Constructing anarchist sexuality: Queer identity, culture, and politics in the anarchist movement

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> I've seen the anarchists in our community become more queer in their outlooks, their self-presentation, and even their own sexualities.
>
> Neal Ritchie (2008: 273)

> I don't like to identify as straight. I find it oppressive.
>
> Tina, a self-identified anarchist[1]

In this article, I explore how queer sexuality is enlisted in the construction of political identity by members of the contemporary anarchist movement[2] in North America. The anarchist movement has developed its own culture, in which there are clear, though contestable, ways that people cultivate their identities as anarchists. Certain expressions of queerness have become associated with anarchist identity, and I am interested in the effects, both social and political, that this articulation has. Investments in 'authentic' expressions of political identity can prove to be divisive within a movement, and can also displace attention away from the material political projects of the movement and onto more superficial, individualized concerns. Yet the integration of resistant practices and identities into the culture of a movement can serve to collectivize what may *seem* like superficial and individualized concerns, such that they end up carrying real symbolic and material power to effect change. Here, I present some of these effects as they play out in individuals' personal experience as participants in the anarchist movement.

'Anarchist' is a political identity assumed by individuals, and, like any other social identity, it is constructed and communicated through the adoption of lifestyle practices and visible bodily performances. Sexuality is one way (among many) that individuals represent, and thus constitute, themselves as anarchists. Identities are historical, meaning that they are made possible by particular discourses, which arise at particular moments, in particular contexts, and amidst particular power relations (Hall, 1996). Thus the content and meanings of an identity, such as anarchist, are always contingent, varying in ways based on spatial and historical location, and discursive struggles over its definition. Each person who identifies as an anarchist experiences and enacts the identity in their own unique way, but there is enough coherence around the term for it to be a meaningful object of analysis. Despite variation between individuals, the anarchist is a specific *type* of individual, who represents the incorporation of various practices into a coherent, nameable identity (Foucault, 1990a; Heckert, 2004). Here, I show that queer sexuality is an important component of anarchist identity: particular sexual practices and ways of sexually self-identifying are incorporated into the constitution of the anarchist subject.

The definition of queer I work from is rooted in an activist and theoretical tradition that celebrates sexual autonomy and the proliferation of sexual difference, in opposition to the repressive conformity of heteronormativity. Queer is a refusal to accept the legitimacy of socially dominant sexualities on the basis that they are natural or intrinsically valuable. This refusal is resonant with anarchism's fundamental philosophy, which is a commitment to autonomy, accompanied by an opposition to hierarchy, that is, unequal power relations that allow some people's autonomy to

[1] All interviewee names are pseudonyms.

[2] The contemporary emergence of anarchism in North America can be designated by a number of terms: movement, subculture, scene, community, network, and so forth. In this article, these terms can be seen as roughly interchangeable, though my use of one instead of another in any given instance is intentional, based on its connotations in the sociological literature. See Gelder (2007) for a review of this literature.

be violated by others. Dominant sexual mores and institutions create hierarchies in which people are coerced into having and expressing a limited range of sexual desires and interpersonal arrangements (Rubin, 1984). Thus it is ideologically consistent for anarchists to take up queers' resistance of the established hierarchical valuation of sexual identities and practices. In this article, I describe ways that self-identified anarchists attempt to resist dominant norms of sexuality. The modes of resistance I discuss here do not exhaust those deployed within the anarchist movement; however my selections are reflective of what came up most often and most strikingly in the course of my research.

Methodology

This article draws on my research on the culture of the contemporary North American anarchist movement. I conducted interviews with 37 individuals who self-identified as anarchists, or had a strong affinity to anarchist politics. The majority of the interviews were done face to face, though some were conducted over email or internet chat. The format of the interviews was semi-structured, in that I introduced general themes to the conversation via open-ended questions about the interviewees' identification with anarchism, participation in political organizing, membership in anarchist communities, and personal lifestyle practices. In addition to conducting interviews, I attended anarchist bookfairs, conferences, organizing meetings, and social events as both participant and observer. I also read texts, both printed and electronic, written by and for anarchists.

Recruiting interviewees for a study on anarchists can be a complicated matter. Radical activists and their organizations are regularly subject to infiltration and surveillance by law enforcement personnel, which may make them particularly wary of people claiming to be doing 'research' on their activities. For this reason, I relied on something of a snowball technique, recruiting people I was personally acquainted with and then through them, making contact with other potential interviewees. I chose not to restrict the study to a particular organization or physical location, because of the anarchist movement's nature as a cosmopolitan, electronically connected network in which organizational affiliations are highly fluid and geographical mobility is common. As I will discuss later, individuals' experiences of sexuality and anarchist identity are affected by their situation within local communities, so it turned out to be instructive to talk to people who were situated in a variety of locations. At the same time, the construction of anarchist identity is not wholly determined by local context, given the circulation of anarchist discourses and bodies within national and global networks, so the account of anarchist sexuality I offer here is, I think, representative (though not, of course, exhaustive). That said, I would hesitate to generalize any of the specific experiences or discourses I discuss here to the anarchist movement as it exists beyond North America. The cultural, economic, and political contexts within which other branches of the global anarchist movement are situated are perhaps too divergent for me to be able to make any claims for the universality of my findings. I would hope however that the analytical tools I use and the theoretical and practical implications of my work would prove broadly useful across borders, and indeed, for other political movements besides anarchism.

I did not purposely recruit interviewees based on any aspect of their identities other than orientation toward anarchism. This openness was intentional, based on the fact that when I set out I did not presume to know precisely how other identity categories would intersect with peo-

ple's identities as anarchists. It was also for this reason that I did not ask people to explicitly identify their gender, race, ethnic background, or class status. More often than not this information emerged as relevant to people's personal experiences and political orientations, but I was careful to let people share these aspects of their identity where and how they found them to be germane to the discussion, rather than demanding that they categorize themselves in particular ways, which might be reductive or presumptuous. Because this article is focused specifically on sexuality, I do not address other aspects of the interviewees' identity for the most part. An intersectional analysis that brings ethnicity, class, age, disability, or other categories to bear on anarchists' experiences of sexuality would certainly be interesting and productive, but it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.

I do not self-identify as an anarchist, and I was candid on this point if interviewees inquired about it, which many of them did in the course of our conversations. I did not announce myself as a non-anarchist when attending events or asking for interviews, so it is possible that I was assumed to be one; it is certainly possible that this assumption affected people's willingness to participate in the study or the answers they gave. I do see my own political identification as a *queer feminist* as placing me in solidarity with many of the beliefs and projects to which anarchists are committed, and because my research is actively directed by and toward my political goals, it is my hope that the people I studied feel served rather than exploited by this work, despite the power differentials inherent to the researcher–researched relationship. Though I am critical of some aspects of anarchist movement culture, as are many anarchists themselves, this critique is, I hope, well founded, and comes from a position of overall support rather than opposition.

What does anarchist sexuality look like?

In many of my interviews, I asked people to talk about their sexual identities and practices, usually in the form of an open question like 'can you talk about your sexual identity, if it's not too personal?' or 'how would you describe your dating practices?' Interviewees demonstrated a tendency to problematize – or subject to ethical scrutiny and self-discipline (Foucault, 1990b) – their personal relationships to heterosexuality and monogamy. By this I mean that people discussed their sexual identifications and practices in terms of how they contributed to and were influenced by their ideological commitment to anarchist politics. Alyssa was explicit about the fact that her queerness is a political orientation in addition to being a sexual identification, '[it] is definitely political – not just about desire and who I have sex with but also about an orientation against capitalist heteropatriarchy'. Alyssa also commented that her queerness does not necessarily 'track with' her desire for other women. For anarchists and other sex radicals, to adopt the label of queer is not to foreclose heterosexual practices, but rather to disavow the social coercion involved in enforcing what Rich (1980) calls 'compulsory heterosexuality'.

Indeed, the majority of interviewees indicated that they had been primarily involved in heterosexual romantic relationships. What is interesting however is that those who are mostly or exclusively heterosexual in practice show a reluctance to completely identify themselves as heterosexual people. When asked to talk about her sexual identity, Tina responded, 'I identify as no preference. Um, I think I lean towards, like, um, heterosexual, like, relationships because that's what I've been primarily involved with, but I don't like to identify as straight. I find it oppressive.' And in describing his relationship with his female partner, Miles noted that,

> what was best about our relationship was just how non-gendered it was. Not that we shared each others clothes and called each other 'ze/hir' or anything, but just that it wasn't caught up in what seemed to be the same patterns and habits of the world at large in our practices of heterosexuality.

What is at issue for Miles and others is less an objection to heterosexual desire and more an objection to the idea that heterosexuality is normal, natural, and morally superior to other sexual arrangements.

A similar concern is involved in anarchist resistance to homonormativity, a term used by radical queers to critique homosexual identities and relationships that conform to heterosexual ideas of normalcy, for example, gender dichotomous, monogamous, legally sanctioned, and so on. In Samantha's experience, for instance, the homonormative taboo around 'butchfag' relationships has meant that her preference for dominant, masculine-presenting females (which she herself identifies as) has been largely unsatisfied in the reality of her dating life, and she has usually ended up dating more submissive, feminine-presenting females. For Samantha, her identity as queer means that she is 'open to having romantic and sexual relationships with people of many genders and sexes', rather than wishing to conform to a butch–fem norm. The responses of Miles, Samantha, and others align with Doty's succinct summation of queerness as 'something that is ultimately beyond gender – it is an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or limited by, notions of a binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of this gender binarism' (Doty, 1993: xv).

The practice of monogamy is particularly ideologically suspect to anarchists because of its ties to capitalism, patriarchy, and the state. Legendary anarchist Emma Goldman opposed monogamy because she felt it mirrored the relation of private property within capitalism (Goldman, 1977). The system of monogamy treats the individual's body, love, and sexual intimacy as if they are exclusive economic goods, whose values are degraded when they are accessible to multiple partners. The cultural injunction to monogamy is a side-effect of the capitalist division of gendered labor, in which men and women are trained for different types of work and are thus dependent on each other and encouraged to form paired bonds (Rubin, 1997). Furthermore, the capitalist state sanctions monogamous heterosexual pairings through the institution of marriage. Josef stated the case emphatically: 'being married and all that is, like, that's just a whole 'nother prescribed …subscription to patriarchy and it's bullshit, it's like property management, and I don't, I don't believe in that, you know?' Grant articulated the connections he sees between his practice of polyamory and his commitment to an anarchist society:

> I think polyamory for me has to do with anarchism being more than just a non-state solution to state capitalism, but a complete assessment of all forms of hierarchy … it has personally helped me address aspects of my patriarchal socialization. It's a tangible way to express that I really don't feel ownership over my partners, and it contributes to a level of openness and honesty you often don't find in monogamous relationships. Additionally it helps me avoid codependent relationships which I think contributes to one of the great successes of capitalism, namely dividing people from each other. More often than not it doesn't matter how we've been divided along lines of race, gender, age, and so on because the ultimate individual goal in a capitalist society is to find a husband or wife and sequester yourselves off from the rest of society in a toxic family unit.

Anarchists like Grant are quite aware of their own position in relation to hegemonic power structures and explicitly recognize sexuality as a medium through which to struggle against oppressive forces. 'Polyamory' is the most common term used by contemporary anarchists to describe their non-monogamous relationship structures. Polyamory is practiced differently by different people, but it generally amounts to a mutual understanding of sexual non-exclusivity between partners. In theory, anarchists' opposition to institutionalized monogamy is less about advocating for particular sexual desires (for multiple partners, say) than it is about a radical commitment to people's freedom to determine the nature of their own sexual practice, without coercion by the market or the state. Even those who are currently monogamous voiced support for the idea of polyamory or said they had been polyamorous in the past. Just as people critically distanced themselves from heteronormativity while still engaging in heterosexual practices, people who practiced monogamy were also critical of it:

> Rilla: I always end up being monogamous… But, like, I think if I think about it critically, I could see why people advocate it, you know? It sounds good but I just, I tend to always end up in monogamous relationships with men.
>
> Leo: I wish I was polyamorous. I wish I could psychologically cope with polyamory [laughs] but, um, I probably couldn't, so instead I'm a very reluctant monogamist.

Although Leo identified himself as a monogamist, albeit a reluctant one, other interviewees disidentified with monogamy, even if they practiced it. The idea is that, as Joel put it, identifying oneself as open is 'a good thing to do', whether or not one actually pursues sex with multiple partners.

Anarchist movement culture and queer politics

An explicitly political oppositionality distinguishes anarchist sexual practices from more apolitical alternative sexuality movements. For example, there is an apolitical discourse on polyamory that does not engage with a critique of power (Haritaworn et al., 2006; Noel, 2006). The literature that circulates within the popular polyamory movement promotes polyamory as a sort of self-help, a change in lifestyle that anyone might make. It fails to take into account the systems of domination that enforce hegemonic norms, particularly where those systems exert unequal pressure on different kinds of bodies. In this context, polyamory is simply discussed as an alternative arrangement that individuals might choose as a way to improve the quality of their own lives and relationships. In contrast, anarchists see polyamory as individual practice *and* social critique.

Not everyone believes that individual practices are effective vehicles for social critique, though. 'Lifestylist' is used as an epithet to describe self-identified anarchists who are supposedly more concerned with their own expressions of anarchism than with radical social transformation. Those who object to lifestyle anarchism often do so on the grounds that it plays into a neoliberal ideology that uncritically celebrates the agency of the individual, and thereby minimizes the real oppressions perpetrated by capitalism and other power hierarchies (see especially Bookchin, 1995). The pernicious effects of neoliberal rhetoric should not be underestimated (see Duggan, 2003), however there are ways to understand individual practice as

something other than a preoccupation with the self that counteracts the potential of collective action. As Foucault (1988) argues, attention to the self does not necessarily signify the privatization of life or the valuing of the self over others; on the contrary it can be a way of orienting one's conduct toward others and toward the generation of a desired social order.

Queer theory, particularly as advanced by Judith Butler, attempts to explicate the mechanisms by which such individual practices might effect a transformation in social relations of power. Anarchists who treat their sexual identities and practices as sites of resistance are invested in the political value of queer performance. They believe that representations of the self have the potential to effect changes in power relations, so they use their own bodies as models of resistance. These anarchists attempt to 'make trouble' (Butler, 1990) for the discourse of normative sexuality, and the relations of power it supports, by proliferating instances in which the normal categories of identity and desire do not seem to apply. Ho takes a position inflected by queer theory when she argues that people's practices of nonmonogamy 'will almost inevitably become known to other people, and therefore serve as a demonstration of alternative practices and options. This demonstration will incline or facilitate other people to make similar transgressions' (Ho, 2006: 562).

This kind of embodied political performance might be likened to the anarchist tradition of 'propaganda by the deed', which is the use of highly visible action that simultaneously produces a material result and inspires mass revolt. Historically, propaganda by the deed referred to spectacularly violent acts such as assassination or rioting, but today we can understand it more broadly as any kind of embodied performance that promotes the visibility of anarchist politics and perhaps persuades others of their value. Closely related to the idea of propaganda by the deed is that of 'prefigurative politics', which is the attempt to enact desired changes in society through everyday practice within the activist community (Breines, 1982). The idea that by living and performing one's politics one can communicate to others and hopefully effect changes in society is an attractive one. However, theorists of queer performativity (e.g. Butler, 1993) point out that individual acts, on their own, do not have the power to disrupt social norms. In fact, if they are read as mere deviations or personal preferences, transgressions may serve to reinforce the norms they attempt to subvert. Acts of resistance must be articulated to a collectively understood political discourse in order for them to register as such. I would argue that, in fact, anarchist movement culture is a medium in which such an articulation can be achieved.

The contemporary discursive articulation of anarchist politics and queer sexuality is owed in large part to the work of explicitly anarchist queer activist groups, notably Gay Shame in the USA. Gay Shame advances a radical alternative to the liberal discourse of gay rights and gay pride, suggesting that queer sexuality is best nurtured not by assimilation to mainstream culture or the winning of privileges through consumerism and statist campaigns, but by direct actions that aim at more autonomy and a better quality of life for queer people (Sycamore, 2008). Since the inception of Gay Shame in 1998, other anarchaqueer actions, organizations, and publications have emerged with similar missions and tactics. For example Bash Back! formed in 2007 in preparation for protests at the mainstream political party conventions in the USA, and has spawned the formation of active local chapters across the country as well as a recurring Radical Queer Conference (BAMF! Productionz, 2009).

The shared values of subcultural scenes are commonly established through the circulation of written documents (Duncombe, 2008). This is certainly true of the anarchist scene, where texts are shared in the form of zines, newsletters, blog posts, links on social networking sites, and a few

major websites that serve as electronic hubs for the distribution of anarchist information. Anarchaqueer zines are readily available at infoshops and bookfairs, and are easily accessible on the web (see, for example, the internet-based Queer Zine Archive Project). It is also useful to consider the publications of the CrimethInc. collective, because they are easily accessible to the uninitiated (they can be found in mainstream bookstores or ordered on the web, plus the texts do not assume that the reader has extensive experience in the anarchist movement). CrimethInc.'s 2000 publication *Days of War, Nights of Love* is subtitled 'Crimethink for beginners' and serves as a sort of introductory text to anarchist ideologies, tactics, and culture. Similarly, CrimethInc.'s *Recipes for Disaster* is a deliberate attempt to collect and pass on knowledge from people's experience with anarchist organizing and lifestyle practices, so that individuals new to the scene can learn from the successes and failures of others. In relation to anarchist sexuality, *Recipes* has chapters titled 'Nonmonogamous Relationships' and 'Sex' which offer advice on how to successfully carry off politically informed practices of polyamory and romantic physical encounters. The existence of texts like this shows that these issues are of concern to anarchists and that there is an active attempt to establish what anarchist sexuality ought to look like. As the authors of *Recipes* put it, 'since most of us didn't grow up with many good examples of non-monogamous relationships to learn from, the more we discuss and compare our experiences the better-equipped we'll be to chart this unknown territory together' (CrimethInc., 2005: 397).

The circulation of anarchist and anarchaqueer publications is made possible by the infrastructure of meetings and spaces that has been established within the anarchist scene. Infoshops are spaces (often storefronts) where books and zines are centrally stored and made available to the local community. Many anarchist communities also organize annual bookfairs, which draw people from the local area and surrounding regions, and sometimes even from across the continent. Infoshops and bookfairs not only expose people to anarchist texts but also bring people into physical contact with each other, where they can perform and discuss their practices of non-hegemonic sexuality. Furthermore, in the last decade especially, anarchists have had a regular presence at global and national politico-economic summits. These protest convergences serve as occasions for globally dispersed individuals to meet each other in localized physical spaces. The flows of bodies and discourses between spaces of convergence – what Juris (2009) describes as the networked logic of the anarchist movement – helps to bring queer identities and practices to various communities and the individuals within them.

Explicitly queer-themed discussions, events, and spaces can usually be found amidst the offerings at these nodes within the general anarchist network. Many protest convergences have featured queer spaces (see Brown, 2007), for example the Queer Barrio where one interviewee stayed when he traveled to the 2006 G8 protest in Germany. Not coincidentally, the Queer Barrio was located in close proximity to other explicitly anarchist campsites. A group called Anarkink held a party to coincide with the 2009 Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair, so travelers to the fair could experience the sex-positive queer anarchist scene in San Francisco. The Berkeley Anarchist Students of Theory and Research & Development's annual conference regularly features at least one discussion panel on queer issues; a recent topic was 'Anarchy & BDSM'.[3] These are just a few

[3] BDSM is shorthand for a whole set of erotic practices based on consensual role-plays of power dynamics. The letters are variously taken to stand for bondage, discipline, domination, submission, slave, sadism, master, and masochism, respectively.

examples of ways that the infrastructure of the broader movement fosters the exploration of the intersections between anarchism and queer sexuality.

Anarchist networks are also key to establishing a culture in which queer sexuality is felt to be supported at a collective level by the whole community. Individuals acting on their own may not have the wherewithal to effectively resist the pressures of heteronormativity. Although Miles was initially optimistic about his ability to have a marriage that preserved the radical nature of his relationship with his partner (see the quotation earlier in this article), ultimately his hopes were not realized:

> Even though I 'never believed' in marriage, I thought it was such a trivial thing that I could participate in the institution without it having any effect on me or our relationship. I have learned the power of these structures in how they shape your world and how others deal with you (and you with them), and don't like it. This so-called intimate relationship has become an interest of others (and, of course, the state). I guess I used to think that you could turn these things against themselves from the inside and it didn't make any difference if you had the right attitude. I don't believe that now … So the 'marriage experiment' is a failure, from my point of view.

Despite his best intentions, Miles found himself unable to resist the coercive power of hegemonic institutions to affect even his most personal experience. Within a cultural context where most people define marriage differently than he, his ability to shape his own experience of an intimate relationship is severely hampered. Miles expressed to me that he does not really feel himself to be a part of an active anarchist community. Perhaps if he and his wife were surrounded by others who re-imagined intimate relationships in the same way, they would be able to sustain a more radical marital partnership.

Gabby's experience also speaks to the importance of community in supporting alternative sexual practices. Gabby, who identifies as polyamorous, has been a part of anarchist scenes in Los Angeles and Washington, DC, but she felt it was easier to practice polyamory in Washington rather than in Los Angeles, because it was accepted as the norm within the scene there. Her preference was not challenged by those she dated because it was assumed that most people in that scene were polyamorous, and in fact, preferences for monogamous partnerships had to be defended. By contrast, anarchists in Los Angeles are aware of, and nominally in support of, polyamory, yet Gabby does not have the same sense that it will be automatically acceptable to her potential partners. Joel corroborated Gabby's observation that polyamory became a community standard in Washington. He mentioned a well-known and well-liked couple in the anarchist community there who had an open relationship, which he felt paved the way for others to try out the practice. This couple's visible performance of polyamory allowed the practice to enter people's 'sexual vocabulary', as Joel put it.

The prevalence of communal housing among the anarchists in Washington also contributes to the formation of community support for queer sexualities. Within these spaces, residents and visitors have opportunities to witness their peers' private lifestyle practices. Intimate expressions of sexuality are on display for others to observe and emulate – everyone can see (and hear) how many people someone is bringing home on a regular basis, and who disappears with whom into whose bedroom. In a society where sexuality – especially queerness – is often encouraged to

remain hidden, semi-public alternative spaces create the feeling that it is perfectly acceptable – even normal – to be openly queer. In such settings, CrimethInc.'s promise, 'Look around and you'll see that there are alternatives… to the traditional ways of making love and being sexual that mainstream culture offers us', (2000: 203) actually rings true.

The pitfalls of anarchist identity politics[4]

That the anarchist movement fosters a collective culture of resistant sexuality is what gives real political potential to anarchists' performative critiques of hegemonic sexuality – critiques that might otherwise be unintelligible and ineffective acts of isolated individuals. Yet, although the anarchist proliferation and normalization of queerness is, in itself, a positive corrective to the marginalization of queer sexuality in mainstream society, it is not wholly unproblematic. One of the byproducts of cohesive movement cultures is an investment in authenticity – the idea that you have to adhere to certain cultural practices in order to be a 'real' anarchist. Indeed, accusations of inauthenticity are rampant within anarchist scenes. Authenticity is established by the individual's ability to bring their practices in line with an accepted narrative of identity (Giddens, 1991). When a person claims (or rejects) a particular sexual identity, or engages (or refuses to engage) in a particular sexual act, or enters into (or resists) a particular interpersonal arrangement, it always makes a statement about that individual. Although queer practices may or may not be experienced as the manifestation of an individual's natural desires, they are always performative in the sense that they function to represent the self and constitute one's social identity (Butler, 1990). Because of the articulation of queerness and anarchist identity, an individual's self-representation as queer is at the same time a reconsolidation of anarchist identity, and thus of one's belonging in the anarchist scene. By the same token, to perform sexuality in such a way as to contradict the socially constructed narrative of anarchist identity is to call into question one's claim to that identity. Because 'authentic' anarchist sexuality is constructed as queer, individuals whose sexuality does not read as queer may not be seen as legitimate anarchists.

Joel observed that individuals who attempted to practice polyamory were ashamed when they found themselves experiencing feelings of possessiveness or jealousy, as if these emotional reactions jeopardized their identities as 'good' anarchists. Orlando said that he had seen his friends get 'stressed out' about their own desires, putting pressure on themselves to be in open relationships, even though they did not find the arrangement pleasurable. Leo made a similar observation:

> I was really trying to force the ideology on my reality … you can tell, everybody, some people, want to be polyamorous but they just can't cope with it, like [on] their own psychological level. But you can tell they suffer at it and they're making everybody else suffer, and everybody else, like, some people don't want it, but yet they're taking that position.

[4] Traditionally, 'identity politics' refers to the idea that those individuals who identify with a particular social group are best positioned to undertake political activism on behalf of that group. It has also come to refer to the policing of identity that goes on within activist scenes. See Heckert (2004) for an extensive consideration of the relationship between sexuality and identity politics, and the implications for anarchist movements. My argument here is somewhat distinct from Heckert's (whose fieldwork was done in the UK), in that the anarchist movement as I observed it recognizes sexuality as a legitimate site of radical political activism. In my analysis, the idea of authentic anarchism is used not so much to exclude sexuality from anarchist politics as it is to police the content of an authentically anarchist sexuality.

Because anarchist communities are so effective at promoting counter-hegemonic practices, people feel insecure when their own preferences fail to measure up to anarchist norms, and they feel unduly pressured to participate in practices they are not personally comfortable with, in order to maintain their integrity as anarchists. To privilege certain practices in the name of queerness is not only a contradiction to the anarchist opposition to hierarchy, but it is furthermore a misunderstanding of the queer project. Queer is about dismantling those power relations that would make any form of sexuality compulsory, not about the reproduction of coercion in new directions.

An extension of the problem of authenticity policing is the foreclosure of productive relations of solidarity across borders of sexual identity. Anarchists risk alienating people who have real contributions to offer to the movement if they are too concerned with whether people are 'queer enough' to participate. This is not to say that anarchists should mainstream their sexualities in order to appeal to a broader public, but rather that there ought to be room in the movement for people with varying sexual identities and practices. Several interviewees demonstrated an awareness of these issues and described their own struggles with them, pointing out the importance of 'meeting people where they're at' when doing political advocacy. They recognized that contextual factors would affect people's openness to radical political expressions like queer sexuality, and that it is important not to talk down to people or make them feel defensive about their cultural backgrounds. For example, Mark reflected that he often encounters homophobia among the working-class laborers he tries to do organizing work with. This highlighted for him the importance of cultivating strong personal relationships based on points of political solidarity, so that he could feel comfortable challenging comments and attitudes he finds offensive. For Mark, it was important not to alienate people, but it was also important to him that he did not 'let shit fly' when he felt it was inappropriate.

A particular danger that arises when identity categories become a mark of authenticity is that people may fetishize the image or label of queerness while in fact doing nothing to further the empowerment of queer people. Several interviewees expressed concern about people hiding behind radical political identities in order not to do what one interviewee called the 'sticky work' of confronting their internalized homophobia, misogyny, and racism. A few used the term 'manarchist' to describe self-identified anarchists who claim to be critical of hegemonic gender relations, but who consistently (if unconsciously) invoke and benefit from their heterosexual male privilege. This is one of the perennial paradoxes of sexual 'liberation': critiques of sexual moralism can be taken as license to flout community standards of mutual respect and to objectify the bodies of others, with the ultimate result of reproducing hegemonic sexism (Rossinow, 1988; Bailey, 2002). If people see the adoption of counter-hegemonic identity labels as sufficient to actually counter hegemony, they may end up reproducing oppressive power dynamics.

So we can see that the establishment of a normative anarchist identity – what we might call 'anarchonormativity' – may have unintended and pernicious effects. For some, the solution is to do away with norms altogether: '*Everything*, every desire and need, has to be respected, or else this is no revolution after all, just the 490 Sexualities 13(4) establishing of a different norm' (CrimethInc., 2005: 398). Yet this position risks reproducing the neoliberal model of free choice that treats individual acts as pure expressions of personal agency, ignoring the systemic power relations that are always at work in structuring those acts. This would be to dismiss the real obstacles that work against the adoption of queer identifications and practices and to excuse people when their choices happen to replicate traditional oppressive relationships. The problem with

traditional oppressive relationships is not that they are traditional, but that they are oppressive. If we rethink norms, not as repressive homogenizers, but as shared ethical commitments, we can perhaps rethink normativity as a basis upon which individual identifications and practices can acquire the collective force of the movement culture from which they emerge. Anarchonormativity has its political value then, insofar as it serves to proliferate and make legible forms of sexuality that are informed by anarchist ethics.

Conclusion: The strategic use of queer anarchonormativity

There is power in identity. Individuals may become 'collective agents of social transformation', when they mobilize their shared political identities toward radical political projects (Castells, 2003: 70). Where the disciplinary power of anarchonormativity is used to promote a queer critique of hegemonic sexuality, and thus makes life more livable for those whose desires are repressed by dominant institutions and discourses, it has positive political potential. Where such power is used to generate new forms of repression or to foreclose relationships of solidarity or to distract from efforts to combat material oppressions, it is less strategically sound.

Anarchists might usefully retain the discourse of authenticity, as long as its disciplinary power is wielded strategically for positive material outcomes. The power of anarchist identity lies in its potential to use collective values – sometimes in the form of cultural norms – to mobilize people against oppression where they find it. So for example, Joel remarked that 'guys who are players under the auspices of anarchism get called out really quickly', by other anarchists who want to preserve the political integrity of polyamorous practice. Similarly, the critique of 'manarchism' can function to push people to bring their material practice in line with their symbolic identifications. The fact that people get 'called out' for their failure to adhere to anarchist political ideals helps to check oppressive sexual practices that occur in mainstream society and within the scenes themselves. In such cases, social discipline can work to produce desirable subjectivities and practices. Yet the power of these disciplinary tactics must be wielded strategically, so as to avoid reactionary tendencies toward name calling and boundary policing. To wield the power of anarchist identity strategically would be to evaluate critically its effects (as I have tried to do in this article), and then to deploy that power in such a way as to maximize those effects that contribute to emancipatory political projects, and minimize those that do not.

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