pride / Protect ALL NC Families / S.O.N.G.                                | Wilmington, NC  | 04.21.12 |
|                                   |  |                 |          |
| National blogger call             | Protect ALL NC Families (Jeremy Kennedy, Nation Hahn)                                | Conference call | 04.22.12 |
| Faith in Action: Get out the Vote | Protect ALL NC Families (Faith)  | Durham, NC      | 04.22.12 |
| Legacy media press conference     | Protect ALL NC Families (Jeremy Kennedy / Communications)                            | Raleigh, NC     | 04.23.12 |
| Senior campaign staff meeting     | Protect ALL NC Families  | Raleigh, NC     | 04.25.12 |
| Interfaith Prayer Vigil           | Greensboro People of Faith Against Amendment One                                     | Greensboro, NC  | 04.28.12 |
| Amily McCool Press Conference     | Protect ALL NC Families  | Raleigh, NC     | 05.01.12 |
| Club Cabaret Amendment One Panel  | Protect ALL NC Families  | Hickory, NC     | 05.01.12 |
| NAACP press conference            | NAACP  | Rocky Mount, NC | 05.03.12 |
| NAACP/Faith press conference      | NAACP  | Greensboro, NC  | 05.06.12 |
| Rock Against the Amendment!       | Protect ALL NC Families / The People's Alliance / Pinhook                            | Durham, NC      | 05.06.12 |
| National blogger call             | Protect ALL NC Families (Jeremy Kennedy, Nation Hahn)                                | Conference call | 05.07.12 |
| Campaign "War Room"               | Protect ALL NC Families  | Raleigh, NC     | 05.08.12 |
| Raleigh Field Office              | Protect ALL NC   | Raleigh, NC     | 05.08.12 |

|  |   |                    |          |
|--|---|--------------------|----------|
|  | Families  |                    |          |
| Campaign "Victory" Party   | Protect ALL NC Families   | Raleigh, NC        | 05.08.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC   | Greenville, NC     | 05.23.12 |
| HRC Faith debrief  | HRC   | Washington, D.C.   | 06.01.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC, HRC, S.O.N.G.  | Siler City, NC     | 06.06.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC, HRC, People's Alliance of Durham, ACLU-NC                              | Durham, NC         | 06.14.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC, ACLU-NC, Replacements, Ltd., S.O.N.G.                                  | Greensboro, NC     | 06.18.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC, HRC, PFLAG, ACLU-NC  | Rocky Mount, NC    | 06.19.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC, ACLU-NC, Sandhills Pride   | Southern Pines, NC | 06.20.12 |
| Salisbury Pride Festival 2012  | Salisbury Pride   | Salisbury, NC      | 06.23.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC, OUTRight Youth, HRC, Exodus Missionary Outreach Church, ACLU-NC, NAACP | Hickory, NC        | 06.25.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Mitchell County GSA, Equality NC  | Spruce Pine, NC    | 06.26.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC, ACLU-NC  | Boone, NC          | 06.27.12 |
| Cleveland County Board of Education meeting                                  | Neighbors for Equality on agenda  | Shelby, NC         | 07.23.12 |
| WHAT'S NEXT? Town Hall Tour  | Equality NC, Salisbury Rowan PFLAG  | Salisbury, NC      | 07.25.12 |
| DNC 2012 LGBT Caucus   | Democratic Party  | Charlotte, NC      | 09.04.12 |
| Live taping of the "Stossel" show  | FOX News  | Chapel Hill, NC    | 09.21.12 |
| "What does Amendment One mean to you and your family" Community Law Workshop | CSE, Equality NC  | Durham, NC         | 09.22.12 |
| NC Pride Fest  | NC Pride  | Durham, NC         | 09.29.12 |
| Twitter Town Hall  | Equality NC, Neighbors for  | Twitter            | 10.09.12 |

|   |   |                                   |          |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|----------|
|   | Equality                                  |                                   |          |
| '8 the Play' Staged Reading                   | Mitchell County GSA                       | Bakersville, NC                   | 10.20.12 |
| 'Contemporary GLBT Issues and Activism' Panel | Eastern Carolina Equality                 | Greenville, NC                    | 10.26.12 |
| Fairness WV Gala                              | Fairness WV                               | Charleston, WV                    | 11.10.12 |
| 2012 Equality Conference                      | Equality NC                               | Greensboro, NC                    | 11.17.12 |
| 2012 Equality Gala                            | Equality NC                               | Greensboro, NC                    | 11.17.12 |
| LGBT Representation & Rights Panel Discussion | LGBT Representation and Rights Initiative | Chapel Hill, NC                   | 12.04.12 |
| 'WE DO Campaign' action (Phase 4)             | CSE                                       | Wilson, NC                        | 01.14.13 |
| 'WE DO Campaign' action (Phase 4)             | CSE                                       | Winston Salem, NC                 | 01.14.13 |
| 'WE DO Campaign' action (Phase 4)             | CSE                                       | Arlington, VA to Washington, D.C. | 01.17.13 |

## APPENDIX B: KEY NORTH CAROLINA LGBT MOVEMENT ACTORS

| NAME                  | ORGANIZATION(S)                       | ROLE  | RESIDENCE        |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Jeremy Kennedy        | Protect ALL NC Families               | Campaign manager  | Portland, ME     |
| Alex Miller           | Protect ALL NC Families / Equality NC | Steering committee / Interim Executive Director         | Carrboro, NC     |
| Jennifer Rudinger     | Protect ALL NC Families / ACLU-NC     | Steering committee / Executive Director                 | Raleigh, NC      |
| Stuart Campbell       | Protect ALL NC Families / Equality NC | Steering committee / Executive Director                 | Raleigh, NC      |
| Karen Quimby          | Protect ALL NC / HRC                  | Steering committee / Regional field director            | Washington, D.C. |
| Caitlin Breedlove     | Protect ALL NC Families / S.O.N.G.    | Steering committee / Co-director                        | Goldsboro, NC    |
| Nation Hahn           | Protect ALL NC Families / New Kind    | Senior online strategist / Director of Engagement       | Raleigh, NC      |
| Ryan Rowe             | Protect ALL NC Families               | Director of Faith Outreach                              | Hyattsville, MD  |
| Chris Speer           | Protect ALL NC Families / Equality NC | Director of Campus Outreach / Director of Organizing    | Greensboro, NC   |
| Ian O'Keefe           | Protect ALL NC Families               | Deputy Director of Campus Outreach                      | Boone, NC        |
| Colin Stephans        | Protect ALL NC Families               | Deputy Field Director                                   | Raleigh, NC      |
| Jen Jones             | Protect ALL NC Families / Equality NC | Director of Communications / Director of Communications | Carrboro, NC     |
| Tucker Middleton      | Protect ALL NC Families               | Deputy Communications Director                          | Washington, D.C. |
| Kay Flaminio          | Protect ALL NC Families / Equality NC | Director of Leadership Gifts / Director of Leadership   | Durham, NC       |
| Jasmine Beach-Ferrara | CSE                                   | Executive Director                                      | Asheville, NC    |
| Lindsey Simerly       | CSE                                   | Campaign Manager  | Asheville, NC    |
| Collyn Warner         | Neighbors for Equality / CSE          | Executive Director / Communications Assistant           | Tuscaloosa, AL   |
| Allison Bovée         | Mitchell County GSA                   | Co-founder  | Bakersville, NC  |

|                           |  |                          |                 |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Amy Waller                | Mitchell County GSA                              | Co-founder               | Bakersville, NC |
| Bishop Tonyia M. Rawls    | The Freedom Center for Social Justice            | Executive Director       | Charlotte, NC   |
| Bishop Donagrant McCluney | S.O.N.G. / United Progressive Pentecostal Church | Faith organizer / Bishop | Greensboro, NC  |
| Michelle Mathis           | ALFA   | Volunteer Coordinator    | Hickory, NC     |
| Michael Edwards           | Moore Against Amendment One / Sandhills Pride    | Founder / Director       | Pinehurst, NC   |
| Mark Brown                | PFLAG Rocky Mount                                | Member                   | Rocky Mount, NC |
| Linda Stroupe             | PFLAG Greensboro, NC                             | Director                 | Greensboro, NC  |
| Rich Elkins               | Eastern Carolina Equality                        | Founder                  | Greenville, NC  |
| Rev. William Barber       | NAACP-NC   | President                | Durham, NC      |
| Rev. T. Anthony Spearman  | Clinton Tabernacle AME Zion Church               | Pastor                   | Hickory, NC     |
| Rev. Reggie Longcrier     | Exodus Missionary Outreach Church                | Pastor                   | Hickory, NC     |



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