

## **ABSTRACT**

POWELL, RACHEL ELAINE. "You Just Won't Get Anything Done That Way": Inequality and Informal Elites in a Leaderless Occupy Movement. (Under the direction of Dr. Sinikka Elliott).

The Occupy Wall Street movement that spread through the U.S. in the fall of 2011 extolled consensus-based decision-making processes as fair and just. While Occupiers touted their "leaderless" organizational model, informal elites arose in many of these Occupations, including Occupy the City, the organization under study in this dissertation, located in a major city in the southeastern U.S. Based on 600 hours of participant observation and 20 in-depth interviews with movement participants, I examine how participants with greater resources garnered power in the group and deflected criticism by reminding members of the importance of their contributions to the movement and by relying on narratives that mobilized movement principles such as "autonomy" and "inclusivity." Findings reveal that members created internal inequality in ways that mirrored the reproduction of inequality in mainstream society. The group crafted rules that punished marginalized Occupiers while informal elites were able to evade punishment by controlling resources, closing ranks, and co-opting venues for grievances. I show how the elites' actions occurred in the context of a capitalist economy and under the watchful eye of a conservative government. I argue that constraints on resources encourage practices that may lead to oligarchy, self-selection, and homogeneity, undermining a social movement organization's goal to grow a democratic movement.

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“You Just Won’t Get Anything Done That Way”:  
Inequality and Informal Elites in a  
Leaderless Occupy Movement

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my partner, Derek Cronmiller, who might as well be listed as co-author for all the times he helped me think of a word that was on the tip of my tongue but inaccessible. Derek, your mastery of language is attractive.

And also to my parents, Jay and Jody Powell, who—bless their hearts—supported my 25-year educational career. Mom and Dad, I do solemnly swear to remove your Discover card from my wallet.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Rachel Powell (or, post-Ph.D. graduation, Rachel Cronmiller) was born in Eunice, Louisiana in 1986 to lucky parents Jay and Jody (Lamonte) Powell. She, alongside younger brother Andre, enjoyed Cajun food until she moved to Shreveport, Louisiana to attend Centenary College of Louisiana and became a vegetarian. Graduating with a Bachelor's in sociology in 2008, she scored an awesome liberal arts education under the guidance of Michelle Wolkomir, who, alongside her partner-in-crime Michael Futreal, convinced Rachel to go to graduate school at their alma mater, North Carolina State University. Many Global Village lattes later, Rachel received her Master's degree in 2010. Before she was ready, she fell into the Occupy Wall Street movement, finding both a fascinating dissertation project and the one with whom she fits. Rachel and her partner, Derek, live in Raleigh, North Carolina with too many fur babies (Nora the border collie, and kitties Amos, Lucy, Tuggy, and Izzy) who consistently delayed her graduation but who are the joys of her life. She really does enjoy walks on the beach and piña coladas, especially the occasions when both can be combined with Hanson concerts.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It wasn't that long ago (who am I kidding—it totally was) that I wrote some acknowledgments in my Master's thesis. Thinking now about what to say to those who have been my rocks in the rapids (the kind you can hold onto so you don't drown, not the kind that get your raft stuck), I realize that it's probably been too long since I expressed my gratitude. Here's my attempt to say all the things I should have been saying all along:

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To Dana: when are you moving to Raleigh? You should move to Raleigh. I am so glad our family “adopted” you. You make everything better. Now go write that book.

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To members of Occupy the City: Thanks for talking to me. I hope what I’ve written here helps us all to do better the next time... because there will be a next time.

To Gwen and Antonio, Josh and Caren, and Charles: I’m inclined to bust out an “I’ve... had... the time of my liiiiife... and I owe it all to you!” for y’all. Y’all are hands-down some of the best people on this planet and I am so thankful that crazy thing happened that brought us together. A million billion thank-you’s for emotional support, game nights, glasses of wine, hugs, and great big laughs.

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spot close to the stage. Life's hard on a Hanson fan, but without trips and concerts like these to give me something to look forward to every few months, well, life would be a lot darker.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I grew up with conservative parents in a small southern town of 10,000 residents. Any inkling I had about social change as a child was informed by stereotypes about hippies in movies and television shows. In high school, I started to outgrow my small town, but felt only anger and frustration with the social problems of which I was becoming aware. Having no clue how real social change happened, my solution was to leave and find some magical place (somewhere progressive, though I did not yet know the word) where problems like homophobia did not exist. I moved a few hours north to a residential high school and became involved in my first social movement by becoming a member of an LGBT organization. In college, my new sociology courses and a job at an abortion clinic also got me involved in feminist groups.

Unhappy with the tedious incremental progress of getting ordinances through city councils, I jumped at the opportunity to do something I thought was radical. During my second year of college, I hopped on a bus and traveled across the country for two months on the Souforce Equality Ride of 2006 (modeled after the Freedom Rides of the early 1960s) fighting for LGBT acceptance and rights. We trespassed on private property, got arrested, and even made the news. Upon my return home, I was even less satisfied with once-monthly two-hour activist meetings discussing plans that would take months or even years to achieve. Within a couple of years, lacking bold and exciting opportunities, my political activity dwindled to involvement with a communist group that met occasionally to discuss leftist literature and theories but—despite being comprised of community organizers—did not

organize anything beyond these “classes” itself. I told myself that I did not have time for activism anyway, given that I was in graduate school at this point.

Enter Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in late 2011. In a matter of days, all the time I thought I did not have was consumed with heavy involvement in the movement. Having heard about arrests in New York City on the news and seen coverage of OWS on *The Daily Show*, I knew something radical was happening but did not realize I would get the chance to be involved locally until I was invited to a General Assembly (GA) of a local Occupy group, which I call Occupy the City (OC). I attended the GA, signed up on the email listserv, and made plans to attend the kick-off rally. Assuming OC would dissipate at the end of the rally, I left early. OC was located in a southern and relatively conservative city and state, which led me to think the group would not *actually* occupy a space. I was shocked to my very core when nearly 20 people stood their ground and were arrested later that night—now *this* was a group worth joining, I thought.

I immediately gave OC my all. I woke up before the sun to relieve the overnight Occupiers,<sup>1</sup> spent my days with the group virtually every moment that I was not in class, and exhausted myself with GAs that lasted two to four hours in the evenings. I was tired, cold, and sick, but fascinated with the speedy pace of organization and the quick and complicated drama and dynamics of hundreds of strangers learning to work together in a matter of days. I was intrigued by the process of consensus and impressed with the group’s ability to negotiate from tension and competing ideas to unanimous agreement. I thought the “progressive stack”—assigning a speaking order during meetings based not just on who wished to speak

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the proper form being “occupant,” members of OC called themselves “occupiers,” so I use their language in this dissertation.

first, but also incorporating a consciousness of inequalities based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability and letting members of marginalized groups speak first—was very clever and that the group’s use of it signified deep commitment to eradicating inequality in the spaces that most people take for granted every day.

At the same time, I could see that members of dominant groups were still given subtle privileges that were not extended to members of minority groups. I also witnessed times when men sexually harassed women and when those responsible for facilitating meetings had discussions that betrayed their commitment to equality, such as deciding how to handle a homeless, autistic member who often spoke out of turn and referring to him as the group’s “problem child.” I initially wondered, then, how inequality persisted in spite of and behind the consensus process. How does inequality permeate social movement organizations that intend and claim to be democratic? The opportunity to study this Occupy group arose suddenly and, as happens with inductive research, I began this project with a broad interest in the organization’s structure and decision-making process. I found that the structure of OC, as well as group processes and discourses and the structural constraints OC encountered, enabled an informal hierarchy to arise and persist. Ultimately, this dissertation, based on nine months of fieldwork and 20 in-depth interviews with OC members, documents how elite members gained power while marginalized members were punished and banned. I argue that despite the group’s commitment to democracy, the rise of an informal elite undermined group values and goals and made it much more akin to an oligarchy.

Documenting and analyzing these processes—and ultimately being critical of OC—was an immensely difficult process, given that I believed in the cause, had befriended so

many of the group members, and continued to think of OC as doing something truly radical, despite some flaws. The group's unawareness of internal inequality, I believed, was forgivable (and correctable), given that these activists, whom I had come to appreciate and even love, were the lone group in town willing to disrupt the system (at least this was the case at the start of the Occupation—other local groups, inspired by the OWS movement, began to adopt similar tactics). Even now, after the group endured multiple problems and setbacks and eventually became defunct, I and other OC former members with whom I keep in touch feel some pain associated with OC, but also feel gratitude for the experience and a bit of awe that it was, in many ways, a success. It is my hope, then, that this dissertation guides those committed to progressive social change in future endeavors, identifying what went wrong for OC and what went right and how activist organizations who wish to be diverse can successfully include more people. In what follows, I place the Occupy movement in context, both describing its formation and gaining of momentum and its place in sociological social movement literature, and then describe the methods I used to conduct my research.

## THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT AND THE RETURN OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

In late 2010, the Middle East and some parts of northern Africa erupted in riots and civil wars. Dubbed the “Arab Spring,” demonstrators concerned with dictatorships, class inequality, and human rights violations took to the streets after a man in Tunisia self-immolated in protest of police brutality and government corruption (Day 2011). In Cairo in January 2011, protestors occupied Tahrir Square in the hundreds of thousands (Otterman and

Goodman 2011). With social media playing a key role in this revolution, activists around the world took notice of the occupation.

In June of 2011, Adbusters magazine—a major Canadian anti-consumerist publication—emailed its subscribers with a message: “America needs its own Tahrir.” Picking September 17, 2011, as a start date, Adbusters invited people (see Figure 1 below) to “Occupy Wall Street” and “bring [a] tent” (Adbusters 2011). At the same time, a group called New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts (NYABC) organized a “sleep-in” called “Bloombergville” to protest the influence of corporate money in politics. NYABC activists convened to plan the occupation of Wall Street. The planning group eventually came to be called the New York General Assembly, and the site of the protest became Zuccotti Park, a privately-owned space considered, in most ways, to be public (Writers for the 99% 2012). A couple of hundred people slept in this small park each night for two months until the New York Police Department raided the camp. In addition to the 200 or so arrests made the night of the raid (Barron and Moynihan 2011), the NYPD made mass arrests at other OWS demonstrations—such as the 700 arrests on the Brooklyn Bridge in October 2011 (Wells 2011)—that captured the attention of the mainstream media.



Figure 1. Adbusters' call to “#Occupy Wall Street” and “Bring Tent.”

Again, the centrality of social media to the movement—especially live, streaming video of demonstrations, arrests, police brutality, and General Assemblies—allowed activists all over the world not just to watch the activities of OWS, but to use their camp and their General Assembly as a model. Within a month of its inception, Occupy groups were started in about 1,000 cities in nearly 85 countries (Rogers 2011a). Occupiers adopted “We are the 99%” as a slogan and called for people of every demographic to recognize their common interest—fighting the richest 1% of Americans, who, at the time, owned about 43% of the nation’s nonhousing wealth (Lowrey 2011) and who use their wealth to influence politicians to act in ways that harm average Americans (Rogers 2011b). With an emphasis on power and inequality, Occupations adopted the model of the General Assembly, using consensus to make decisions and enabling any single individual to “block” a proposal. Groups intentionally avoided selecting leaders and instead chose to remain leaderless (Writers for the 99% 2012). Creating such a democratic model based on participation generated struggle in many cities, as few Americans are familiar with groups of this nature and how to keep them

functional in practice (Woehrle 2003). Still, those committed to the movement held out such a model as the ideal. The mainstream media derided the groups' practices and methods, such as using hand signals to communicate consent or disagreement (Lithwick 2011), but few could deny that the OWS movement spread in a way that few progressive mass movements have in several decades.

Within weeks, scholars began blogging about the movement and working on journal articles that would appear in, for example, an entire dedicated volume (volume 54) of *The Sociological Quarterly*. The Google Scholar alerts I subscribed to for Occupy included articles on inequality and inclusion in the camps (Maharawal 2013; Schein 2012; Smith, Castaneda, and Heyman 2012), the centrality of technology and social media to recruitment and networking (Nielsen 2013), state repression and the democratic nature of the movement (Juris et al. 2012; Liboiron 2012; Nugent 2012), and what successes the movement had had thus far and where it might be headed (Milkman, Lewis, and Luce 2013; Wilson 2012). The tone of each article was a mix of surprise that the movement had spread like wildfire and optimistic hope that the movement would successfully pressure politicians into giving the American middle class a break, while punishing those who played a significant role in the financial crisis of 2008.

Given the subject of this dissertation, most of the articles that were valuable for my research analyzed the structure and decision-making processes of Occupy groups and reopened debates on participatory democracy and bureaucracy in social movement organizations (Leach 2013; Piven 2013; Razsa and Kurnik 2012). Polletta (2014), in particular, detailed how consensus and leaderlessness now in use by the Tea Party and

Occupy movements alike were “abandoned” by activists decades ago (at the latest, by the 1990s), yet had “gained new life” after Seattle and the first World Social Forum. Polletta theorized that a new generation of activists adopted participatory democracy thanks to “an odd combination of participation and nonparticipation that many young people experience today” (2014:84): young Occupiers belong to a generation that is excluded by old political institutions (such as political parties and Congress) beholden to the wealthy and so is used to participation and organization by way of the internet. The Occupy movement, then, reflected the habits of young people and was accessible to them, despite the critiques of consensus and leaderlessness by older activists.

Was it the case, though, that a new generation of activists was somehow better prepared to negotiate consensus, or would they still be duped by what Treloar (2003) calls the “myths of consensus” and find themselves facing the same challenges as older generations? For instance, one of the myths about the consensus process, Treloar puts forth, is that the consensus process is inclusive. Given that consensus is a time-consuming process (thereby excluding people who have little time to spare), many withdraw from consensus-based social movement organizations, and people (especially people of color and working-class and poor people) are often alienated by elements of the consensus process (e.g., hand signals and jargon). People of color and working-class and poor people who feel alienated by the consensus process tend to reject it and tend not to form coalitions with consensus-based groups (Gamson and Sifry 2013; Nugent 2012; Polletta 2005; Treloar 2003)—a weakness for those organizations who desire to be prefigurative and embody diversity. Indeed, new

research coming out of OWS revealed that however adept younger people might be at participation, old critiques might still be valid (Leondar-Wright 2014).

Additionally, consensus is especially difficult to achieve in heterogeneous groups (Mansbridge 1983; Rothschild-Whitt 1979), setting Occupy's preferred decision-making process at odds with its aim to be inclusive of 99% of Americans. As a nonhierarchical movement, Occupy is a "flat" organization, the kind in which Sutherland et al. (2013) argue members are less likely and perhaps unable to exercise "power over" another and instead are more likely to exercise "power with." By power-with, Starhawk—who developed the concept—means "the power not to command, but to suggest and to be listened to, to begin something and see it happen" (1987:10). Power-with, then, is "a more subtle and dynamic quality embedded in social interactions, discourse and meaning-making processes" (Sutherland et al. 2013:14). Not surprisingly, activists, and especially *new* activists, who were drawn to Occupy's premise that one did not need previous experience with activism to participate may not be primed to recognize power-with, allowing subtle, but critical, disproportionate influence to go undetected and uncorrected. One could imagine that group members' inability to acknowledge unequal power in a group—inequality that is felt but seemingly unable to be expressed, explained, or rectified—may pose a threat to the consensus process. Both of these challenges—heterogeneity and members' struggles to talk about power—were characteristics of Occupy that posed significant threats to inclusivity and equality.

While Occupy groups across the country had a lot in common, there were important differences between them to be analyzed, yet I found that much of the new research on the

Occupy movement was based on Occupy Wall Street in New York City. Although there was some work coming out of other cities, I continued to read article after article in which authors (e.g., Jaffe 2011; Maharawal 2013; Williams 2012) highlighted the militant, radical aspects of Occupy Wall Street, in particular, as well as the Occupy groups of a few other cities that sounded very little like the local group in which I participated. Occupy the City preferred to formulate a rather conservative image, investing effort in seeming “family friendly” and discouraging front-page photos of arrests that would make members appear radical or, as group members often put it, “angry.” Additionally, in OC, I observed a process of increasing bureaucratization in a group that formally considered itself democratic. Cafferata (1982) noted that there is little research on processes of bureaucratization within democratic groups. The case of OC, then, offered an opportunity to collect rich data from its inception and over a long duration that would allow me to analyze how the group, situated in a particular context, negotiated leaderless, participatory democracy. My findings show that the specific combination of structure and group processes OC faced enabled an informal hierarchy to garner the kind of minority power found in oligarchies. I now turn to the methods I used to collect and analyze the data that form the basis for this dissertation.

## METHODS

### **Meeting Occupy the City**

My research observes one local branch of the Occupy Wall Street movement. By October of 2011, I had heard news stories about Occupy Wall Street, but, not being a social media user myself, I was unfamiliar with the group’s use of the General Assembly (GA)

decision-making process. When I was invited by a fellow leftist to attend a gathering of the new, local Occupy group, I assumed I was attending a rally or protest that day. In fact, I found myself at the second GA of Occupy the City (OC), about 200 people meeting in a local park. It soon became clear to me that this event was not a rally, but rather, was a planning meeting for an eventual rally. Due to poor sound amplification, I could not hear those who were speaking, nor could I hear the “rules” of the decision-making process or how to get involved. Since my commitment to the group was low, I spent my time that afternoon moving through the crowd and chatting with people I knew from other activist organizations. Two hours later, I left with no knowledge of the consensus process, though I did commit to attending the rally the group had been planning.

A week later, I did attend, along with about 1,500 people, the kick-off rally for the Occupation, held at a historic building downtown. As I was enrolled in a fieldwork class at the time, I briefly considered bringing my notebook along that day, but ultimately decided to just enjoy myself, still thinking that I would attend the rally and then be done with OC—indeed, with strong police presence on-site and without having spoken to organizers about their plans, I did not really believe OC would last longer than a day. I did not bring with me anything that would have been useful had I planned to stay the evening (e.g., food, a sleeping bag, and so on). I left the rally for dinner and checked the news a couple of hours later (since I was not in touch with anyone on-site, the news was one of the only ways I could learn about the events there). Learning that nearly 20 people had been arrested for refusing to leave the protest site but that many more remained just outside the police barricade, I realized that the activists were more committed than I had given them credit for. I returned to the downtown

area for a few more hours until everyone was released from jail. After I got drawn into the movement that evening, I found myself committed to participating in the Occupation.

Within a few days, I believed I had found an interesting research project, and within a couple of weeks, I had obtained approval from my dissertation chair to study OC. During those few weeks, I had begun taking notes, profiling the people who were involved in OC and what I had learned about them from various conversations and events. Later, I reconstructed what I could about those first few weeks in my field notes and through interviews with people who were there from the start (and who were much more informed and committed than I was at the get-go). Eventually, I spent over nine months with the group, participating in rallies, protests, GAs, working group meetings, and maintaining the camp site, in addition to formally interviewing 20 OC members.

### **Occupy the City**

Occupy the City was located in a metropolitan area (population over one million) in a southeastern state in the U.S. While the state is overall a conservative one, there is a rich history of civil rights activism—in fact, the OC campsite was on nearly the exact same slice of land as a Freedmen Convention held shortly after the Civil War. Yet, in the last 10 presidential elections, the Republican candidate won the state's vote in eight, and during the course of OC, the state elected a Republican governor. Locally, the year prior to the start of OC, newly-elected Republican county school board members suddenly ended a progressive diversity policy that other school boards hailed as a successful model for nearly a decade; educators, parents, and civil rights activists engaged in a prolonged struggle to elect a

Democrat majority in the next election cycle who would reprioritize diversity. Residents in The City and nearby towns are more liberal than those in the rest of the state, who consistently elect conservative government officials. While those government officials did not subject OC to the same military-style raid that other Occupations—such as those in New York City and Oakland—experienced, this was in part because OC was not comprised of many anarchists or radicals taking land or challenging police power as other Occupations were (indeed, self-identified anarchists were drawn to and participating in another Occupation about 30 miles away).

In fact, what made OC unique among Occupations was the group's participation in the rent economy. The group set up camp on rented land and signed a lease for the space each month. Legally using private property prevented the police from evicting the group, allowing the OC camp to exist longer than most, if not all, others (OC was rumored to be the longest-running camp at the time it closed, but this information is difficult to verify). While such an extended time was an advantage other Occupations did not have (e.g., it allowed for a consistent meeting space), it also hurt OC in ways other Occupations were not. The financial expenses paid by the group included a \$1,000 insurance bill reducing the landlord's liability and monthly costs such as rent (\$400), food (\$500), and supplies (\$100), in addition to costs borne by individuals who donated food, water, medicine, portable toilets, and so on. Sustaining these expenses for such a long period of time took a toll on the group; as I will later show, participation in the rent economy and expenses like these both incited and facilitated tensions.

Because membership in OC was informal, it was impossible for me to count and demographically define<sup>2</sup> all members. The kick-off rally was attended by about 1,500 people; by the end of my participation 9 months later, only about 5 people regularly attended meetings; and during the course of my field work, the core group of active participants ranged from about 20 to 50. Of the shifting core group, I counted about 22 white cismen, 19 white ciswomen, three black cismen, two white transwomen, one black ciswoman, and one cisman who identified predominantly as Native American. Nearly all participants ranged in age from the early 20s to mid-60s. Most had at least some college education or a bachelor's degree, and I would estimate that a quarter or more had graduate degrees, but about half were not working during my field work. Unlike other Occupations, there was not a sizeable student population in OC, though some students did participate in both OC and an Occupation at a nearby university campus<sup>3</sup> whose meetings I attended a handful of times.

### **Gaining Access**

Even as an insider (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009), I was not sure how to go about gaining access to the group as a researcher, given that there was no single leader or group of leaders to give permission. Before a GA one evening, I met with the working group in charge of facilitating the GAs and told them that I would like to study the group and was unsure

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<sup>2</sup> While demographically defining all members of this ever-shifting group was challenging enough, there was the additional challenge of defining everyone exactly as they would see themselves. The categories into which I placed people were decided based on a combination of my observations of their race, sex, and gender cues, as well as the times when I was able to hear them define themselves (i.e., during group activities or in one-on-one interviews for this paper).

<sup>3</sup> While I did attend meetings of other Occupations, ranging from local Occupations to Occupy Wall Street itself, I am unable to draw meaningful comparisons between those and OC as I spent far too little time with other groups to evaluate the composition of their members, analyze group dynamics, learn the groups' histories, and so on.

whether I could simply announce that I would be taking notes or whether the group needed to come to consensus on allowing me to do so. Collectively, we decided that I would simply announce my presence as a researcher on a frequent basis and—since NCSU’s IRB exempted this study and did not require each participant to sign a consent form—also announce that anyone could opt out of participating (that is, I would not include their statements and actions in the write-ups of my analysis).<sup>4</sup> Given the fluid nature of group membership in OC, I made the announcement at many GAs, working group meetings, and camp visits, and also put “Occupy the City Researcher” in my signature line on the online forums after making several posts that I would be using content from the forums as part of my archival material. I also used the email OccupyStudy@gmail.com to communicate with members so as to be as transparent as possible.

Two people opted out of my research immediately, both of whom had (separately) decided never to participate in any research study. Of those two, one I never met (she had a small Internet presence but was not on-site very much), and the other was part of OC only for the first three weeks or so of its existence. Later, one woman gave me permission to use data I collected on her through the time of her interview in mid-April 2012, but did not want me to use my notes on anything she said or did after that, for reasons unclear to me. Finally, in June 2012, a month before my field work concluded, two more people—a man and a woman in an intimate relationship—opted out of this study. They had not been active participants for some time (and never resumed participation in OC) and at the time, I was not sure why they opted out. I later learned that, after participants split over loyalties, this couple decided they

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<sup>4</sup> I believe that if I had put a proposal to study the group to the GA, it would have received consensus, possibly with a few “stand-asides” from those wishing to opt out.

did not like me, and they might have been suspicious that the jottings I was taking (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995) were for the benefit of the local police. To protect the confidentiality of participants, I assigned pseudonyms for the movement and its members. I refrain from citing news stories in which OCers are quoted that, if searched for on the Internet, would reveal the identity of a member. Later in the dissertation, I reference a documentary on OC made by local college students, but only with the assurance that the documentary is not on the Internet and I possess one of just a handful of DVDs ever made.

### **Data Collection**

In the week leading up to the kick-off rally and for a short time after, OC held two GAs per day, at lunch time and in the evening. These GAs took place at the historic building downtown where the group maintained a 24/7 picket. Once it became clear that only a few people would attend the lunchtime GA and that no decisions affecting the whole group should be made by only a handful of people, that GA was eliminated, leaving only a daily evening GA, often attended by 100 or so people. By the end of January 2012, the daily GA— participation by then decreased by half—was reduced to one weeknight GA and one weekend GA per week (for some time, both were held at the historic site, until the weeknight GA was moved to the camp the group had set up in November 2011), and by June, when attendance was down to fewer than about a dozen regular attendees, the weeknight GA was also eliminated. The group held the weekend GA at the historic downtown building through

the summer of 2012, when only about five Occupiers attended each week and I ended my fieldwork.<sup>5</sup>

I attended almost every GA and recorded minutes. To make this job easier, I eventually used a small digital recorder—paired with a notebook for fieldwork jottings—and transcribed the recording the next day. The Occupy movement held transparency as a core principle, and since it was easy to do once I had transcribed the minutes, I posted the minutes on the group’s website so that others who missed a GA could be informed of decisions the group made. I was amused when some members started treating me as an official record keeper—one member of the most exclusive and maligned group, “the clique,” nicknamed me “Minutes,” and when folks had questions about rules or processes, they asked me what I remembered about group decisions, rather than looking for answers in the records online. I felt that the work this all created for me was worthwhile; I believe that doing this type of “grunt work” for the group signified my commitment, and members seemed to reward my efforts with their trust and acceptance.

In part, the motivation behind reducing the number of General Assemblies early on was to decrease the workload on people who were also attending a number of working-group meetings held each week. Members gathered in a number of places—the historic downtown building, the eventual campsite, local coffee shops and bars, libraries, and Occupiers’ homes—to discuss the business of working-groups like (GA) Facilitation, Human Needs, Communications, Diversity, Outreach, Archives, Direct Action, Financial, Art and Culture,

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<sup>5</sup> After ending my field work, I continued to participate with the group for one year. During the winter, the group held GAs at a mall for protection from the cold, and in the summer, the group moved back to the historic building most of the time but also experimented with switching between local parks to see if other locations would increase attendance.

De-escalation, Legal, and more. Like the General Assemblies, working-group meetings were open to all members of the public, but—given the diversity of meeting locations and times, including midnight—access to meetings was, for some people (those with workplace or family responsibilities and those who lacked transportation), limited.

In any case, Occupy the City was certainly meeting-intensive, providing me many opportunities for fieldwork. I used my recorder and notebook to capture field notes during these meetings. Many others used notebooks during these meetings, too, so my writing was less conspicuous than, say, when I took notes during social gatherings. Still, attendees sometimes joked that, when I wrote down things they said, they must have said something important (sometimes they directed me to take down what they had said). Other times, I strategically avoided writing, such as when the meetings were about planning illegal actions or were convened for the purposes of discussing things that felt highly personal to members. In those cases, I used my recorder as I was driving home to say a few things that would jog my memory when writing fieldnotes later.

In addition to my presence and participation at GAs and working-group meetings, I also wrote fieldnotes after protests, rallies, social gatherings, and visits on-site. The log I kept to track my attendance and participation—an Excel spreadsheet in which I kept track of the date, the event I attended (e.g., a GA, an overnight camp watch), the hours I spent, and notes about significant happenings during that event—shows that rarely did a day go by in which I did not spend some time face-to-face with participants doing the “business” of the

Occupation (I did not log my daily online activities, like engaging in forum discussions).<sup>6</sup> Between October 2011 and June 2012, I logged 600 hours of participation. This rigorous schedule—especially when I logged hours in the middle of the night—made writing fieldnotes daily difficult, so some recordings were transcribed well after an event.

I collected data off-site, too. Given the group's frequent use of the Internet to communicate, I collected data from the group's email list, biweekly newsletters, website, and forums, as well as private messages and emails that group members sent to me and phone calls that they placed to me. I archived a few months' worth of Facebook and Twitter posts, and a tech-savvy group member sent me an Excel spreadsheet tracking Facebook traffic on the group's page for the first few months. I also started a working-group to archive material, keeping newspaper articles about OC, flyers and materials OC handed out, and photos, among other things. I wrote field notes after attending a handful of meetings of another local Occupy group and after a trip to New York City in December 2011. During this trip, I attended an Occupy Wall Street (OWS) General Assembly, some working-group meetings, and a protest, and also went to a bar with OWS activists to compare our Occupations and the problems each group faced.

Finally, I interviewed 20 Occupiers—19 of these interviews took place between March and October of 2012, while the final interview took place in May of 2013 with a member who wanted to be interviewed but needed time to heal after he experienced emotional trauma while participating with OC. I put out a call for interviewees at the site, on

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<sup>6</sup> While I initially made notes in the log about when I spent time with select participants socially (e.g., going to a movie with Occupiers for fun), I did not count those hours toward my fieldwork, and I later stopped recording these events as the Occupiers became my friends and these kinds of hang-outs happened more frequently.

the forum, and in the biweekly OC newsletter that the Communications working group distributed via email to about a thousand email addresses, and I asked a few people directly to participate in an interview. Three additional people volunteered to be interviewed (one of whom I never recalled meeting), but they were not very active participants so I did not interview them. Of the 20 people I did interview, all but one were active participants in OC for at least a few months (even if they were no longer active by their interview date), and the other was a woman from an Occupation about 30 miles away who had visited OC several times and whose comparisons between the two Occupations I thought would be valuable. All interviewees were white: 10 cismen, eight ciswomen, and two transwomen,<sup>7</sup> ranging in age from 22 to 69. All had attended at least some college and about a third had gone to graduate school. Over a third were unemployed at the time of the interview.

In the interviews, I asked questions about participants' childhoods and educational backgrounds, their experiences with activism before joining the Occupy movement, their feelings and beliefs about the goals and methods of OC, and the relationships that they had formed with other Occupiers, among other topics, which varied widely. In fact, during many interviews, hours passed before I had made it through the guide, as I let interviewees take the conversation to places relevant to them, creating a lot of diversity in topics covered. My transcripts reflect a variety of themes as I modified the interview guide as participants brought new topics to light in order to pursue these topics in subsequent interviews. I conducted the interviews in participants' homes, in coffee shops and restaurants, at a park, and, for one interview, while walking around the downtown area (the participant's request).

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<sup>7</sup> While the transwomen of OC used the language of "trans," I do not recall hearing anyone refer to themselves a "cisman" or "ciswoman." This is terminology I have chosen to use.

The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours; the average length was just over an hour and a half. I used a digital recorder during the interviews and then, after writing post-interview thumbnail sketches, transcribed many of the interviews myself; I also received a small grant from my department to have the rest professionally transcribed (I later reviewed these for accuracy by reading the transcripts as I listened to the audio, making corrections as necessary).

### **Interests and Focus**

Having never belonged to a group that used consensus democracy to make decisions, my initial research interest was the participatory process that OC employed in General Assemblies. I was interested in the origins of consensus and OC's decision to adopt that process, how participants felt about it, and how members understood and articulated the nuances of the process. As I learned more about the group's goals to use consensus to ensure equality within the group, I became intrigued by the contradictions that I witnessed—namely, that despite members' best intentions and desires to eradicate inequality in society, very real marginalization was still occurring just under their noses in the group, seemingly without awareness and possibly without intent. In my fieldnotes, I documented instances of racism and sexism, discourses about homeless participants (who were drawn to the cause, and sometimes, to the limited resources OC had, including food and blankets), and tensions around whose voices “counted,” how much, and when.

Once the 24/7 sidewalk picket became too onerous, an individual rented land so that OC could set up a camp that included many small tents for sleeping, a portable toilet,<sup>8</sup> and three large tents for a kitchen, a library, and medical care. The creation of the camp brought new narratives to light. Should we<sup>9</sup> occupy rented land? Who will pay the rent? Who will make decisions about the camp? How will we allocate resources? Should we make rules about on-site behavior? All of these questions increased opportunities for me to study processes of inequality within the group. When OC eventually split into two factions—a “pro-camp” faction and an “anti-camp” faction—common talk within the group expanded into conversations about substance abuse, “family-friendly” appearances, and the perceived dangers that homeless black men, especially, present. These topics, too, became topics of interest for me, and I pursued them in fieldnotes and interviews, while continuing to focus on the GA process.

### **Data Analysis and Positionality**

I conducted this research using grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), starting not with a hypothesis but with observations. After spending time with Occupy the City, I wrote fieldnotes, including documentation of my own participation and emotions. After interviews, I wrote thumbnail sketches that included notes on how I might “tweak” my interview guide to reflect themes that seemed important to my interviewees and refine my analysis. For example, after the first few interviews, I realized that participants spoke often about the

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<sup>8</sup> A female member paid for a second toilet a while later after some women said they found the original toilet, used predominantly by men, too gross.

<sup>9</sup> I use “we” here because I am asking the questions that members of OC found themselves asking at that time. See below for a discussion of how I decided to include or exclude myself by using “we” and “they.”

personal relationships that they had been forming with other members of OC, and yet my initial interview guide contained no questions about personal relationships between members. Through these interviews, then, I began to see the importance of belonging to a group as a major “side bet” (Schwalbe 2008) riding on members’ participation in the group, increasing their commitment and discouraging them from quitting when things got tough.

I used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data (Charmaz 1983; Glaser and Strauss 1967). I coded (by hand) my fieldnotes, the interview transcripts and thumbnail sketches, and archival data, such as forum posts, for emerging<sup>10</sup> themes and processes. For example, initial codes included “relationships,” “networking,” and “clique.” Later, focused coding produced child codes (e.g., “making friends” under “relationships”) and connections between initial codes. Writing analytic memos helped me to understand how various processes shaped inequality within the group. For instance, writing about the codes “making friends” and “exclusion” led to a memo about building power “behind the scenes” and a particular process I later came to call “closing ranks.”

Data collection and analysis were driven by symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969). A primary correlate of symbolic interactionism is that the best way to do research is to take an inductive approach and go directly to the social world. Blumer advocated that the empirical world “must forever be the central point of concern. It is the point of departure and the point of return in the case of empirical science. It is the testing ground for any assertions made about the empirical world” (1969:21-22). In the field,

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<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the importance of Occupiers’ perceptions of risk was one such emergent theme, and I did not include questions about it in the interview guide as I only realized once interviews had been conducted how important these perceptions were. My analysis of their perceptions of risk, and the processes that formed and influenced those perceptions, is based on how they talked about risk to other group members.

symbolic interactionists view study participants as agents who both produce and respond to meanings that emerge from interaction in the context of particular structural arrangements and material and symbolic conditions (Blumer 1969; Mead 1934). As Occupiers reified their decision-making process and reified and reproduced inequality, it was my goal to understand how these were constructed through members' daily interactions as they participated in a social movement organization in a conservative state and capitalist economy.

I also relied on intersectional feminism (Collins 2000) to make sense of my data. I approached the project from the position that my experiences of the Occupation and my emotions about it were a source of knowledge rather than things I should repress and from which I should disconnect myself. I examined the meanings of gender, race, and social class for participants and how social identities, emergent in interaction rather than static, were formed at the intersections of categories of inequality. For example, in Chapter 3, I show how some Occupiers made race and social class especially salient for homeless black men as they framed them as "dangerous" to women and children of the Occupation and punished and, in some cases, ejected them, while acknowledging that these same men, oppressed and oppressor, objectified me, a white middle-class woman, through extensive commentary on my body and other incidents described below. I responded to the harassment in a way that may be typical of white, middle-class women (see Duneier 1999 for example) but also reflected my position as a researcher gravely concerned with keeping informants happy, a phenomenon perhaps more typical of female fieldworkers than male (Schilt and Williams 2008): I was polite to these men. I granted them favors, like the use of my cell phone. Though I wanted to stand up for myself and educate the men about how their actions could

make women uncomfortable—and, indeed, if the men had more status in the group, I would have said something to that effect, as I did with David a few times when he was inadvertently sexist—I was worried that saying something about this to these men might alienate them and restrict my access to data.

Theories of discourse, narratives, and framing (Benford and Snow 2000; Miller 2000; Snow et al. 1986) were also influential in my analysis as I sought to understand how events not only unfolded but were interpreted and turned into accounts (Pugh 2013; Scott and Lyman 1968) by members. I analyzed the ways that individuals used frames and narratives as tools to evoke particular emotions that shaped lines of action (Mead 1934). This framework was especially fruitful in a social movement that emphasized inclusion (with its “We are the 99%” slogan) and a group whose perceptions of “safety” were emotionally evoked and successfully framed to justify excluding people. I analyze discourse in the group by focusing on the rhetoric members used to accomplish specific goals (Miller 2000:317).

Throughout my observations and analysis, I tried not to let it escape me that I conducted this research as a young, white woman in graduate school. Rather, my fieldnotes contain extensive commentary on my own participation and feelings and how others’ reactions to me and any ideas I shared with the group may have been shaped by who I am (Kleinman and Kolb 2011). I am articulate in my speech and use middle-class speech patterns, but I made no effort, as I have done for other research projects, to dress in ways that conveyed a particular class standing—nor could I have on many days, given the range of climate conditions that required me to don everything from a sundress and flip-flops to thick layers and rain gear. While many Occupiers were white, middle-class, and had college or

advanced degrees, I do not think all the participants understood what graduate school is, yet they seemed to at least understand that I had an advanced degree (and one low-income, black, male camper nicknamed me “Teach” after learning that I taught undergraduates). For that matter, some of the participants understood the kind of analysis that a sociological dissertation entailed (because they knew more about grad school, because they had looked up and read my master’s thesis, or because they had asked me directly), but I was also asked by some members to write down things they said in a way that suggested to me that they thought I might be writing what would become a best-selling book that made OC look like a group of heroes. When I began the project, I asked myself sometimes if these people, who were, for a time, my friends, would be hurt by what they read. As the project progressed and I decreased my involvement with the few remaining OC members—and indeed, as former OC members moved on with their lives, too—I grew less concerned that my analysis would impact my (by now diminished) relationships.

Because I was an active participant from the beginning and I followed through on the tasks I volunteered for, I was accepted by the group. For most of the period that I studied the group, I forced myself to remain quiet, not wanting to influence the direction of the group or “disrupt” the very processes I was studying. Admittedly, the commitment to non-interference was difficult, emotionally (Kleinman and Copp 1993) and as someone who believed in the politics of the Occupy movement. The precarious space I occupied in the movement is evident in this dissertation, as I sometimes position myself within the group by using “we/us” and other times distance myself from the group by using “they/them.” As a general rule, I use “we/us” when an outsider did something to the group (e.g., “The police told us to leave”) or

when the group made a decision of which I was a part (e.g., “We decided to hold conventions in the summer of 2012”). I use “they/them” when the group made a decision from which I abstained (e.g., “They formed a working group for indigenous people”) or said or did something in my absence (e.g., “They set up camp while I was out of town”). The boundaries between “we” and “they,” however, are somewhat porous and not always clear-cut (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

Refraining from being outspoken, respecting the confidentiality I had provided participants, and doing both “grunt work” (which the group took as a sign of commitment and loyalty) and whatever work the group needed me to do (whether I agreed with the idea that the work should be done or not), it seemed as though I effectively positioned myself in such a way that everyone seemed to assume I agreed with them. Even after the group fractured, I was accepted by nearly every faction that formed and was invited to a number of “secret,” exclusive meetings. As a strategy, I appeared to be an ally to everyone. At the end of his interview, I told Samuel that one Occupier, Sally, frequently added me to emails that she sent to another Occupier, Carmen, and I could not figure out why, since Carmen and I did not share a common perspective. Samuel ventured,

I think it’s because a lot of people don’t get you...I just think a lot of people get the wrong impression of you early because you’re not necessarily as vocal all the time...I think some people take that to define attributes about you that aren’t true. That you don’t have strong opinions...that you don’t feel passionately one way or the other about topics that we’re talking about and I think people just miss that...I think that’s why.

Thanks to my strategic silence, the members of OC were able to use me as a sounding board, and then project whatever they needed onto me, which gave me great access across the board. This strategy was not employed without frustration. I wrestled a lot with simultaneously wanting to help craft a successful movement, as an Occupier, and wanting to be hands-off and observe the group's "natural" progression without interference, as a researcher. When members spoke to me in private, I often felt as though they were sharing information with me as a researcher (rather than as a fellow Occupier) and I felt an obligation to keep that information confidential. Keeping "secrets" was emotionally tiring, and I often felt unable to act on confidential information in a way that I thought might be more beneficial to the Occupation. Since I could not be at the site 24 hours a day and relied heavily on people filling me in about things I missed, I worried frequently about losing the trust of my informants by, for example, people on one side of an issue finding out that I was also close to people on the other side of the issue.

Fortunately, I was never asked to publicly account for my multiple loyalties across groups, despite the existence of a gossip-centric phone tree where I am sure I was discussed. I also found that I could rely on someone voicing my perspective, even if I felt that I could not. I became especially close with one Occupier who had a full-time job and, like me, could not be at the site as often as he would have liked. He and I used the Internet and text messages to keep in touch with each other and with those on-site in our absence, and the more we talked, the clearer it became that we saw eye-to-eye on the issues that cropped up. As he vocalized a perspective I shared, I grew more comfortable with my own silence, knowing that my own ideas were being included in the discussions despite my silence.

While the various factions accepted and included me in most ways, I was occasionally excluded by the “clique.” Clique members behaved in friendly ways toward me but did not always invite me to most of their “affinity group”<sup>11</sup> meetings. I cannot know for sure, but I believe that my limited online presence (i.e., lacking a Facebook page) played a small role since the clique used social media sites to communicate and plan. I also do not use drugs, nor do I consume much alcohol socially, so I may have also been excluded from most of the clique’s social events because they tended to include these things and I had a reputation as a non-partier. I also believe that I was occasionally excluded because the clique engaged in illegal activities (e.g., stealing supplies for the camp) and they likely had concerns that I would include such activities in my fieldnotes.

I believe I was also occasionally excluded because some clique members did not like me, or at best, did not like a decision I had made for my personal life. During the course of my participation with OC, I ended one intimate relationship and began another,<sup>12</sup> and some OC members had negative opinions about me due to those decisions. Group members knew of my decisions, since both partners were Occupiers (the former partner only occasionally involved, the new partner heavily involved) and they discussed my decisions both privately and publicly. To say that I experienced a great deal of anxiety about my personal-life-made-public would be an understatement; I sought counseling and ultimately quit the group a year

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<sup>11</sup> While working groups were formed by and held accountable to the GA, affinity groups were small, exclusive, friendship-based groups convened for purposes other than those approved by the GA. In other words, if the GA did not approve of a course of action (something illegal, for example, like stealing supplies for the camp), independent affinity groups might take it upon themselves to pursue that course of action autonomously. Affinity groups and the principle of autonomy are discussed below.

<sup>12</sup> Fellow Occupier Adam described the tendency for couples to crop up as “the erotic nature of protest.” David and I became engaged, following two other Occupy couples (including the marriage of Samuel and Lillian), and several other people who met at the Occupation were involved in short-term relationships (with even more people rumored to be in relationships that were never confirmed).

after ending my fieldwork. Even then, I frequently worried that important players in this story would revoke their consent to participate merely to spite me, and while my small friendship circle still includes a handful of Occupiers, I have mostly ceased communication with OC. (In reflecting on my position after much time has passed, I concluded that I worried more about how much people were discussing my relationship than I needed to: though Occupiers did discuss my relationships, several other couples had formed—some not without scandal, as in the case of two clique members—and people likely cared about my relationship no more than they cared about the others and much less than they cared about their own lives.) I found during the course of my interviews that the personal relationships Occupiers formed with one another were profoundly important: many reported feeling alone or isolated before joining the movement, and their participation and engagement were increased as a sense of community grew. At the same time, group disagreements often became personal, and members frequently discussed hurt feelings and emotions as the root of decisions to quit.

The “slut shaming” (Armstrong et al. 2014) I experienced while participating with OC was only one facet of the sexism I encountered during my time with the group. Unsurprisingly, most instances of sexism involved my body. A month into the Occupation, for example, I was the only woman on-site for an early morning shift and three men spent several minutes critiquing nearly every element of my body, describing each part (my hair, my skin color, my size, and so on) in detail, rating them and comparing them to other women’s bodies. I mentioned this incident parenthetically in a forum post later that day, and another man sent me a paternalistic private message, offering to speak to those men on my

behalf. Sometime later, another man in the group had me walk on the “inside” of the sidewalk as we walked downtown, and yet another man in a separate incident downtown asked me to take his elbow as we walked to a meeting. These chivalrous gestures, even if well-intentioned, communicated to me that I was in need of men’s protection, reinforcing the gender order. My reactions to these kinds of events varied based on how well I knew the men, whether I felt safe, and so on, but I was always concerned that, if I stood up for myself, I would lose the participant’s consent in this project. In some cases, I went along with the sexism if I felt the risk of alienating the men was too great, which also caused me some distress.

My physical safety was also a concern as I began participating after dark with a group of virtual strangers and in the middle of a city. In particular, I was concerned about the potential dangers I faced as a woman, including sexual assault and other violent acts that reinforce men’s power over women. I was on-site the first night of the Occupation, but once everyone was released from jail, I chose to go home instead of sleeping on the sidewalk, since I did not yet feel safe with group members or passersby. I did spend one (ultimately sleepless) night on the sidewalk before the camp was set up and recall holding my cell phone in one hand and eyeglasses in another, lest they be stolen from me or should I need either quickly in the case of a threat. Once the camp was set up, I felt safer sleeping in a tent that I could lock, but I did arrange to sleep at the camp only on the nights that a male Occupier I trusted would also be sleeping at the camp. I chose this Occupier because, of all group members, I was closest to him and knew he would look out for me, and also because my partner at the time insisted I be in the company of men, rather than women, due to sexist

notions that men are better protectors of women than other women. Very soon after, I came to know and trust the campers and no longer worried they would be the source of threats to my safety, and I believed they would protect me (and indeed, that we would all protect one another) from threats posed by passersby.

Occupiers were known to talk about how sleeping downtown with virtual strangers produced quick intimacy and strong trust,<sup>13</sup> aided by 24/7 participation, sharing meals, and more. Friendships developed, and before long, I found myself opening my home to some Occupiers for showers, meeting Occupiers for Friday night drinks, and supporting Occupiers' proposals not necessarily because they were good proposals, but because I wanted to support my friends. Like those I interviewed, participation in OC transformed me from an isolated homebody to a social busy bee as I found a community of people who cared about politics and injustice like I did. While this newfound community was a source of joy and comfort in many ways, it could also be a source of discomfort on the occasions that I witnessed or even participated in dynamics that reproduced inequality. Homeless campers, for example, needed places to stay after OC closed the camp—while a couple of Occupiers arranged housing for a few campers, a palpable tension formed when those who expressed concern for campers could not or would not make sacrifices to house them. This tension was difficult to experience, leaving me to wrestle with guilt when the camp closed and later that year when I

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, when some “anti-camp” women complained that they felt unsafe around male campers (described in Chapter 3), women in the pro-camp faction argued that these women only felt unsafe because they had spent so little time on-site getting to know the male campers and that part of the solution to this problem was that these women should spend more nights at the camp. Mal and I told other women which nights we would be there (as “allies”), but this did not change these women’s minds and they did not spend the night at the camp in the future.

ran into a homeless Occupier on a downtown street corner, but it was also instructive for my research into group processes that facilitate and maintain inequality.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation analyzes how a leaderless, democratic movement may foster and encourage inequality between members despite the group's aim of eradicating inequality. I examine how group structure, decision-making processes, values, and interactions play a role in generating and maintaining inequality, as well as the context (political and economic) within which the group operates. My findings shed light on the challenges that prefigurative social movement organizations face and the defensive practices that may inhibit their success. By highlighting various structural conditions under which OC operated, and the culture in which it was situated, I wish to focus on the context in which Occupiers acted rather than on the motivations of these actors; this research is a study of actions, and the consequences of (intended or unintended) and context around those actions.

In Chapter 2, I examine how participants who are members of dominant social groups with greater resources may become elites who garner power in a group. Elites are featured in both this chapter and Chapter 4. In this chapter, I show how elites rose to power in Occupy the City as they reminded members of the importance of their own contributions to the movement and benefitted from narratives that mobilized movement principles such as "autonomy." I reveal that members of OC gained elite status by using the General Assembly process (and the assumptions that underlay it) and deflected criticisms of their unequal power by reifying the process. This chapter highlights how the decision-making process and

movement principles were important in facilitating the consolidation of power among a few members.

In Chapter 3, I reveal how members' interactions and the context within which an organization is situated (particularly a capitalist economy and repressive state) shape the rules a group may craft to punish marginalized members as well as the narratives they use to justify those rules. While the previous chapter explains that autonomy was a valued precept of the movement, I show in this chapter how Occupiers positioned autonomy as a privilege that could be extended or revoked based on individual behavior. I link the concepts of autonomy and citizenship and argue that the Occupiers' strategies of and preoccupation with controlling disadvantaged members alienated members who were not white and middle-class, antithetical to the movement's goal to represent "the 99%."

In Chapter 4, I return to elites—both pro-camp "clique" members and anti-camp elites—to reveal the group processes that enabled them to get away with destructive behaviors, as well as how their actions undermined the group's commitment to democracy. Just as the movement value of autonomy was subverted by elites, as Chapter 2 shows, this chapter reveals that so too was the principle of participatory democracy, as a minority came to control resources and disproportionately occupy important roles and influence decision-making. I draw on theories of oligarchy (Leach 2005; Michels 1962; Turner 1991) to show that even activist organizations that aim for pure democracy may become more akin to an oligarchy in the context of scarce resources and slow, consensus-based decision-making processes.

Finally, in the fifth and final chapter, I discuss the implications of my research both for scholars studying social movements and inequality as well as for social movement organizations and activists. I discuss how my findings contribute to the literature on unstructured groups and to our understanding of generic processes of inequality. I also provide recommendations for activists who are seeking to create diverse and inclusive movements while reducing inequality among members. I conclude with a discussion of the limits of my analysis and how scholars in the future can build on this dissertation by embedding themselves in the groups they study differently than I did.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **“I’M NOT IN THEIR CAMP”: INFORMAL ELITES IN A NONHIERARCHICAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATION**

In this chapter, I analyze the group’s structure, decision-making process, and proclaimed values and ideals. Groups committed to horizontal democracy must—for democracy to be realized—decide how to fairly distribute rewards, such as status and power, among participants with a variety of status characteristics (e.g., race, class, and gender), skills, and personalities in ways that take into account these myriad facets of diversity. Adopting a pre-fabricated solution (in this case, the General Assembly—or GA—process and structure that characterized most Occupy Wall Street groups) replaced any discussion of or agreement over fair distribution in Occupy the City (OC). I will show that some members of OC were able to gain elite status by using the GA process (and the assumptions that underlay it) and reifying the process to deflect criticism.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” Jo Freeman (1972) claims that feminist groups—critical of bureaucracy, with a “natural reaction to the over-structured society”—call themselves “structureless.” But, Freeman argues, there is simply no such thing as a structureless group; rather, there are formally structured groups and informally structured (or unstructured) groups. Not only is structure not inherently bad, as some feminist groups seemed to believe, but in an unstructured group in particular, the danger is that an informal hierarchy forms. An elite group forms, comprised of those who have the most free time to

work in the organization, accumulate more knowledge and contacts than others, make friends, and develop an understanding of how to get things done. Once an elite group forms and begin to benefit from the ability to influence the group, they prefer for the group to remain unstructured in order to keep the power they have gained. Because the power was not given to them by the group, Freeman argues, it cannot be taken away, so the elite are ultimately not responsible to the group.

A vast body of literature since Freeman's original piece explores whether and how SMOs, especially prefigurative organizations—those who wish to organize themselves in ways that reflect their ideals for society, such as (in OC's case) ensuring equality and democracy—prevent or handle the rise of an informal elite by adopting structure, norms, and a variety of decision-making processes. In "The Tyranny of Tyranny," Levine (1979) asserts that structure and rules offer organizations pre-fabricated solutions to common problems. While some might see these as useful tools, Levine argues that typical structures, rules, and solutions impede creativity and impose "prescribed roles" on individuals. She points to mainstream American socialization in which those who are the most articulate, clever, and charismatic "win" and cautions that activists must consciously and constantly counter the tendency to reward "personal style" with power.

While Freeman and Levine's articles are theoretical, I provide a data-driven analysis of a unique case, Occupy the City—a formally leaderless, informally structured group that adopted prefabricated solutions and plenty of rules. Expectation states theory provides a framework that is useful in teasing out the processes laid out by Freeman, Levine, and others and the mechanisms by which some members of a group are likely to gain informal elite

status. Expectation states theory (Correll and Ridgeway 2003) proposes that group members make assumptions about one another—how skilled people are, how good their ideas are, and so on—based on characteristics that may be observed (such as skin color) or learned about (such as occupation). When a group member is assumed by other members to be skilled and have good ideas, they are given more space to talk and their ideas are evaluated more positively. As members interact in patterned ways based on these assumptions, a status hierarchy forms and is maintained. The hierarchy “reflect[s] the social status attached to each member’s distinguishing characteristics” (Correll and Ridgeway 2003:30). Most data that support this theory have been collected via experiments, assisted by the use of computers. I add to the literature on this theory, then, by analyzing data gathered via participant observation.

I begin my analysis with a description of the GA process that OC used and what it meant to the Occupiers. Then, I show how some members—mostly white, middle-class, and male—were able to gain informal elite status, intentionally or not, in a purportedly leaderless group. Elites engaged in processes such as sacralizing and reifying the GA process, despite important critiques of the process from other members, and subverting the GA process. As elites created group norms, such as valuing effort and using it as a currency to buy power and influence, even non-elite members validated elites with rhetoric, such as attributing leadership to “strong personalities.” Together, the decision-making process and movement principles benefitted members who belonged to dominant groups in society (i.e., were white and middle-class) and enabled them to influence group decisions more than other Occupiers were able.

## THE STRUCTURE OF OCCUPY THE CITY

Following in the footsteps of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and many Occupations worldwide, Occupy the City conducted its official business by using the General Assembly model. OWS and other Occupations broadcasted their GAs online via live streaming Internet technology, thus allowing OC members to learn what GAs were and how GAs were run. However, only so much learning can be done in a one-way broadcast, and OC members who watched the streams (some of whom mistakenly assumed that *everyone* who joined the movement watched the streams and thus needed little introduction) only had the most rudimentary understanding of GA process, including the mythology that consensus has roots in anarchist groups. Marcus, a white man in his 30s who joined OC at the start and participated the duration of my field work, said:

A lot of us who were there early on were watching the OWS GAs, as I remember it, we were like, “yeah, we’re gonna follow that process.”...I don’t think we went over [the hand signals], like, “okay, twinkle fingers, doggy paws, and blocks,” you know, the details of the process... Everybody there knew what that meant from watching OWS online and mic checks and all that stuff. And I think somebody referred everybody to—was it [www.takebackthesquare.net](http://www.takebackthesquare.net)?— which is where I believe the GA process comes from, whoever designed that site and those group of people. Or maybe even *Adbusters* [magazine], I don’t even know. I have no idea where it originally came from. But I know the whole thing has anarchist roots and I imagine

people in anarchist groups may have been using this well before Occupy ever started.

Even though consensus is closely associated with the historical tradition of Quakers, members of OC sustained the narrative that it was an anarchist process developed by OWS and other activists and did little in the way of fostering education about General Assemblies or theories of consensus.

While some Occupiers were at least familiar with the process thanks to the livestream, others (myself included) had never seen any streams and came into the movement with no knowledge. For the first couple of months, then, at the start of each GA, the group reviewed the process and the hand signals associated with each procedural action. This verbal review conveyed much information in several minutes, sometimes leaving newcomers bewildered and latecomers in the dark. Learning the process was even more difficult for Occupiers who joined after the group had been in existence for a couple of months, when the review of process was virtually eliminated under the assumption that everyone was familiar enough with it by then. As I conducted interviews, members recounted their early confusion with the process and how a lack of understanding left them feeling frustrated, as articulated here by LeeAnn, a white Occupier in her 50s who joined OC in the first couple of weeks after its kickoff rally:

*RP: What do you like about [the GA process]?*

LeeAnn: Everybody's voice is heard. Most of the time.

*RP: Have you seen times when they're not?*

LeeAnn: I think that, actually, in the beginning, one of the first couple of GAs I went to, I said something and the original group had a way of talking down to people if they didn't know all the rules and regulations. That kind of pissed me off a couple times. How they would talk to people, you know, because you don't know all the rules and regulations.

Sally, another white OC member in her 50s, attended the kick-off rally and participated just once a week for the first couple of months and then more often as the weather warmed. She echoed LeeAnn's comments that it was difficult to "know all the rules and regulations" but also noted that her lack of knowledge made her uncertain about participating for fear of getting it wrong:

Well actually, I'm still learning [the hand signals]. I never really learned them very well. I didn't really understand some of the process. But I liked the fact that it seemed more democratic. Although, because I didn't understand the process, I really didn't know how to find my voice in it. It seemed restricted, but it—maybe because I don't understand it...I was kind of shut down if I did something wrong. You know, it's not intentionally belittled, but I felt belittled. Like, "What are you doing?" You know?

While some members could not "find their voices" in what often was a confusing process, the GA "seemed" to be a democratic one. Sally's account supports Treloar's (2003) argument that members commit to this process not because they believe in it, but because they believe in the *myths associated with it* (e.g., that it ensures democracy).

Occupy the City initially held two GAs a day, but by the end of my fieldwork nine months after the inception of OC, the few members that remained had steadily voted to decrease the number of GAs each week to one on Saturdays. The majority of the time, GAs consisted of three sections. First, the “working groups” of OC reported their progress on various tasks, such as organizing protests, updating the website, maintaining the camp, and so on. Next, individuals brought forth proposals—such as requests to implement rules in the camp, ideas for direct actions done in the name of OC, and statements to be released to the press—upon which members would come to consensus (or not). Only if a proposal passed in the GA would OC members consider it “official.” Finally, Occupiers made announcements about events (most often protests and working-group meetings) in the near future.

Throughout the GA, Occupiers fulfilled several roles. One or two people would act as facilitators, the role of which entailed keeping the conversation on track and ensuring that everyone had a chance to speak. Another would act as a “stack taker,” assigning members a speaking order. There were also a minute-taker and, occasionally, a greeter (someone who would explain what OC was to passers-by who expressed interest, so that the GA would not be interrupted). Because members were to rotate through the roles, and decisions about the group were made in the GAs that were open to the public, OC called itself a “leaderless” organization. There was no executive position or council of elected individuals and anyone could claim membership in OC.

Almost immediately, the OC GA passed a “statement of autonomy” (and put the statement on its website), which read, in part:

Occupy the City is a people's movement. It is party-less, leaderless, by the people, and for the people... We welcome all who, in good faith, petition for a redress of grievances through non-violence. We provide a forum for peaceful assembly of individuals to engage in participatory, as opposed to partisan, debate and democracy. We welcome dissent... The people who are working together to create this movement are its sole and mutual caretakers. If you have chosen to devote resources to building this movement, especially your time and labor, then it is yours.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork, Occupiers articulated appreciation for a leaderless structure and rejected the few proposals that limited the power of GA or the power of people to participate in GA. For example, one member, Lissa, a white woman in her 30s who traveled often and therefore participated for only a couple of months, posted on the forums that she planned to make a proposal that would, if made a group rule, prohibit someone from blocking a proposal if they had not been an active member in the recent past, but she received negative feedback and never made the proposal. Another time, a proposal was made to form an executive committee, and it received dozens of blocks from group members. Members also insisted people must be present to participate, refusing to even allow people to Skype or call into GA, but anyone present—whether a regular Occupier or a first-timer—could take on a role, get on stack, and participate in decision-making.

OC members were committed to the GA model and, much of the time, liked it. As they explained it, their commitment to the GA model was derived from the promise the GA seemed to hold: anyone could participate with a voice equal to that of any other. Occupiers

lauded how the GA model could be used to highlight marginalized voices in particular. Trista, a white woman in her 30s who participated from the beginning, said to me in her interview:

They [OWS] made such a big deal on the live stream with this idea where, “Come down! You can be part of anywhere you wanna be and all you gotta do is, you know, just—everybody has a place.” And it was just this whole idea that they pushed on live stream of just, if you wanna be part of this, that’s fine and if you wanna be part of this, that’s great.

Many Occupiers I interviewed were drawn in by the promise that this movement could be *their* movement—each Occupier could exert control and shape this democratic movement through the participatory process of the GA.

Most members of OC had never belonged to a group that used consensus, and their first impressions were positive. They spoke of the GA process with faith that Occupiers were working together to come up with innovative solutions. Lillian, a long-time white Occupier in her 30s, described her first impressions in a way that reflected the thoughts of many:

I really liked—it felt so like cool as far as—it felt—I don’t even know what the word is—not revolutionary, really, as in “a revolution,” but like, this whole new concept of being able to see this process in action. Like people really getting together and trying to sort things out. I remember feeling like the process was just so cool, you know, it was just different, nothing I’ve ever been involved with before, really.

While nearly everyone complained at some point that GAs could be tedious or frustrating, the overwhelming sentiment was that it was an effective process that essentially forced people to truly listen to one another and consider alternative ideas. As members participated in daily meetings that sometimes lasted several hours, they became incredibly emotionally invested in the GA process, as Trista demonstrated in a forum post:

I watched the [OWS] livestream for two weeks straight, almost daily, all day, to get a feel for what this was all about, and I heard messages of inclusivity, dialogue, celebrating [the] individual, celebrating the collective consciousness, respect, dignity, fairness, equality, giving marginalized voices a say, education, [and] self-actualized, calm, peaceful people talking and engaging and listening. I showed up at the first GA [of OC], and took the risk of my life getting up in front of 200 people to attempt to facilitate a GA, to guide a group to cohesion using a beautiful process, that can be very effective, and build consensus...

Trista describes the many promises seemingly held within the GA process. She, and others, anticipated that the GA would provide an inclusive space for otherwise marginalized people, and so they took “the risk of their lives” sharing their ideas with the group, ideas considered unpopular amongst their friends and relatives.

Unfortunately, many members’ belief that everyone had an equal voice in the GA waned over time. Occupiers learned that some members spoke more than others during the meetings, were allowed by friendly facilitators to “jump” stack, and were given the space for

long monologues while others were given a signal to “wrap it up.” Members felt hurt when the GA process in OC did not live up to their expectations. Trista’s forum post continued:

I showed up at the first GA [of OC], and took the risk of my life getting up in front of 200 people to attempt to facilitate a GA, to guide a group to cohesion using a beautiful process, that can be very effective, and build consensus, only to be insulted and booed off the stage by a bunch of people who had the attention span and patience of two-year-olds. If something takes more than 30 seconds, the world ends, and yet we go around talking about how we want to do all these cool actions and ideas. But we can’t listen to a dissenting voice for one second without finding a way to silence. It’s pseudo-inclusive, not authentic...What happened to commitment to transparency that we claim we have, to openness, to being a place where you can join any group you want? Apparently that was a bunch of BS.

Soon after the inception of the Occupation, Trista and other members identified a disconnect between movement ideals and practices. I will now show how some members were positioned to use that disconnect to their advantage<sup>14</sup> and gain elite status and power within the group by engaging in three processes: sacralizing the process, subverting the process, and creating leaders.

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<sup>14</sup> Elites who gained power—and used it—may have had several reasons for doing so. They may have always wanted power, or they may have found that once they had power, they enjoyed it (as most people likely would). When I say that elites were able to use that power to their advantage, I define “their advantage” to include actions that created the kind of group they hoped to participate in, even if they did not personally benefit from a given arrangement any more than any other Occupier.

## THE RISE OF INFORMAL ELITES

Freeman (1972) argues that, in unstructured groups, there is a danger that an elite group will form. Those with resources (such as free time to donate to the organization) accumulate more knowledge and contacts than others, make friends, and develop an understanding of how to get things done. Proponents of expectation states theory argue that elites of leaderless groups are often members with high-status characteristics (white people, men, and so on) who are given more leeway to speak and who are more likely to have their ideas evaluated positively by other members. In Occupy the City, an elite group did indeed form, comprised of those who belonged to dominant groups: the elites of OC were mostly<sup>15</sup> white, middle-class people who were not employed and, therefore, had time (and often money) to donate to OC. Elite Occupiers demonstrate well the process and effects laid out by Freeman. For example, three months after joining OC, Jamie, a white woman in her 30s who participated for about four months, articulated how the accumulation of knowledge was “concentrated” in the hands of a few who came to be seen as “leaders”:

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<sup>15</sup> One elite member, Lissa, was a white, but a traveler. In her interview, she told me she would be looking to settle down soon, but that the traveler lifestyle was one she intentionally adopted after she had saved a few thousand dollars: “I quit my job. I didn’t want to get an apartment just to earn enough money to have an apartment; I needed adventure... Being on the road all the time has an incredible freedom to it. But being able to shower every day has its own freedom. It’s a different type of freedom. A lot of the traveler kids that I hang out with—like in the same way other people would be like, ‘Oh, they’re homeless,’ you know what I mean, like in a derogatory way?—my friends refer to you [a person with a home] as a ‘housie’ and they look down on you for being stuck in a house, for paying bills and being stuck in a mortgage or this or that, or stuck in a lease. They’re like, ‘Ah, you’re caught up in the system.’ And they’re like, ‘I’m free. I could be in Florida tomorrow; nothing to stop me.’”

Lissa began her “adventure” with a few thousand dollars and also received Social Security Disability Insurance payments throughout her travel. She differed from other homeless campers in that she had more access to money than they did and used some of that money to pay for a cell phone and computer that allowed her to access the social networks of OC and to purchase beverages at the establishments in which OC held some of their working-group meetings. Though she lacked a home, she was white, had gone to college for a couple of years, was well-connected, and had access to regular income.

We lack a good grasp on what's necessary to plan large actions and other events, and the knowledge of what's required is concentrated with the people who have done it, rather than distributed throughout [OC]. In a leaderless, decentralized movement, concentration of knowledge is one of the things that creates de facto leaders in particular areas...if we don't share knowledge and teach organizing skills, we end up with certain people becoming more important, even invaluable to our organization.

As Jamie points out, and as I will show in Chapter 4, those who gained elite status were considered “invaluable” to OC. In part, they were thought to be invaluable because they knew how to get things done in OC while non-elite members often did not.

Many of the activists were ardently committed to the movement and to enacting social change, and thus persisted even after an informal elite arose—some of whom were called “the clique” and were “pro-camp” while others were “leaders” of the “anti-camp crew,” factions that will be explained in depth below)<sup>16</sup>—and some Occupiers came to be seen as *the* leaders, those with more power than others and those who would have their desires realized more often. Elites' power, as this dissertation will demonstrate, included the ability to influence GA votes, control and mobilize resources, and make particular demands on the group by threatening to revoke their support. It became a source of personal frustration (for me and others)

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<sup>16</sup> “Clique” members included some elite Occupiers (Mal, James, Dillon, and, for a time, David) and a few non-elite Occupiers. “Clique” elites and Lissa were “pro-camp” elites, while Ricky and Carmen were “anti-camp” elites.

that the elites, both respected and loathed, had so much influence in the group. Yet, there was no collective response to the power they had acquired. How did they gain, and keep, power?

Elites gained power via three processes that I will now discuss. First, I argue that elites participated in and capitalized on the sacralization of the GA process. Turning the GA into a daily ritual, elites reified the process, positioning it as neutral and alleging that it “empowered” all members. Then, I show how elites subverted the process, including engaging in actions like “taking off their facilitator hats” and jumping stack, as well as forming affinity groups with no accountability to the General Assembly. Lastly, I articulate how elites created leaders by turning (their own) investments (of time and effort) into currency that could be traded for status, while non-elites equated leadership with the “strong personalities” of elites.

### **Sacralizing the Process**

Very quickly, Occupiers treated the GA process as sacred. In the early days, each General Assembly of Occupy the City began with a ritual of sorts: the facilitator provided a lengthy explanation (easily five minutes or more) of the structure of the GA, the proposal process (how to propose something and the order of the discussion), how to get on stack, and the dozen or so hand signals used to silently communicate with the facilitator. Those who attended most or all GAs grew bored of hearing this each night, while those who were new found themselves confused after being bombarded with information and generally just raised their hands for everything rather than using specific signals. After meeting for a couple of

months—and especially when the cold grew so bitter that no new people were attracted to the meetings—the facilitators either shortened or deleted altogether the ritual at the start of the GA. “What happened to the sacred explanation?!” someone cried at the start of the December 11, 2011 General Assembly when the facilitator opened with report-backs.

With little else to unite groups in the Occupy movement—there was no national leadership, most Occupy groups refused to consent to specific goals or demands, and direct action tactics varied as some groups camped while others did not—the General Assembly became the process that defined the movement and distinguished it from other social justice groups. As such, members of OC imbued it with lots of sentiment and meaning, down to the very time it was held. Oliver, a white man in his 50s, commented wryly four months after the camp closed, “I think we’re almost at the point now where we can [stop] worry[ing] about the sacred time of 4:00 on Saturday.” Once the GA was adopted by the group, there were few changes made to the process despite members’ criticisms of it (namely, how tedious it was).

To OC members, the GA represented several things: commitment to horizontal democracy and transparency, establishing patience and close connections with other members, and the frequent and regular gathering of members to increase communication, among other things. Despite their importance, many members missed GAs for a variety of reasons (weather, lack of transportation, interference with family time, work, and so on). When GA attendance was low and members made proposals to decrease the number of weekly meetings (this happened several times), the proposals were often met with resistance, such as when Trista responded to a two-GAs-a-week proposal with, “I don’t want to lose our

GAs and stop having them. It's miserable sometimes to be outside, but please don't stop having them. People know us by our presence on the [site]. It means a lot to be there, and it saddens me to lose that." While the proposal was only to decrease the number of GAs, not eliminate them altogether, Trista presented a heartfelt argument that the face-to-face General Assembly was OC's signature presence in the community.

Several processes underlay the sacralization of the General Assembly, and elite members were able, at times, to take advantage of the GA's sacred status to gain power. They did so in three ways: insisting on the preservation of the sacred process despite others' criticisms that it ignored local context, reifying the process to deflect criticisms that some members had more power than others, and alleging that the process was an all-powerful one that "empowered" everyone, enabling them to avoid work that they did not want to do.

### *Ignoring local context*

In addition to critiques that the GA was a tedious, time-consuming process, some members expressed concern that the GA process ignored local context. When members<sup>17</sup> of OC adopted the GA process in conjunction with Occupations around the world, assuming that is the way Occupy is "supposed to be done," they adopted a prefabricated solution. As Samuel, a white man in his late 30s who participated for the length of my fieldwork, explained, "We've just kinda used the system that we learned through Occupy Wall Street and we've adapted it here and there, but very little. Like, we've just kinda kept it the way it

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<sup>17</sup> Due to the fluid nature of membership in OC, it is important to note that those who decided to use the GA process were not necessarily members of OC for very long. When I asked Occupiers who planned the initial GAs and kick-off rally, few members could name more than one or two people who were involved. Most seem to have quit or reduced their participation to Facebook within weeks of the start of the Occupation, so the members who used the GA process were not necessarily the same members who decided to adopt it.

is.” Occasionally, members vocalized objections to the wholesale adoption of the GA process, claiming that OC needed to find its own process that worked for them. LeeAnn was one Occupier who expressed more often than most that what worked for Occupy Wall Street may not work for Occupy the City:

And that was another one of my pet peeves—we’re not New York. I understand we want to be in solidarity with them, but we’re not them. We can’t run [the movement] like we’re New York. And we shouldn’t. You know. That’s becoming abundantly clear to other people, too, that we’re so gung ho for that. [We’re in] just [a] totally different area. You know. So. We don’t have a Wall Street.

Despite these occasional criticisms, OC continued to use the GA process. Resistant to making anything larger than minor tweaks, Occupiers treated the process as sacred. The persistence of the process, despite critiques, may have been due to the fact that it was *non-elite* members who voiced these critiques; if *elite* members had been asking for changes, it is possible that their concerns—as more powerful members—may have been addressed.

Members did not explicitly discuss that a participatory, democratic meeting may work better in other cities where inequality was given much more attention than it was in OC. While OWS and other Occupations reported holding teach-ins on racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, ableism, and more, conversations of this sort were absent in OC. I documented only three teach-ins of this variety in the nine months I spent in the field (other teach-in topics included urban camping, website coding, and other practical skills). One teach-in took place during a picket and was harmonious, but the other two were tense

and rife with challenges to pro-equality stances. As an example, the women of OC, mostly white and middle-class, decided to hold a meeting after a few women posted on the forums that they felt uncomfortable going to the camp because, they claimed, the men at the camp were ungrateful for the meals the women provided, cursed in the presence of women, and left the portable toilet a mess. The men these women were referencing were mostly poor and homeless and several were black. When two of the women tried to get the others to view the men through the lenses of race and class and come to an understanding of their behavior, the others stood firm in their convictions that there were no excuses for the men's behaviors. Rather than discussing the way mainstream society has systematically disenfranchised men of color and those in poverty, the women discussed individual men and their behaviors. The men at the camp could hear the women's meeting through the tent walls and were angry at the women's lack of empathy for them, furthering the division between the two groups.

The Occupiers' difficulty discussing inequality, and the absence of conversations about it as a result, shaped the local context of the General Assembly meetings: Occupiers entered the meetings with predominantly mainstream ways of thinking about inequality [e.g., the women in the aforementioned meeting characterized the men's speech as an issue of etiquette—the rules of which are raced and classed, of course—rather than recognizing it as a “code of the street” (Anderson 1999)], and the organization did little to counter or transform those ways of thinking or radicalize members. There was little ideological alignment work done in the group.

Further, while OWS had thousands of participants and hundreds of thousands of dollars (Martin 2011), OC had little of either. Alienating participants—as tedious GAs often

did—was risky for OC, and tense discussions about financial resources would likely have been resolved much more quickly in an Occupation flush with cash. The General Assembly meetings, then, looked different in the City, though they were not different in format. Despite the criticisms that OC adopted a pre-fabricated solution that ignored local context, OC continued using the GA process and treated it as though it effectively equalized all members. The adoption of the GA process was positioned *as* the group’s agreement about inequality and how to eliminate it internally. In the next sections, I explain who positioned the GA this way, and how.

### *Reifying the process*

As discussed earlier, over time, some members came to believe that the GA process *seemed* democratic, but was not. As many Occupiers came to recognize the existence of an informal elite, they challenged their power and actions. Elite members, in turn, used and reified the GA process to invalidate claims of unfairness, treating the decision-making process as an agent that would “work” so long as it was “respected.” Occupiers talked about GA process as something to be “respected,” and elite members were able to use that language to discredit critiques that they had more influence and were given more support. Many times, members talked about the process itself as sacred, something to be revered, something to be trusted, and so on, thereby reifying it. For example, Lillian (a non-elite) spoke of tense GAs where people did not “respect the process,” which prevented the process from “working”:

People would walk off. It’s like, no, that’s not the process working. You can’t just walk off. You have to stay here and, you know—and, you know, so if

people aren't respecting the process and if it gets testy, it's hard to keep the process going in a positive direction so we can get an outcome that satisfies both sides.

The vernacular of “respecting the process” was used for matters large and small. For instance, at one GA, elite member Ricky, a white man in his late 50s, got in the face of a non-elite member who, often confused,<sup>18</sup> interrupted the GA to ask a question about an event and cut off his question by saying, “Please respect the process.” Once elites asked this of a member during a discussion, the only acceptable course of action was for that member to fall silent, lest one be accused of not respecting the process. In my fieldnotes, for example, I documented an instance when one elite member dubbed an autistic Occupier a “problem child” during a Facilitation workshop—this man was unable to discern the expectation of falling silent and frequently continued to discuss the concerns of homeless Occupiers (of which he was one) after being asked to “respect the process.” As Occupiers marched and chanted “People over profits!” (i.e., that people and the heads of corporations should care more about people’s well-being than about profits), the way the facilitators handled this man caused me to ponder whether Occupiers should adopt a new mantra for themselves: “people over process.” Following, and “respecting,” the process was of utmost concern.

Members espoused the belief that if one “respected the process,” the process would then be fair to everyone, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued. Most Occupiers were using this process for the first time, so, Marcus reasoned, “I think it took a lot of places to get used to it, even when it gets controversial and contentious, to get used to ‘hold your tongue

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<sup>18</sup> Group members often discussed whether this man—very committed, but unable to follow group discussions—had Asperger syndrome. I could not confirm whether he did.

and wait till it's your turn on stack and respect the process, everybody will get a chance, just relax,' you know, that whole thing." Still, some members found that even after using—and “respecting”—the process, it did not deliver on its promise. Sally remarked that the process did not actually dissuade those who simply “talk loudest” from dominating:

I don't feel very vocal or what the—that I know what I'm supposed to do exactly. I know more about it, but I'm still confused about the process and I don't see where there's an opportunity for discussion. And it's like, I feel like it's whoever talks loudest talks, or whoever talks more, talks more. And it kind of gets personal and, I don't get that. It's kind of how society is, culture is anyway, when you get a group of people together. There's always people who talk more, are more aggressive, assertive, or want to take control.

Sally, like some others, never quite understood what really became a complicated process, and more importantly, she felt as though it did not protect members against someone who talks loudly getting to speak more often (indeed, GA transcripts reflect that elite voices dominated, especially when elites facilitated and allowed other elites to “jump stack,” described below). Sally then accounts for this trend by claiming it is an inevitability in “society,” despite the group's design to intentionally combat hierarchy.

“Letting the process work” was a unifying discourse that encouraged members to move their attention away from a rising hierarchy and toward their own shortcomings. LeeAnn in particular often reminded people that the onus was on them to come to a GA, where all voices are alleged to be heard:

[You] need to stand up, and you make your voice heard. If you're disgruntled, you have to talk about it. You can't just sneak away... I gave people power, because I didn't go to GA and vote. The only person I can blame about stuff, if I don't vote for it, is myself. It's the same, you know, it's that simple. And when I pointed that out to other people—and Carmen told me that her reason was she'd had a death in the family. Well, that's fine. But you can't bitch about something if you don't show up and vote.

Despite the group's acknowledgement that some people *were* more likely to see their desires realized through the GA process, it was still propped up as a neutral one that “worked” on its own so long as it was followed. Any failure was not on the part of the process, but the user.

Elite Occupiers used this discourse to consolidate their power. Asking an unhappy Occupier to “respect the process” was a way of deflecting critiques about internal inequality and reminding people that the GA process was something they supported and thought of as an ideal version of participatory democracy. When Trista publicly expressed frustration about elites' power in the movement, for example, James responded by propping up the GA process as fair and controlled equally by all participants:

I'm doing my best to do what I think will advance the Occupation, yet I recognize that my voice weighs no more than anybody else, which is why I bring all of these proposals to GA. It's the GA that decides. It's the General Assembly of Occupy the City. If anybody has any issue with any proposal, they can express that at GA and that idea will stop until it is

further worked on. That's how things are decided. That's how things happen in this group. It has nothing to do with me.

By marketing itself as *the* movement of, by, and for the people, Occupy the City refreshed its promise that all voices were equal and thus renewed members' attraction and commitment despite their disgruntlement.

### *Empowering members*

In addition to treating the GA process as an omnipotent process that “worked,” members—elites and non-elites—also spoke often about how the process and structure of the group “empowered” all Occupiers in ways that other social movements did not. OC initially marketed itself as a “leaderless” movement. Members also called the Occupy movement an “autonomous” one, but, as I will discuss below, the meaning of “autonomy” shifted over time. Describing the group as leaderless and its members as autonomous was, at first, a strategic legal tactic that protected members from incrimination: since police forces would not be able to point to any single leader in the movement, government officials could not hold any single individual responsible for the group's actions. Since members were not bound to follow the directives of leaders, each member was empowered to do as s/he pleased (e.g., illegally march in the street instead of legally marching on the sidewalk), and other members could absolve themselves of any blame by saying that the person was autonomous. More politically mainstream Occupations, like OC, could also disassociate themselves from any violent or distasteful actions by saying that the autonomous actor was not acting on behalf of or representative of the Occupation if the GA did not come to consensus on the

action or statement. In a discussion, one OC member pointed to an example of how this worked: “Remember when the kids in [neighboring town] acted to Occupy the private [company name] building? Many of them were Occupy activists; however, they made an explicit and repeated attempt to establish the fact that they were autonomous from Occupy.”

Despite the advantages of calling themselves “leaderless,” over time, Occupiers began to adopt a new word: “leaderful.” Rather than characterizing the group as absent any leaders, Occupiers claimed that it was indeed full of them. As Ethan, a white man in his late 60s who participated often, put it, “To me, leaders are mostly people who are self-determined and passionate....So, I think we have lots of leaders in Occupy.” The Occupiers took pride in their creativity and work and, in trying to encourage as many people as possible to take initiative and contribute, began to call the group “leaderful” and to empower individuals to step up as leaders.

In the Occupy movement, anyone, members claimed, could be a leader—anyone could form a working group, bring forth a proposal, plan a direct action, and so on. Given OC’s relatively small size (hovering around 50 members for most of the time that I studied the group), OC didn’t just *want* people to step up as leaders—they *needed* people to. Thus, ideologically and practically, the group promoted the ideal of “empowering” people to be activists (many of whom had never participated in activism before). By “empowering,” Occupiers seemed to mean that members could be heard and valued. Ricky, for example, said of the GA process, “It was giving a voice to individuals. It was empowering. It was empowering to individuals and it was empowering to the group. And people having a voice, people finding their voice.”

Moving toward describing OC as a “leaderful” group also had a practical application: the work of the 24-hours-a-day Occupation, if it was to be successful, had to be shared by as many people as possible. In her interview, Lissa was insistent on convincing me that the group needed leaders, however taboo the label, because of the workload to be shared:

Everybody says I’m in charge of the camp. All the campers—when someone walks in and there’s a question...they’re like, “where’s Lissa? Go ask Lissa. She’s in charge.” And I repeatedly say, “I’m not in charge.” I say, “I’m in charge of the kitchen, maybe,” but I’m willing to take at least that much responsibility and say, “yeah, I’m pretty much in charge of the kitchen.”

But...I wouldn’t be able to run the kitchen without the help of others...so it’s like, you tell me whether or not the movement needs leaders on April 10 when I’ve been gone for four days? Tell me that. Because I really think you will have a problem unless another leader steps up.

Running the kitchen, and the rest of the camp, was a lot of work. Lissa—a leader herself—argued that, if the work was to get done, “leaders” would have to “step up” and “be in charge.” No one should get mad at her or other leaders *for being leaders*, she argued, because groups require leaders to accomplish things.

Given that “autonomy” was a respected principle in OC, members also used the word to reinforce that any person could form a working group or plan a direct action. Members were reminded that anyone who had an idea should feel empowered to take responsibility for bringing the idea to fruition. This forum post by a sometimes-involved white man in his early 30s invokes the principle of autonomy:

Remember, as a Leaderless, Autonomous, Fully Democratic movement, all you ever need to do is step up and say, “Hey, We’re going to march after GA!” (great way to get the blood pumping before a DA [direct action] meeting) or “Hey, We’re about to lead a chant and we want you to join us!” And please do so! Even if it seems scary at first. It’s fun and others WILL march and chant with you because we’re all in this together.

Used in this way, saying that everyone was autonomous was meant to empower and equalize all members. However, as I will discuss momentarily, it is quite difficult to form a working group or plan a direct action alone, and individuals needed support for their ideas.

Reinforcing that everyone is and can be a leader would ideally translate to more people sharing the labor. Indeed, non-elite members discussed the importance of supporting those who were trying to bring their ideas to fruition. For example, Marta urged, “We need to commit to each other. People need support. [Supporters need to say], ‘I’m not interested in that [task], but I’ll be...doing flyers or taking the pictures,’ and have small groups, but everybody working together to support that one action as a whole... We’re a group. We’re a team. We should work on every little piece together and pull it together.” However, what I observed is that elite members were able to use the ideas of empowerment and “leaderful” to get others to do the labor they did not want to do themselves. The following example demonstrates what a typical episode of empowering someone looked like in OC and how someone could appear supportive while sidestepping labor they did not want to do. Eli, a white man in his 50s who was only occasionally involved with the group, proposed on the forums that OC host a public viewing of a documentary about farmworkers:

Eli: We should announce an OC viewing at a public place with a large screen TV. Invite everyone, call the Latino community centers, have a discussion about possible support actions (Occupy the Fields?) following the show.

Ethan: Eli, I want to say sincerely that I respect and affirm your passion... and also I sense a hesitation to act on behalf of your own highest principles. Well, you don't have wait. You are a leader of your own directions. If you believe and act others will follow.

Despite the encouragement he received from Ethan, Eli often spoke of feeling disenfranchised. Once, he suggested a teach-in, and David, a heavily-involved white Occupier in his 30s that some members (but not all) deemed part of "the clique," encouraged him to announce one and conduct it himself. When Eli responded, "I leave announcements to the leaders," David reaffirmed that OC was a leaderful group: "We're all leaders here, Eli...if you have a deep understanding of this issue, you are empowered (not by me, just by being you!) to announce a teach-in." In David's affirmation of OC as a leaderful group, and of Eli as an empowered leader himself, he sought to persuade Eli to take on some labor—labor that David did not plan to take on himself, as he later shared with me.

Without the support of elites and the resources they brought to the table—including practical support that is important to organizing, such as access to a phone tree and the authority to post information on the group's website, which was more crucial than the moral support non-elites were able to provide—non-elites who moved forward with plans found them difficult, exhausting, and sometimes impossible to achieve. Marcus, for example, planned and executed several direct actions and, though they were usually successful events, as Marta explained to me during her interview, "He had no help in any shape, way, or form.

He had to do everything, from the advertising, the flyers, to getting people together.” Marta speculated, “And I think that’s when he finally said, ‘This will be my last direct action.’”

While all groups include people who generate ideas but do not follow through and so are not taken seriously, Marcus consistently proved he was committed to following through but was unable to get elite members—who would have brought more resources to the table than the non-elite members who *did* offer support to Marcus—to help him with labor.

As the case of Marcus demonstrates, despite OC’s insistence that all members had an equal voice and that anyone could (and should) be a leader, some members of OC found that their ideas were not truly supported by the Occupation. These members articulated feelings that elite members’ ideas were privileged over others’ and were given real, practical support, namely money or people’s time and energy. The support was easy to measure in spaces like the forum, where people could see how many views or “likes” someone’s post got (generating a “10 Most Respected Members” list, based on likes). In her interview, LeeAnn claimed elite members’ posts were widely read and their ideas were supported, based less on merit than on whom they came from:

I can say something on [the forums], nobody reads what I write. They’ve done the same thing to Sandy. They’ve done it to quite a few people. You know. But you let David or Samuel, one of them post something, and everybody reads it. Because it’s just like now, the whole thing about color-coding [the calendar] is coming back to the forefront. I mentioned that how long ago? So. Like I said, it’s just—I mean it is what it is. And how many times I have called other people and said, “Can you suggest this?” Simply because I know.

LeeAnn “knows” that, if she wants her ideas to become successful, she should ask other, more influential, people to suggest them. Her ideas garner support when others propose them, but not when she proposes them, suggesting that support is contingent upon the people asking rather than the merits of the ideas.

Based on my observations with the group, LeeAnn’s argument seemed like an accurate one, and members discussed this dilemma fairly often. Teddy, a long-time white Occupier in his 30s, recounted a story in his interview that supports LeeAnn’s assertion. Early on, he suggested that a working group form to “occupy the airwaves” with a public television show, yet people ignored the idea until one of the informal elites, Ricky, pitched it:

Teddy: Not a whole lot of people listened until Ricky decided that he wanted to do something, so...

*RP: Do you think people listened because it was Ricky, or it just worked out that way?*

Teddy: I don’t know one way or the other. Ricky’s a bit more forceful than I am and a lot more noticeable than I am.

Teddy believes that his idea to start a particular working-group was ignored until a “forceful” member adopted it. However empowered members might try to make him feel, Teddy could not create a public television show alone. My fieldnotes show that he argued for a television show for months, an idea that received no traction until Ricky and Carmen began putting it together—and paying for it.

As I said, Occupiers debated whether all ideas with merit received support, or whether it mattered whose idea it was. After the camp closed, one of the GAs turned very

informal since there was little business to discuss. “Process” was thrown out the window as members essentially sat around and chatted. Absent of any informal elites, a conversation was started by LeeAnn’s insistence that garnering support is as simple as asking for help. Oliver responded by arguing that despite his efforts, he could not get two key “clique” members—James, a white man in his 20s, and Mallory, a white woman in her 30s who went by Mal—on board with attending meetings he arranged to organize an event, and that made it hard for him to get anything done despite the attendance of non-elites. Trista then pointed out that elite members receive actual support while others are merely told they are “empowered”:

LeeAnn: If you’re going to have an idea, you need to own it. You need to ask for help.

Oliver: You don’t just take a crash course in group starting...I can’t get things done easily. [Planning one event] drove me bonkers! Couldn’t get people to meet—couldn’t get James there, couldn’t get Mal there.

Trista: I let those things go. But my sense is, on the other hand, someone will tell me they are on board with [an idea], and they [offer to] spearhead, and people back them. But if I say I’ll spearhead, people say it’s a good idea, but I don’t sense the same support. Maybe that’s my stuff, but I don’t think it is...And I may just look at people who have emerged as our leaders, people like James or Ricky, who, everything they do is automatically considered good, it seems like. [Members present laugh heartily, as though to imply that everything James and Ricky do is *not* considered good.] It seems that way. Or Carmen, or other people. No matter what they do, people get on board.

Alfred: It may seem that way to you, but Ricky has gone through a lot of people to get where he is now. [laughing]

Lillian: He's pissed off quite a few.

Trista: He is the one who's had the most influence in meetings and groups.

Despite the support given to elite members, those present at this meeting laughed at the idea that elite members' ideas and actions are always considered good, discussing how elite members actually "went through a lot of people to get where they are now" and "pissed off quite a few." Still, Trista reminds them, the ideas of elite members who "emerged as our leaders" hold sway and receive plentiful support, however controversial the members themselves may be, while others are told they have "good ideas" but receive little truly helpful support.

If unsupported members voiced their complaints that they could not in fact execute "autonomous" actions, elite members responded in a way that hid marginalization. Elites told the unsupported individual that, since Occupy *was* an autonomous movement, no one could force a person to donate their time, energy, or money to another's ideas. Rather than critically examining the marginalization of certain *people*, in their remarks, elites focused on the ideas themselves instead of the individuals who brought them forward—"we are not opposed to *you*, but to your *idea*." "Autonomy" became a word that sounded as though it would empower everyone, but upon realization that all members were not equally supported, it then was used to obfuscate any responsibility to provide closer-to-equitable support to members. Lacking any organizational solution (or, indeed, any brainstorming) as to how support and resources could be allocated more fairly, Occupiers quickly created a group norm: citing

autonomy defended almost any course of action, restricted responsibility to the group, and developed an orientation towards the individual.

In summary, in this section, I've examined how the GA process adopted by the earliest Occupiers took on a sentimental, symbolic, and sacred status as the group's signature feature. By positioning the GA as a fair and neutral process, elite members promised that the process would "work" for anyone who "respected" it. Even though some members had valid criticisms of the process, such as how it ignored local context, it gave the Occupiers who ritualized it a sense of specialness and belonging; the group then refused to make anything more than minor tweaks to it. While the group claimed the ideal of being a "leaderful" group, full of "empowered" members, elites were able to advance this rhetoric to sidestep labor while deflecting criticisms that they were elites. The elites' practices obscured their influence and, as I will now show, subverted the process, too.

### **Subverting the Process**

While the General Assembly process was fairly set in stone in OC, undergoing only minor changes over nine months, and while it was considered sacred and neutral (that is, in need of little change), elite members' actions subverted the process and the ideals and assumptions that underlay it. The subversions secured them more influence and power in ways that may have seemed small or insignificant but, when done systematically and frequently, produced a hierarchy between elites and non-elites. These subversions included facilitator partiality and forming affinity groups instead of working groups. While some Occupiers vocally objected to these tactics, elite members deflected criticisms, and these

actions came to be generally tolerated within the group thanks to the perception that elites' participation was critical to the Occupation (discussed in Chapter 4).

### *Taking off the hat and jumping stack*

Each General Assembly was moderated by one or two facilitators whose job it was to keep the discussion on track and ensure that all voices were heard. In doing so, facilitators would ask that everyone who wanted to speak raise a hand, and the “stack taker” would assign each person a number in the speaking order (putting people “on stack”). Facilitators taught stack takers to assign those people who belonged to marginalized groups (racial minorities, women, disabled, poor, transgender, homosexual) earlier in the stack, before privileged members (white, men, able-bodied, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual), reifying and reflecting members' preconceptions about inequality.<sup>19</sup> Facilitators and stack-takers, then, served as gate-keepers to the conversation and were thought to protect the participatory, democratic model that ensured the ideals of the movement were being met.

There was much agreement among members that a good facilitator was one who was impartial to proposals. Partial facilitators were characterized as violating a commitment to leaderless democracy. Wendy, a white woman in her 30s who participated for the first five months, said of facilitators who got “very heated” at GAs, “Not that it's a bad thing, but facilitators can't do that—that's when it comes across as bossy or bullying and being a

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<sup>19</sup> A review of my field notes, however, does seem to indicate that, except for newcomers, how often someone spoke largely defined their place in the stack, identities and inequalities aside. Those who spoke more often were placed at the end of the stack, while those who spoke less often were placed up front. This might have happened for two reasons: despite the group's agreement that members with marginalized identities should speak first, the stack-takers' knowledge of someone's identity might be limited (i.e., the stack-taker might not know if someone was homosexual, for example); and it is much more practical to rank members according to speaking frequency than it is to “calculate” how much someone is oppressed.

leader.” Occupiers expected one another to be passionate about proposals, but did not consider such passion a desirable trait in a facilitator.

Yet, as I have documented, there was often a disconnect between the movement ideals alleged to be foundational and the group’s practices. Over time, for example, Occupiers came to tolerate the routine violation of impartiality by some elite members when they acted as facilitators. That is, some facilitators frequently expressed their opinions about proposals, and some even voiced opinions about the Occupiers who brought the proposals (such as assessing the motivations behind a proposal or whether the proposer was a committed enough Occupier). Mallory and James, in particular, were critiqued by many of my interviewees and other Occupiers who appear in my fieldnotes for being partial and failing to create an open forum for ideas. LeeAnn’s description of Mal’s facilitation style was one I heard over and over again in interviews:

LeeAnn: There again I could do without Mal.

*RP: Facilitating?*

LeeAnn: Mmhmm.

*RP: What don’t you like about her facilitating?*

LeeAnn: Um, I don’t like the way she rolls her eyes. [laughing] At times, she is arrogant, but I don’t know that she—’cause I don’t know what other word to call it. Okay, condescending would be better than arrogant. So she pretty much—if you don’t have a penis, your opinion shouldn’t really count.

Mal, James, and Ricky—along with other elites, who facilitated less often than these three—were described by many of my interviewees as condescending, arrogant, and rude because, as

my fieldnotes confirm, they frequently expressed approval or disdain for proposals (or even for or against an Occupier), leaving little space for non-elite Occupiers to disagree with them without feeling silly. For example, at one GA that Mal facilitated, Ricky proposed that OC “no longer endorse” the camp where members planned direct actions and slept (the camp will be discussed in the next chapter). Mal strongly supported the camp. Throughout the GA, Mal questioned the truth of Ricky’s assertions about the state of the camp and twice prohibited those who supported the proposal from speaking, once by yelling at a man (the Occupier who first leased and donated the campsite, who, as the next chapter will explain, turned against the camp very shortly after paying for the land) that responses were not allowed at that time. While it was true that technically, his response would have been out-of-process, this rule was fairly flexible as facilitators frequently allowed responses at that stage. Mal yelled at members and provided partial commentary on the proposal, which was against the rules for facilitators. I documented in my fieldnotes that she said the following: “This proposal makes me very angry...I think it’s insulting to the people who gave up their homes to be here, or came here and learned about the movement...To kick some people out of the place they now live is like, ‘...fuck this guy in his tent’—really? That seems counter-movement...That’s snobbery and bougie-bullshit.” After she yelled at the man (the original camp donor), James—who usually supported Mal but intervened after such an egregious violation of the facilitator role—recommended that Mal discontinue facilitating that GA (which she did). How, then, did elite facilitators deflect criticisms of this kind of behavior?

While Mal did not do so in the GA described just above, other times she and other facilitators who wanted to voice their opinions without flagrant disregard for the expectation

of impartiality would light-heartedly claim that they were “removing their (metaphorical) facilitator hat” for a moment. For instance, during one especially contentious GA in which Occupiers debated using group money to purchase a hefty insurance policy for the camp (which was required by the landlord for the camp to remain open), Mal “removed her hat” briefly to take a side in the debate—noting her agreement with those in favor of spending the money and claiming that those who were against the proposal were opposed for “retaliatory and personal” reasons—and then “put the hat back on.” “Removing the facilitator hat” essentially gave facilitators a pass to act like any other (partial) Occupier in the meeting for a few minutes, even when the partiality had lasting effects throughout the rest of the GA or even future GAs. Yet as Teddy rightly pointed out, the success of the GA depended on someone “wearing the hat” on a consistent basis:

When it got to the point that we had shrunk to a point where personalities started to emerge and we decided some things in “groupie” kind of ways, that affected how GAs ran going forward....When it got to the point where I thought that [Mal] and James and some other people didn’t handle it well when people said things that they didn’t like...I think they just lost control of the process, to some degree.

*RP: What kinds of things did they do?*

Teddy: I mean, they wouldn’t follow stack as well. And they would tend to speak a lot about it and do a whole lot of, “I’m gonna take my facilitator hat off.” Which you’re supposed to do [if you’re going to say something partial], but it got to the point where like, somebody needs to wear the hat! I was about

ready to buy a hat...But, you know, I think there were certain people in the Occupation that had very specific aims and wanted to do very specific things, and wanted specific credit for it...I think when you start having your agenda and putting your agenda ahead of everything else and say “no, we need to do this”—not “what are we gonna do? Let’s figure something out”—and say “no we need to focus on this,” I think that tends to—no one’s the King of Occupy. No one’s the Queen of Occupy.

Despite Teddy’s insistence that “no one’s” the King or Queen of Occupy, members frequently referred to James and Mal—and indeed, they referred to themselves, tongue-in-cheek—as the King and Queen of the Occupation.<sup>20</sup> They and other informal elites violated the expectations of facilitators and “took off their hats” often, which, as Wendy noted, came across as trying to be leaders. Many Occupiers came to feel that “putting your agenda ahead of everything else” undermined the group’s aim to use consensus, yet they felt like the

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<sup>20</sup> At times, James did acknowledge that he had more power than other members and indicated that he felt uncomfortable with such power. For example, in a forum post, he wrote, “I am currently a member in 12 [working groups]. This is a problem...Nobody should have that much influence within an occupation...I have unintentionally come to hold to [*sic*] much of an influence within the group, and that defeats the purpose of what it is we’re fighting for.”

Two days after that post, James addressed his power again in response to a post by Trista in which she accused elites of dominating the group. But this time, James seemed to deny he had more influence than others. James wrote, “Mal and I have recognized the fact that a number of people seem to think we are ‘in charge.’ Nobody is in charge. Nobody controls the occupation. I have no more say in what goes on than anybody else. I think it’s fucking ridiculous that we even have to address this shit.”

Contradictory statements like these reveal the difficulty sociologists have in discerning their research participants’ motivations. Jackall (1989:6) writes that “the enduring genius of the organizational form is that it allows individuals to retain bewilderingly diverse private motives and meanings for action so long as they adhere publicly to agreed-upon rules.” Thus, this dissertation focuses on actions and consequences (intended or unintended) rather than actors’ motivations.

facilitators did their due diligence in at least announcing that they were “taking off their hats.”

Despite the expectation of impartiality, facilitators were allowed to speak on stack in last place. It was also not uncommon for a facilitator to let the stack run, and then share her or his opinion at the end without technically being on stack. Yet, as Teddy pointed out, facilitators sometimes “jumped stack” (cut in line to speak), as Mal did when she voiced her agreement with spending group money on an insurance policy. Non-elites who jumped stack were told to wait, yet elite members (or their friends) were routinely allowed to jump stack without comment, or told they were jumping stack after they finished saying all they wanted to say. David, for instance, allowed Marcus to jump stack ahead of a female Occupier in one GA. After Marcus was done speaking, David then called Marcus out in a joking manner (“50 lashes for Marcus!”). In another GA, when Seth (a camper with little influence) asked a question out-of-stack, David prevented anyone from answering Seth, telling Seth in a serious manner that he must wait until the current stack had run its course and get on a new stack to ask additional questions. These patterns were consistent in my fieldnotes.

Jumping stack, in many cases, seemed to be accidental (a member forgot her or his stack number, or someone had a heated outburst that s/he could no longer contain) or innocent in intentions (a member suddenly had to leave the meeting but wanted to share his opinion first). Nonetheless, when elite members jumped stack (or allowed their friends to do so), they (potentially inadvertently) influenced the direction of a conversation or discredited an idea. When called out, elites did not offer much more than an apology, but the influence

they had wielded could not be undone, and so—like “taking off the facilitator hat”—there was no great recourse against stack jumping.

### *Affinity groups*

Alongside leaderless democracy, another value of the Occupy movement was inclusion (the movement’s slogan, “we are the 99%,” speaks to this value). In OC, elite members violated this principle, too, and garnered more influence and support in the process. As the meaning of “autonomy” changed within OC, elites invoked autonomy as a unifying principle, while engaging in acts that were divisive. The structure of the Occupation included working groups that were formed through the GA and open to the public, but elite members<sup>21</sup> also created “affinity groups,” unofficial friendship networks that were not created through the GA and—generating some complaints (as discussed further below)—were open to invited members only. For instance, I asked Adam, a non-elite white Occupier in his 50s, how he ended up at a particular affinity group meeting organized by elite member Ricky and held at non-elite member Gabby’s house:

*RP: So did you just ask Gabby or someone, “Hey, can I come?”*

Adam: I was invited by Ricky. But he also said that he didn’t invite me till he asked Gabby, so he had vetted me as someone willing to come.

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<sup>21</sup> To my knowledge, only one non-elite member, Teddy, created an affinity group. An important difference between Teddy’s group and other affinity groups, though, was that Teddy announced his affinity group at nearly every GA he attended, inviting others to join. The purpose of Teddy’s affinity group was to “infiltrate” progressive organizations in hopes of getting their members to join OC; only one other Occupier reported that he formally joined Teddy in this endeavor, though other Occupiers would occasionally attend another organization’s meeting and report back to OC that they, too, had “infiltrated.”

Ricky, an elite member, organized the meeting and—other than clearing with Gabby who was allowed in her home—invited few people to it. While some affinity groups met consistently and Occupiers knew those groups existed (even if they did not know when the groups met or who attended their meetings, since affinity group meetings and their locations did not generally get announced at GA or on the group’s website as working-group meetings did), in many cases, such as this one with Ricky and Adam, those who were not invited did not learn the meeting had happened until it was over.

The first time I heard the term “affinity group” was the evening of OC’s kick-off rally. As the permit expired and police began surrounding the rally, one woman came before the group and asked people to form “affinity groups” for the purposes of protection—Occupiers would form groups of about five and learn each other’s names and look out for one another throughout the evening, in case arrests were made. These particular affinity groupings did not last, and as Occupiers got to know each other over the next couple of months, the affinity groups that formed had nothing to do with protection, but rather, the term came to signify a group that functioned like a working group but was exclusive and friendship-based.

Affinity groups did not register as a “problem” to those who were invited. Teddy, for example, was invited to OC’s most exclusive affinity group and attended their meetings; he told me in his interview,

All that stuff doesn’t concern me too much. If people want to group together exclusively, whatever. At least I’m—I wouldn’t be offended if I wasn’t invited and, you know, I wouldn’t object to anybody joining, if it

were up to me. If you want to have a small group of people that you can work with best and you want to do it, as long as you're doing something and as long as you're not detracting from the whole thing, then go on about your bad self. It doesn't matter to me.

Yet others who were not invited felt excluded and betrayed that a core principle (inclusion) was violated. At the same informal GA referenced earlier, Occupiers had a conversation about an affinity group that planned (on Facebook instead of the group's sanctioned public forum) a meeting at a time when a GA was to be held, forcing members who were invited to choose between the two:

Trista: Those little things. The way the group got started. The way people did it. That all adds up to a shared sense of belonging. You can call it autonomous all day long—fine, be autonomous, but it has become synonymous to “closed group” to me.

LeeAnn: I don't know how they're closed if you're invited to them.

Lillian: There are little affinity groups that no one gets invited to.

LeeAnn: I guess I get invited to everything.

Trista: There are certain people that do get included and are clearly respected—that's great for them. And it's harder to see there's a problem when you're one of the ones invited. It doesn't seem like a problem to you. You get the phone calls. You know what's going on.

Note the sense of rejection articulated by Trista. Many of those who were not invited felt that affinity groups were simply “closed groups” for those who were “clearly respected.” OC

could not force affinity groups to disband since they existed outside the official structure of the group, but the elites were able to use them to discuss ideas, make plans, and make decisions that they could then present to the GA as a unified front.

When members did openly object to affinity groups (most often by posting on the forums, as in the example below), conversations about affinity groups were laced with the word “autonomy,” like when Trista says that “autonomous...has become synonymous to ‘closed group.’” The discourse of “autonomous action” became an elite narrative that invalidated claims of internal inequality. Autonomy became tantamount to “doing whatever one wants, without consideration for the group,” and elite members were able to invoke the principle to form affinity groups and exclude people. When tensions rose between individuals’ desires and accountability to the group, the principle of autonomy was employed to tip the scales in favor of individuals’ desires. One example of a response to a forum post about the problem of affinity groups read, “Occupy Wall Street has always been a leaderless, autonomous coalition movement built around an open, formal General Assembly structure. We are no more empowered to break cliques and affinity groups as to require membership cards, dues, or in-person participation from our multitude of online supporters.” By April of 2012, six months after OC began, the group had fractured into many autonomous affinity groups (discussed more in the next chapter), and General Assemblies became especially acrimonious when elites of various factions formed voting blocs with supporters. When I reflect, as a sociologist and an Occupier, on the demise of OC, I frequently conclude that splitting into affinity groups—without recourse—had to be a primary cause.

When faced with criticism of the rise of cliques, elite members asserted (using the language of autonomy) that it was “natural” for affinity groups to form in “any” community, as Mal does in this forum post:

Regarding friend and affinity groups—yes, these things exist at the Occupation, just as they do in any community. People are going to take autonomous actions. Sometimes, those actions will be kept away from the knowledge of the general community, for a variety of reasons. Friend groups will hang out together. None of these things prevents people from attending ANY working group meeting or keep them from joining in on any direct actions. It takes incredible effort to be heavily involved. Certainly, not everyone is able to be involved to the same degree and nobody expects it of them. But resenting people who are here every day (and therefore have a lot of input as a result) is a waste of valuable energy that could be used to become more involved.

Mal indicated that exclusivity may be warranted “for a variety of reasons.” Affinity groups usually convened for the purpose of executing tasks that members felt needed to be kept relatively secretive, such as planning a direct action (which might be thwarted if police knew of the plans) or doing something illegal (e.g., stealing materials to build the camp).

However, there was not always much rhyme or reason to the affinity groups—not all tasks needed to be so secretive. For example, during one GA, James announced<sup>22</sup> an affinity

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<sup>22</sup> While some affinity group meetings were announced, this was rare; most were private. Some affinity groups also began with public announcements, but then some members were excluded as the group shifted into a more private mode and continued meeting without telling original members.

group convened for the purposes of discussing public policy: “We’ll call it the James affinity group. We’re meeting as soon as this GA ends to talk about the corporate personhood bill. If you want to do something other than yelling at each other, meet here.” Despite having invited everyone, his announcement was offensive to some because he named the group after himself, also putting people down in the process (“do something other than yelling at each other”). It was also the case that another group already existed for this purpose (so rather than working together, he convened a separate group, splitting efforts and loyalties). Sally explained David’s reaction to James’s new group:

James called that [meeting]. And he even said at the GA, “I’m going to have this meeting, right after GA.” And we were talking about *Citizens United* [a Supreme Court case] and all that, and it was a really good meeting to me...and David came up and said, “Why are you discussing this? [An official OC working-group] discussed this! You’re duplicating efforts!” And he was really mad, and he came up and he was really mad!... James was like, “Well this is—I decided to do this and we’re doing it now and we’re meeting right now and you’re interrupting,” or something.

A classic case of the tyranny of structurelessness (Freeman 1972), affinity groups, private or not, felt wrong to a lot of Occupiers, but others saw no problem with them. This lack of consensus may be another reason affinity groups were never outlawed.

In other cases, some people who might be perfect candidates for a given task were not invited into the group. When I asked Marcus in his interview if he had ever felt alienated or isolated by being left out of affinity groups, he responded, “Yes, to a small degree. Especially

with some of the more secretive things. It's like, 'okay, well, why do you need to hide this from me? You know, I'm part of the movement too.'" Similarly, I once offered to help with an action involving a police officer who was especially strict on some Occupiers. Mal responded, "I think we are going to take care of him just fine," and when I explicitly asked, "Can I be included in the 'we'?" James, like an administrator invoking a committee, merely, yet decisively, said, "An affinity group is handling it." Despite what I thought of as "credentials" indicating my trustworthiness (having multiple arrests for civil disobedience in protest movements and a vocal distrust of police officers), Mal and James would not allow me to help and did not provide a reason for the exclusion.

Over time, Occupiers realized that those who formed affinity groups were doing so for the sole purpose of being able to decide with whom they would work, without having to give a reason why. Forming an affinity group was a way of taking control of the group, especially since the group's activities were not subject to the consensus of the General Assembly, as a working group's activities were. Thus, some members saw affinity groups as a way to subvert the GA process and violate other core movement principles such as transparency. As Marcus explained, "People try to, you know, circumvent the process, it's true, they do. They try, 'alright well this isn't working for me, so I'm going to try to find another way around it.' Or affinity groups or whatever happens to do that, so." When James refused to get the GA's consensus to allow him to sign a lease to establish a camp on rented property, he defended his action as the decision of an affinity group of autonomous donors. In response, a woman replied to him on the forums,

But I think what a lot of the “autonomous” actors are missing in point is that by engaging in that action, a core precept of the movement was violated, and that is a big problem to many, myself included...When people involved in OC autonomously engaged in an action, for whatever reason it may be, they violated such a core precept of the movement...when you state that a GA held, in which only the six autonomous donors attended and decided, well, that’s not group consensus right there for one thing, that is autonomous action outside of the group by the individuals reaching consensus on an idea clearly not supported by large, and much evidenced here in this post as well as by how many people have left OC.

When faced with criticism, Occupiers who formed affinity groups and undertook tasks not approved of or liked by the GA only had to say that they were merely an affinity group, not a working group subject to the authority of the GA. Others could continue to complain about the subversion of the GA process, but affinity groups were not accountable to the GA and thus did not have to change their course of action. While someone in the group could have proposed that affinity groups be banned, it would have been a difficult proposal to pass, as it would have competed with the group’s value of autonomy; and so, complaints of systematic exclusion were then reserved for one-on-one gossip sessions only.

By removing one’s facilitator hat, jumping stack, and forming affinity groups, elite Occupiers were able to subvert the GA process. At the same time, they were able to get away with such actions by invoking unifying principles like “autonomy.” As these elites worked around the process and deflected criticisms—and since their participation was considered

critical to the movement, as Chapter 4 will show—there was no collective confrontation by non-elites. With no real recrimination for these behaviors, elite Occupiers ended up increasing their power and influence, all the while technically playing by the rules.

### **Creating Leaders**

Once Occupiers transitioned from proclaiming the group “leaderless” to “leaderful,” members walked a fine line: they began to talk openly about needing leaders and what makes a good leader, without actually promoting the ideal of having leaders. Sometimes they did so by simply avoiding the word “leader” or using expressions like, “I wouldn’t say ‘leader,’ but...” Since most Occupiers came to accept that the group did, in fact, have leaders, and that maybe it was even okay to have leaders, the questions became, who are the leaders, and how does one become a leader? Here, I argue that elites engaged in a process that established them as leaders and enabled them to reap the rewards that came with the title; the process involved turning the investment of time and effort into a form of currency in the Occupation that could be traded for power. Meanwhile, other non-elite Occupiers were quick to attribute leadership status to “strong personalities.” Non-elite members, then, validated elites and gave them a pass.

#### *Converting time and effort into currency*

Recall that elites and others reified the General Assembly process, asserting that it was a neutral one for all who went through the trouble of getting involved. Stating that the process was a fair one that applied equally to all participants was a way of saying that, if

someone did not like how things were going, the onus was on her to show up and contribute more. When some Occupiers were angry that the sidewalk picket had ended in lieu of people's preference to be at the new camp site, Abe, a white Occupier in his 60s who was involved for only the first couple of months, responded, "The sidewalk's there. [laughing] You want to get out on the sidewalk, get out on the sidewalk. No one's stopping you." Mal's response was similar, invoking how much time and effort she had invested and how little time and effort was invested on behalf of those who were critical:

If you're mad we're not on the sidewalk, I hope I've seen your ass down here with a picket sign. And if you're mad we gave up the sidewalk, I really hope you slept there in the rain, in the cold, with cops kicking you in the morning.

If you're pissed we're not on the sidewalk, come down and picket.

In a movement that emphasized participation, it may come as no surprise that the time and efforts people invested became a currency they could trade with those who gave them status and power in exchange.

Before I show how the investment of time and efforts was converted into currency, I would like to address one potential criticism of this analysis. A critic might ask why it is a problem if group members who invest more time and effort into the organization have more say in what happens in the organization. Indeed, this dynamic can be observed in other groups, as anyone who has attended a handful of Parent-Teacher Association meetings has probably seen. Is it not likely that those who foster an organization care more about its well-being than those who do not? Is it not possible that it would be a good thing to reward those who invest effort with status and power? Is it not fair that those who work hard should have

their desires realized? What I will show is that, in OC, the narratives around time and effort benefitted elite members who had something non-elites did not (plenty of time to invest efforts) *and* whose contributions were defined as more valuable than those of non-elite members (as the case of Henry demonstrates below). In a cyclical manner, investing more effort brought elites more status.<sup>23</sup> Rewarding something that elites had to give—and other members did not—made the conversion of time and effort into status unfair, in addition to the fact that non-elites were not rewarded for the less valued efforts they invested, especially men of color. This dynamic is problematic on its own, but especially disturbing when it exists in a group committed to eradicating inequality—it suggests that, if progressive activist groups cannot identify the problem and devise strategies to diminish or eliminate it, other groups (such as Parent-Teacher Associations) will struggle as well.

Elite members became elites not simply because they invested a great deal of time and effort, but also because they were successful at convincing others that those who invest the most time and effort should wield the most influence—and they were successful at highlighting their own contributions while minimizing those of others (especially the most marginalized members). In her interview, I asked Gabby, a white woman in her 50s who participated for the first four months and then sporadically thereafter, why she thought some Occupiers gained more status than others. She replied, simply, “Well, they were there a lot.” Similarly, Marcus identified Jamie as “an organic leader in the camp” because “she’s done a

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<sup>23</sup> Understanding that elite status was mostly based on efforts invested explains why the composition of elites shifted over time. While some, like Mal and James, maintained elite status for the duration of their participation, others, like David, began with elite status, and then—as he reduced his participation in the Occupation—came to be identified as an elite less often by other members, while Ricky—whose participation increased over time—rose slowly to elite status.

lot of stuff.” Investment was sometimes measured in seemingly “funny” ways, such as carrying the title “Hero of the Revolution” on the forums (listed just below one’s screen name) for those who posted lots of messages. More often, though, investment was measured by work done for the group, and status took the form of being seen as a leader. Lillian referenced “our leaders” in her interview, and I asked her who the leaders were:

Um... Carmen? [laughing] That’s a contentious one. Well, only, I guess, in that she was the one that sort of initiated the whole thing [the Occupation] to begin with, but, like, I will always have this weird, like, feeling about her where it’s like, I think it started at the very beginning on the sidewalk. But, like, I always heard people talking about some Carmen woman, and I had no idea who that was. I’m like, “Well if she’s so important, how come we never see her here? Where is she?” [laughing] So she felt like this like important leader person like from far away, but I’m like, she’s not a leader, she’s not here, forget it. [laughing] How can you say you’re, like, totally involved and committed but, like, never actually show up? That’s always kind of pissed me off, but [laughing] that’s just me.

Carmen came to be seen early on as a leader because she was part of the group who organized the kick-off rally. Even though she then decreased her involvement dramatically, the initial time and effort she invested were deemed exceptionally important and she retained her status for many months.

Deriving status from efforts did not depend on *why* members were investing effort, and even those who did not agree with the movement could come to be seen as a leader

within it. Lissa was seen as a leader, even though she was vocally opposed to the movement in important ways. She disagreed with some of the core principles and ideals held by many members and often disassociated herself with the movement, openly admitting that—as a traveler—she essentially needed the encampments to assist her with material resources. Lissa admitted to me in her interview:

But I think, Rachel, what it is is a—when I’m taking care of the camp the way that I do, I’m not always doing it for Occupy-related purposes. I’m doing it for my comfort. I want it. You know? I’m doing it for selfish purposes at the end of the day. I’m doing it because I need a place to sleep and I need food.

Despite her “selfish” motivations, Lissa came to be seen as a leader in exchange for the efforts she invested in keeping the camp up and running. While Lissa was the only elite I heard openly disagree with the Occupy Wall Street movement (some Occupiers gossiped about whether other elites, namely Ricky, were agents provocateur), her case showed that one did not have to be dedicated to the principles or goals of the movement to be a group leader. Political beliefs mattered far less than an investment of time and effort in a group that, according to their Statement of Autonomy, “welcomed dissent” and declared, “If you have chosen to devote resources to building this movement, especially your time and labor, then it is yours.” Additionally, as a movement for the 99%, the group cared only that members (whose membership was defined solely by participation) opposed the 1%.

Elites played an active role in ensuring that their contributions were noticed by frequently reminding others that the elites themselves invested time and effort while others did not. Consider this excerpt from one of Mal’s forum posts:

So here we are, the night after all of our supplies were taken. We held our first successful GA at [a local park]. Songs were played. Everything was swell. I left for one hour. When I got back, there were four homeless guys, one very tired lawyer and poor, overworked Billy occupying. WTH [what the hell] is that?! We look like we have given up! Hell, it doesn't even look like an Occupation. It would scarcely pass for a small-scale picket! Can those of us who occupy every night really count on y'all to hold things down while we are gone? Are we going to come back to an empty sidewalk?

In this example, Mal highlights how much work she puts into the Occupation and charges people with laziness, asking if she can count on anyone else or if she will not even be able to take an hour-long break without things falling apart without her. She essentially reminds others that she invests in the Occupation 23 hours a day, while almost no one else does. Additionally, she diminishes the contributions of “homeless guys,” in particular—though there were half a dozen people present (a number some could consider strong and healthy compared to the many times there was only one person on-site), Mal seems to discount them (devaluing the time they invested), instead crediting Billy and the “lawyer” (activating status expectations by referring to him this way) for investing so much that they were “very tired” and “overworked.” The next chapter analyzes the treatment of homeless Occupiers and shows how their participation was marginalized.

Joining lots of working groups was one way of investing time and effort (or even better, forming new working groups), as was being on-site during the most vulnerable hours, especially late at night, when Occupiers faced the most danger, both from passersby and

police. OC members initially spoke of those Occupiers who were able to put in lots of time and effort with some level of awe and praised them for what was taken as a sign of deep commitment to the group. In one GA, Oliver praised an overnigher, Dillon—a white/Native American man in his 20s who participated throughout my fieldwork and was seen as an elite by most<sup>24</sup>—by announcing that he would henceforth be “recognizing Occupiers’ efforts and dedication” with pocket Constitutions, and Dillon was his first choice. Similarly, when attendance was low, Oliver once proposed that people commit to shifts on the picket line in exchange for badges of honor:

The proposal would be a friendly, but serious pledge/consensus (or just show of hands for willingness) on the part of everyone who “says” they are a part of Occupy the City to sign up for two four-hour shifts each week that are not when we already have people present for meetings, GAs, rallies, etc. Perhaps this could/should also be associated with a respectable badge/tag of some kind...with stars, or some other marks or stickers to show their commitment in terms of hours Occupying.

This proposal was not acted upon, but the idea was not vehemently rejected either.

As the elite members received recognition for their investments, they were then able to leverage that praise and use the fact that they put in so much time and effort to exert pressure on the group to make decisions that the elites wanted made (for example, by making claims that the Occupation would fall apart if they were to quit). Mal, in trying to dissuade

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<sup>24</sup> While most Occupiers were easy to classify as elite or non-elite, some, like David, whose participation and status decreased over time, are harder to classify. Dillon is among those—he was heavily invested and a clique member, but non-elite Occupiers also found him to be more likeable than elites like Mal and James. Dillon was a friend to all.

others from supporting the proposal mentioned earlier that would have “unendorsed the camp,” reminded others of the time and effort she invested and then threatened to withdraw her support if the proposal passed against her wishes:

The camp has societal problems and I’ve had my hands right in them. I’ve mopped up blood and called the cops. I haven’t thought we should shut down the camp. I’ve never heard a camper say we should shut down the camp until now. I have put so much into that camp. If it shuts down, you guys won’t see me here anymore.

Later, she appealed to Occupiers to *shut down* the camp in much the same way, recapping her investments and then withdrawing her support if the camp was *not* shut down:

I was here every day till about maybe a month ago, and until three months ago, I slept here almost every night...I’ve done everything I could, and sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn’t...It’s taken too much away from everything else I could be doing. That’s why I haven’t been around and why I stepped down from every working group. I will be taking my tent down in a couple of days. I hoped I could come back, but this isn’t a place I need to be.

Some sociological research help us to understand why Mal felt entitled to make a claim on the group and have her needs met and why, in the absence of positive feelings, she considered quitting. Harris (1998) argued that, contrary to popular beliefs that people join groups with a willingness to meet group needs, group members are often looking for their own needs to be met by the group. Additionally, Woehrlé (2002) showed that claims-making

in groups is only deemed legitimate by people who give enough to the organization. Group members whose participation no longer elicits positive feelings are likely to quit (Wolkomir 2001).

In Marta's interview, she recalled her first days of joining OC and identifying which Occupiers were the most involved. She asked one clique member, James, how much "clout" and "pull" he had, and when I asked Marta if she did so because she thought James had more clout than other Occupiers, she said of him and Mal, "Yes, yes! James and Mal, right off the bat. And Mal was there with all her Human Needs [a working group that provided food, water, shelter, and so on] and there for everybody and helping out and doing stuff." Marta could see that James and Mal were very active on-site and that their investments of time and effort translated to "clout." Similarly, Adam said of Mal, "In certain, you know, leaderless groups, people are going to be called to action. And it's just no question that she gave such an enormous amount of her time and energy, and then I think felt that she deserved to be taken, I don't know, more seriously." Occupiers frequently referred to heavily-involved elite members as "core members," "hardcore Occupiers," and "real Occupiers," and spoke often of how critical their membership was to the group's survival. In fact, the camp was sometimes referred to as "Camp Mal and James," and each time they threatened to quit or scale back their involvement, Occupiers lamented that the Occupation would fall apart without them.

Consider Marta's reaction to Mal's announcement of her departure at a GA. Mal's announcement included a recap of all the time and effort she had invested. Marta deemed her

(and James, who also left the group when Mal did) “really the root of the whole thing” and contrasted how she felt after their announcement with her prior feeling of optimism:

Mal: As of right now, I’m stepping away from OC...As Jamie said, I’ve been on 14 working groups. Now you guys will need someone on Finance, Human Needs, and Expansion and Tactics, because those working groups don’t exist now. I will come and help tear down the library because that’s important to me. I help put it up. I have places for the books to go. I will take care of it. The Human Needs stuff, I’ve asked repeatedly for lists, but no one has given me one, so I will assume everyone is fine. Since Expansion and Tactics was used to put up the camp, I suggest you use it to tear down...I’ll show up at rallies as a member of the public, but don’t call me if something is on fire...I’ve been here since the first day, but I can’t do that anymore.

Marta: I feel very torn. I feel very sad. It’s hard for me to see James and Mal leave. I feel an emotional attachment to them. They were here from the beginning. [crying] I remember all of them and Marcus standing on the sidewalk, and just to leave like that... I’m having a hard time with this. And I can understand you’ve been tired, and James has gone through a lot. We’re family. We’re a dysfunctional family, but we’re a family. I was optimistic when I came today, though I felt sad about the camp, but it’s a time when we can change and grow, and we have a lot we want to do in the future. But I’m having a hard time seeing good people leaving who were really the root of the whole thing.

As James, Mal, and other elites reminded everyone of how much they had invested in the Occupation, others came to see the elites as critical participants, without whom everything would fall apart. As I will show in Chapter 4, these narratives enabled elites to get their way much of the time. They successfully converted their

investments (time, efforts, and, as Chapter 4 will show, other contributions) into currency.

The informal elite were also able to exert control directly through the numerous working groups in which they invested. With so few members, OC needed as many people to join each working group as possible, and given its premise—that the Occupy movement was a movement of the people, by the people—inclusivity was an important value (if not perfectly executed, as I have shown), so no regulations were set on members' involvement. Clique members—mostly unemployed and with a great deal of time to donate, relative to other white, educated, professionals who were members of the Occupation—joined every working group that existed, and thus were able to attend almost every meeting and get a finger in every pie. LeeAnn articulated this process when she said of the clique members,

I wouldn't consider—they think they're leaders, they don't call themselves leaders. I think a lot of it had to do with, they wanted to be involved in everything, so they were on all the committees [working groups] and this, that, and the other, and that was one of the things I had a problem with. Because the way we're set up, anybody can be involved in anything and do anything.

In this group, investing more became a “legitimate” reason for one's voice to weigh more than another's. As clique members were able to gain currency, they were also able to participate in the great majority of decision-making conversations.

In attending almost every meeting, OC elites were able to make friends, network, gather information, devise detailed plans, and acquire cultural capital within the movement, processes identical to those Freeman (1972) detailed. Friendship networks became especially

important in the group. The more Occupiers invested in the organization, the more they generated productive and important friendship networks, as Samuel explains here:

Trista came down [to the Occupation]—like, she called to see if people were down there and if anyone was willing to talk...and then kind of joined the group. One of the things she didn't understand, she was like, "I don't understand how it is that some of you have such strong relationships and I don't have that relationship with any of you," kinda thing. And she had spent almost no time on the sidewalk up to that point. She'd shown up for GAs and that sort of thing, but like, spending three or four hours just hanging out on the sidewalk, she'd never really done that.

Trista, and others who did not invest significant time, were excluded from the elites' friendship network.

While elite members were able to capitalize on their investments, non-elite members were not always able to. Expectation states theory posits that people want to think well of members of dominant groups and are automatically skeptical of those of marginalized groups. I found that in OC, the investments of members of dominant groups were greatly valued, while the investments of members of marginalized groups were devalued. For example, I witnessed the campers investing huge quantities of time in the camp, setting up tents and structures, cleaning, providing meals for others, protecting the camp from passers-by, and so on, but as the next chapter will show, anti-camp elites framed the campers as moochers and devalued the time they spent at the camp, arguing instead that campers should be investing time in General Assemblies and working-group meetings. A black homeless

camper, Henry, was even ostracized for the efforts he invested. When he tried to get members to follow camp rules, he was ignored and shunned:

They [other campers] don't like me because I'm the only one here willing to maintain order...I've been here a long time. I'm just trying to maintain order. No one wants to stick to the rules anymore. Lissa, Simon, Jamie, they're not here. I cook. I go buy food, propane. But I get no respect. The camp gets no respect. People say to me, "nigga please."

In Henry's case, his effort was not valued, and in turn, he did not earn high status; fieldnotes about him indicate that he worked consistently to improve the camp, and yet instead of finding his way into elite networks, I often saw him working alone and sitting alone. (Again, I will show in the next chapter how the actions of homeless and black campers were hardly considered "efforts" at all.)

Devaluation of non-elites' investments also affected those who Occupied the sidewalk in the morning (prior to setting up camp), between the hours of about 6:00 a.m. and noon, when overnight Occupiers would go home or go to work and the sidewalk was left empty and therefore vulnerable. There were frequent pleas for help to Occupy during these hours, yet those who took up the call were rarely rewarded, while Occupiers thought of the overnights as the most hardcore members—and indeed, overnights made the case that they were. For example, when the group debated transitioning from the sidewalk to a camp (detailed in the following chapter), James posted in the forums detailing the hardships that overnights endured:

I'm tired of being kicked awake by police at 6am...I'm tired of not knowing if we're going to be allowed to go to sleep at night. I'm tired of pretending a tarp lying on the ground is effective rain coverage. I'm tired of not having tents...I'm tired of all of these things. I'm tired of people who don't spend the night telling me where I'm allowed to spend the night.

With frequent reminders like these, elites invoked their investments while making the argument that they should have more say than others because of those investments.

### *Leadership and personalities*

As was shown earlier, elites deflected criticisms that some Occupiers wielded more influence by reifying the GA process and emphasizing that anyone who made the effort of showing up would have as much say as anyone else. With their emphasis on empowerment, elites reinforced the idea that, technically, anyone could join a working group, attend GA, or “block” a proposal, so everyone could regulate their own participation, get more involved if they so desired, and exert the same level of control. Elites invalidated arguments that elites had more power by pointing to their own investments and, sometimes, by talking about influential Occupiers’ “strong” personalities. In fact, *non*-elite members (who, as Chapter 4 will show, wished to retain the membership of elites in order to retain their investments as well) made much of “strong personalities,” defending elites with this rhetoric and therefore validating them. In this way, group members reduced inequality to failures of or problems with individuals. Individualism fosters an environment in which people are responsible for

their own outcomes—“if things are not going your way, work harder and make them go your way.” Successful people are those who work hard, and unsuccessful people have not tried hard enough.

In OC, the decision-making process was talked about as a neutral one—not influenced by money or votes, but only by those who were willing to invest effort in showing up. If someone had the “personality” of being determined and committed, outspoken, creative and clever, and so forth, why wouldn’t that person be more likely to see their ideas come to fruition than someone who was not committed, was too shy to advocate for themselves, or who had bad ideas? Occupiers attributed this phenomenon to “human nature” and positioned it as an inevitability. Marcus articulates the way people with “strong minds” become leaders:

I think the leaderless structure, although I see the reason behind it—why it’s supposed to be horizontal, everybody’s equal, everybody has an equal say and all this stuff—it is hard, you know, it’s extremely difficult when you do have all these strong minds...Obviously some people establish themselves kind of as organic-like leaders. ...So I think even in a leaderless movement, you have unofficial organic leaders that kind of stem out of it [and] kind of become very influential. And I think that’s just human nature. I think that’s gonna happen no matter what.

Similarly, Teddy argued that “hierarchies develop on their own” among any group of “primates”:

And I tell you what my biggest frustration with the GA process is: personalities. In a leaderless movement, personalities play a bigger part. Because even though there's no leaders, there are people that think that they are in leadership positions, influential in the movement. You had Ricky and you had Mal and you had James and, you know... Looking to the future, we've got to figure out a way around—and I don't want to say "hierarchy," because Samuel will freak out if we have any kind of hierarchy... Because if you have no hierarchy, hierarchies develop on their own, because we are human animals. We are primates. There's always a social hierarchy.

As is common in our society, both Marcus and Teddy talk about "leaders" as those who seem to be born with particular character traits. They position leaders as those who show up with a set of traits not possessed by others and must simply prove themselves. When I asked Lillian what makes a good GA facilitator, she mentioned one person who quit early on that she thought was great, and said of him, "Like, I don't know. He just had this way about him. It's one of those things that you can't put your finger on, necessarily. It's just mojo or one of those things. You either have it or you don't, I guess."

While non-elite Occupiers attributed leadership to personality and human nature (which is not the first time inequality has been legitimated on the basis of "nature"—see Ortner 1974 for example), they effectively hid the group processes that created and maintained inequality. Trista, more vocal than most about status inequality in the group, ultimately internalized the responses she was frequently given: that she lacked status because she was too sensitive and emotional, not confident or extroverted enough.

But it just—and I’m very sensitive so I don’t know—I’m overly hypersensitive and know that, and I’m overly cognizant of the dynamics and what—how people relate to each other and I pick up on stuff like where other people probably would have [thought], like, “what’s the problem? This is great, we’re all getting together, everything’s fine, yay, we’re gonna have our next GA,” and they were—I didn’t get the sense—everyone else was just like, going with the flow and I’m sitting there the whole time going—you know, “wait a minute...”

While Trista suspected that the “dynamic” of the group was not “fine,” she had a difficult time getting anyone to see things from her point of view. Rather, she concluded that she was “overly hypersensitive” while everyone else was “going with the flow.”

Members of OC repeated a mainstream narrative—that people with “strong personalities” emerge as leaders—that benefitted elites. They successfully deterred a systematic examination of an informal status hierarchy in the group. Arguing that a hierarchy based on personalities is “human nature,” Occupiers positioned so-called “organic leaders” as an inevitability and made non-elite members feel as though their “weak” personalities were to blame for their lack of status and power. Leaders, then, could not—and perhaps even should not—be avoided, if leadership was reduced to personalities rather than (subversive) courses of action.

## CONCLUSION

Freeman (1972) cautioned against unstructured groups, arguing that informal elites arise in such groups. Levine (1979) responded by saying that the rise of informal elites could be countered by consciously and constantly defying the tendency to reward personal style with power, rather than with the adoption of pre-fabricated solutions (processes and rules). Occupy the City, an unstructured group with many processes and rules taken from Occupy Wall Street, thus presents a case that contains qualities of groups written about by both Freeman and Levine. Occupiers adopted a prefabricated model, one that was based on participation, democracy, and consensus, yet few Occupiers—indeed, few Americans—were familiar enough with groups of this nature and how to keep them functional in practice (Woehrle 2003).

I found that informal elites did indeed rise to power in OC, in part by benefitting from subversions of the very GA process they considered sacred. Although on the face of it, these processes may seem natural or inevitable—of course we should highly value those who invest a great deal in a movement—those who gained elite status were members of dominant groups (white and middle-class), while the least valued members of the group (whose efforts were not regarded or highlighted as real efforts, as the next chapter will show) were members of subordinate groups (people of color and working-class and poor people), as expectation states theory would predict. Over time, Occupiers realized a disconnect between their ideals and their practices—they had been deceived by the “myths of consensus” (Treloar 2003), a process that they initially believed would ensure democracy. In the meantime, elites had begun exercising “power-with” (Starhawk 1987).

I conclude that, because the Occupiers did not work on ideological alignment and educate themselves about the subtle ways inequality works, the structure they hoped would guarantee equality did not work in this setting. In other words, the structure was unsuccessful given that the culture of OC was mainstream rather than one that resisted dominant ideologies—non-elites attributed leadership to “strong personalities” while elites positioned affinity groups as a “natural inevitability.” Mainstream notions of inequality—with which many entered the group—stuck, and they resorted to comfortable ways of thinking and being, hiding the marginalization of some members and defending the great influence of others. (While this chapter has discussed the latter, the next chapter examines the creation and treatment of marginalized members.)

From this case, sociologists can learn that the culture of an organization is the lens through which the meaning of its structure (its organizational set-up and decision-making process) is interpreted—for structure is a tool, and it must be wielded by those who understand its purpose and what it can help them accomplish under the right conditions. It exists so that it may be tweaked to reflect the members’ values and aid in accomplishing their goal. Radical structures like General Assemblies will not be successful in accomplishing democracy merely by being imposed on groups with mainstream values; rather, a group must develop a radical culture in order to determine if that kind of structure is helping them to eradicate internal inequality and must consistently alter the structure to meet their needs. Occupy Wall Street, for example, added a Spokes Council when large General Assemblies—attended by regular Occupiers, tourists, and even some hecklers—became unwieldy and they had a need for tighter focus; they ensured the Spokes Council would represent all

organizational working groups, would have rotating “spokes” (working-group representatives), and would still be held accountable to the General Assembly. While even the Spokes Council did not achieve the ideal form (the Occupiers I spoke with in New York City reported that some of their fellow group members remained opposed to it), their effort to change their structure to reflect the context in which they operated made their General Assemblies less tedious and more effective, while also reflecting the radical group members’ values of participation, role rotation, and so on. Such an alteration to structure can only be made if group members refrain from sacralizing and reifying it.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**“I’M DONE CRYING ABOUT MY PERSONAL RIGHTS”:**  
**THE CAMP DIVIDE AND THE SUSPENSION OF AUTONOMY**

After Occupying a narrow stretch of sidewalk for the first five weeks of the Occupation, Occupy the City established a camp on a small piece of private property. Throughout its six-month duration, the camp land was paid for and donated by an autonomous affinity group comprised largely of elite members of the movement. Even though there seemed to be universal agreement that a camp was needed, the camp was a point of conflict from its inception. Everyone agreed that sustaining the Occupation would be much easier with some creature comforts and that the overnight campers, especially, needed tents to get some rest out of the elements. The plan was to set up a camp as a base, but also maintain the 24/7 protest on the sidewalk of the historic building where OC began. Despite this agreement, division in the group began with the establishment of the camp. The first disagreement involved the way the camp was set up (without GA approval). After some initial skirmishes had passed (but were not necessarily solved), the camp remained a contested site, and throughout its existence, a group that many Occupiers dubbed “the anti-camp crew” formed in opposition to “the campers” (which included people who camped regularly and a few pro-camp people who did not camp, but supported the camp and campers). Occupy the City found itself divided over two recurring arguments: the public image of the camp and the funneling of the Occupation’s resources into the camp.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how police and government actions pushed Occupiers into making contentious decisions and created conditions that were conducive to group

fracturing. With its focus on keeping the sidewalk looking “nice,” and its intense crackdown just before tourists were expected in town for the holiday season, the state administration—and police who carried out bureaucrats’ orders—effectively stymied the protest early on with its emphasis on presentability. Fears that the Occupation might look messy—and thus invalid—took hold in the minds of some OC members. These members in turn used OC forums and meetings to express their concerns about certain members of OC—typically the campers who came to represent the face of the Occupation. In doing so, they alienated newcomers and eventually restricted the autonomy of the campers.

I will also show how some privileged white Occupiers who were opposed to the camp were able to invoke race-based fears and frame the campers as threatening and undeserving “moochers,” using tactics linked to colorblind racism (Bonilla Silva 2001, 2010). In the previous chapter, I argued that autonomy was a valued precept of the movement, and, indeed, autonomy is highly valued in individualistic societies such as the U.S. In this chapter, I show how anti-campers positioned autonomy not as an automatic status of each individual, but as a privilege that could be extended or revoked based on individual behavior. While members of the movement proclaimed their autonomy as a taken-for-granted matter, only some in OC were truly autonomous, while marginalized others were surveilled and restricted with elaborate rules and processes to change behaviors or punish them. I will link the concepts of autonomy, citizenship, and deserving/undeserving and further argue that the Occupiers’ strategies of and preoccupation with controlling campers alienated members who were not white and middle class, antithetical to the group’s stated goal to represent “the 99%.”

Before I review relevant theoretical perspectives and move on to the analysis of how anti-campers were able to convince other Occupiers that the campers were dangerous moochers who needed their autonomy restricted, I first provide an introduction that may seem lengthy but is critical for placing these conflicts and group processes in context.

## THE CAMP DIVIDE

Occupy the City held its kick-off rally on the grounds of a state-owned historic site. The rally was permitted for several hours. Once the permit expired, police officers sought to remove the protestors from the grounds, warning them that anyone who did not move off the grounds would be arrested. While almost 20 people stayed put, the several hundred people who were not willing to be arrested moved to the sidewalk between the historic site and the street. Police set up barricades on the sidewalk to keep those people there and arrested those who had stayed on-site.

From that night onward, OC found itself stuck on the pathway with hardly any space to set up necessities. Occupiers quickly learned that the sidewalk, incidentally, was a legal grey area. The state owned the sidewalk, but city police were dispatched to regulate behavior on the sidewalk with a 24/7 presence across the street. The sole state policy regulating behavior on that slice of land simply said that one bureaucrat could enforce whatever rules he wished, and some days sitting and sleeping on the sidewalk were allowed, while other days they were not. Some days, Occupiers could set up tables, as long as a few feet were kept clear for walking. Other days, police told Occupiers that not one single possession could be on the sidewalk, including chairs for protestors with disabilities.

Occupying the sidewalk under such conditions became extremely burdensome, especially for those who occupied overnight. Members of OC longed for a camp full of tents, like other Occupations across the country. They constantly discussed options for places to set up a camp with tents, a bathroom, a kitchen and library, and maybe even a medical tent.<sup>25</sup> The immediate options were limited: take some land and risk arrests (a more forceful and radical option that was more in line with the philosophy of the movement, but was costly thanks to bail and court fines), or get permission from someone to use some land (a more stable option, but one that failed to challenge the freedom of access to public spaces or the private property system).

After several grueling General Assemblies debating courses of action, members of OC decided to ask the City Council for use of a space adjacent to its center of operations. The Council declined the request and OC went back to considering its options. Ultimately, and without going through the GA, one Occupier rented a small vacant lot on the edge of downtown and donated the land to OC. His lease lasted about five weeks (the end of November and the full month of December). For reasons that never became clear to me, and that did not have to do with liability concerns, at the end of December, he refused to renew the lease<sup>26</sup> and generally stopped participating altogether.

Acting autonomously (as, established in the previous chapter, Occupiers lauded everyone's right to do), several members of OC contributed funds of their own to pay the

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<sup>25</sup> Members also discussed how to challenge the arbitrary and capricious policies, but pro bono lawyers advised the Occupiers that the only real option was to be arrested and then challenge those policies in court—which some members did when the police arrested a woman with a disability for having her chair on the sidewalk while a “clear the sidewalk of all positions” rule was being enforced, but the court decisions came far too late.

<sup>26</sup> Some members claim it was because he was angry that the group's decisions about the camp—like what to name it—did not align with his preferences.

rent from January through mid-May. This money was mostly, but not entirely, donated by informal elites. Those who donated in January decided amongst themselves that one of them would bring the money to the land owner and sign the lease; James, an elite clique member, was chosen. I was asked by the other donors to sign the lease in February, as it was important to the donors that the lease be rotated, and I had donated and was actively involved. In March, the lease was signed by Oliver, who was not an elite but was an actively-involved white man. Oliver held the lease through the end of the camp because he had formed a working relationship with the landlord and was able to negotiate with him when and how the camp would close. (Details of the camp closing will be provided in the next chapter.)

From the get-go, some Occupiers took issue with the way the camp was set up. Some were angry that instead of taking land, OC was submissive to the law and using private property. At the same time, few people were willing to risk arrest by taking land. Further, some members were politically opposed to private property and thought the Occupy movement was undermined by participating in a system of rents, as one woman—a college student who participated (even after the group decided to occupy rented land) consistently, but not frequently—articulated:

The principle of renting a space to conduct an Occupation is, in my opinion, a last resort, and Occupy the City is not to that point yet...A crucial part of an occupation is that space is being “taken,” it is being “occupied,” not paid for with currency, paying rent for a space beyond potentially the cost of maintaining the land. I’m totally fine with occupying private space, but not paying rent for it. It’s against the principles of the Occupy movement and

should only be an absolute last-ditch tactic after other tactics (which OC hasn't tried yet) have happened.

Some were so opposed to renting that they no longer saw OC as an Occupation and quit. One person who quit participating after the group set up camp said, "The Occupation in the City was disbanded the day the camp was established." Most group members who expressed these kinds of grievances simply left the group and did not return.

In addition to disagreements about renting, a conflict arose around the decision-making process. Since one Occupier (the man Mal yelled in the previous chapter) acted autonomously by renting and donating the land, no consensus of the General Assembly was required to set up camp. People could choose to participate in the camp, or not. To some Occupiers, it was clear early on that not coming to consensus on the camp site was a problem. For most, though, it took longer to realize that without answers to some important questions, conflicts would arise that took a great deal of time (and patience) to settle: who was in charge of, and responsible for, the space? Could the lease-holder make rules for camp behavior instead of the GA? Would money donated to OC be used to sustain the camp despite some members' disapproval of it? Could a leaseholder who disliked OC's decisions kick the group off the land? In short, given that the camp existed outside of the group's decision-making process, questions arose about whether the GA had control of the camp or whether autonomous individuals who used or paid for the camp had control.

Not even 12 hours after a group of Occupiers met at the site to clear bushes and make room for tents, the initial donor announced that the site was ready on the online forums and that a "committee" had set some rules for the space, such as prohibiting the use of drugs or

alcohol on-site. Samuel opened a debate: “It sounds like some sort of separate bureaucracy is going to call the shots at the site instead of the GA?” A woman who was present at the land-clearing that afternoon agreed with Samuel, arguing, “You can’t do this [form a group to make decisions about the camp] without GA approval...Decisions on the constituencies of the [camp], and how the [camp] can be used, ABSOLUTELY HAVE to go through GA.” The donor argued that he did not donate the land to Occupy the City, but to all Occupiers in the nationwide movement, and so OC’s GA should not be in charge. Because many Occupiers disagreed with the donor’s premise, from November to January (when OC’s GA proposed and consented to the camp being an official part of OC), members were confused and divided over whether the GA was the camp’s ruling body.

The distinction between OC and the camp was considered important because OC had few resources. While individuals donated their own funds for the rent and portable toilets, other camp expenses were funded by the public’s donations to OC. Food, water, and supplies for the camp cost about \$600 per month. Donations to OC dropped off quickly and again, the distinction between OC and the camp came up: if the group had not come to consensus in a GA to set up a camp, why was it paying for the camp? Further, it was immediately evident that many Occupiers preferred to be at the camp instead of on the sidewalk. It became clear that the sidewalk would largely be empty during the day, until GA was held there in the evening. This angered many members, especially those who were only free to be on-site evenings and weekends. When the group considered setting up camp, elite clique member Mal told them, “We can use [the rented land] as a base camp while still maintaining a constant picket out here [on the sidewalk]. We want to do it in shifts so there is always

someone here.” On forums, members expressed concern that Mal and other informal elites and overnighters had promised them that the camp would be used only as a base, and yet the sidewalk remained empty. Those who camped countered that it was too hard to be on the sidewalk and that anyone who was angry that the sidewalk was empty could make a sign and go picket. As in the last chapter, the campers silenced the critics by arguing that, if those critics were not willing to invest effort themselves, they had little right to complain or order “autonomous” Occupiers to stay on the sidewalk. Plus, they said, someone had to be at the campsite to make sure that possessions were not stolen, so being at the camp—where passersby could still be informed about the Occupy movement—was a valuable contribution.

When the group set up camp, I had just made the decision to study the movement, and my fieldnotes up to this point had been a mad scurry to document all that had happened in five weeks, in addition to documenting current events. Given that there were still several hundred people in OC at this point and I was still learning names and faces, I could not systematically understand the exact fall-out from these problems.<sup>27</sup> It seems that some concluded that the camp Occupation was not worthwhile and quit. “Since the start of the camp, I found the time I used to spend picketing [on the sidewalk] was now being wasted sitting around a campfire,” one former member wrote in a survey I had administered about why former members had quit. But most people decided to accept that the camp could be a political space, too—indeed, the very symbol of the Occupy movement. When I asked Teddy, who was initially opposed to setting up the camp, why he ultimately decided to support it, he answered, “Because I was all in for Occupy the City.”

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed, I had traveled for the Thanksgiving holiday when the group broke ground on the camp, and I was as alarmed as anyone when I got back into town and drove to the sidewalk and found that no one was there.

Nevertheless, as I suggested earlier, the camp remained contentious and eventually became the source of a major divide in the group between groups informally dubbed the campers and anti-campers. Analyzing the field and interview data I collected, I came to see the prominent role that race, class, and gender played in how rules, especially those that led to banning campers, were created, justified, and enforced. Writers from other Occupy groups have also analyzed the ways race, class, and gender inequalities mattered for how group members policed one another and made sense of that policing (Phillips 2012; Singh 2012). For example, Shrager Lang and Lang/Levitsky (2012:22) note:

One of the most fraught and contentious debates over inclusion within Occupy concerns “disruptive behavior”—what constitutes it, who is understood to engage in it, and who can be excluded from what because of it. Undoubtedly, the heat of these debates is generated in part because they conjure up questions of demography and boundary-marking yet allow decisions about exclusion to be presented as wholly individual, and by this means depoliticized. So, for example, from Oakland to London, “bad behavior” is ascribed more often than not to participants in Occupy/Decolonize encampments who arrived already “homeless” or impoverished, who are people of color, who are (or are assumed to be) substance users, who are read as disabled. The greater the number of these descriptions that can be applied to a given person, the more likely their actions are to be labeled as “disruptive.”

My case builds on and adds to these other works by articulating autonomy as a racialized, classed, and gendered status, one that may be revoked for those who are labeled bad citizens and among the “undeserving.” I show how those with influence in the movement invoked frames already familiar to members of a “risk society” (Beck 1992; Giddens 1999) to convince activists that surveillance and restriction are justified even in a movement that values autonomy and equality.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My analysis is situated in the symbolic interactionist perspective, which emphasizes that members of organizations make meaning within the context of the history of the organization and the encompassing structures of society. It is also an intersectional one that highlights how members’ interactions construct race, class, and gender as mutually reinforcing systems of privilege and oppression. It is informed by Bonilla-Silva’s (2001, 2010) concept of colorblind racism. He argues that overt racism is no longer socially acceptable, so people now express racism covertly. The central beliefs of colorblind racism include the idea that race is no longer relevant and any racial inequality that exists stem from individual shortcomings rather than structural disadvantages; as such there is no need for institutional remedies for lingering racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2010; Forman and Lewis 2006). Common elements of colorblind racism that I observed in OC include rhetorical frameworks, “othering,” and the token inclusion (rather than systematic exclusion) of racial minorities.

Since the new colorblind racism is frequently practiced covertly (assisted by coded language) and institutionally (e.g., through mainstream media or policing practices) rather than overtly, my analysis is also informed by work on perceptions of, and reactions to, risk—especially risk as crafted by the institution of the media. Sociologists Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1999) assert that, in response to swift changes in technology and our society (including our structure, our culture, and our bodies), we have become preoccupied with risk and perceptions of safety. People develop “risk imaginaries” (Simon 2007), comprised of exaggerated (Glassner 2000) ideas about how much risk they face—and from whom (or what)—and the bodily experience of feeling fear in response to culturally coded images.

Simon (2007) analyzed images on televised news programs during Hurricane Katrina to argue that mainstream images of crime in the U.S.—and people’s perceptions of crime—are racialized; long after slavery and the Jim Crow era came to an end—times during which images of black male rapists and white female victims were popular—the mainstream media perpetuates an imaginary in which criminals are black and victims are white. When news anchors and others subtly link black men to crime, this coded imagery taps into individuals’ preexisting racist fears, potentially leading them to respond in ways that might otherwise be deemed unacceptable. For example, as Simon documents, aquarium workers in New Orleans stayed with the fish they cared for throughout the worst of Hurricane Katrina. Yet, when reports surfaced of looting and other criminal behavior, often depicted as being carried out by black people, aquarium workers left the fish, despite having weathered much of the storm. Simon argues that the workers were able to justify leaving the animals in their care to die by

the threat of black crime. The concept of the risk imaginary emphasizes that while we face some real (not imaginary) risk (even risks posed by black men), we imagine that we face more risk than we actually do and, as risk has been racialized and gendered, we believe black men are more dangerous than they actually are.

I invoke this concept because my data show that anti-camp Occupiers tapped into other white, middle-class Occupiers' race- and class-based fears as a strategy for engaging in behavior (i.e., surveillance, restriction, and exclusion) that would otherwise be considered unjustifiable in a movement that valued autonomy and inclusion. In fact, while the group considered itself a resistance movement, members thought and acted in mainstream ways, failing to see or rectify internal inequality. In the wider society, Americans value autonomy, but only for those who make the "right" choices. As the rhetoric goes, those who make poor decisions—such as breaking laws—have their autonomy revoked through the penal system. The revocation of autonomy is depoliticized by focusing on individual behavior rather than structural inequality, and this happened in OC as well, including using police to remove those who violated some group policies. While it is true that there were some dangerous incidents at the campsite—incidents that I do not wish to downplay—I will show that anti-campers exaggerated the amount and severity of incidents, evoked race-based fears in framing those incidents, and consistently punished black campers while turning a blind eye toward white campers who sometimes acted dangerously. This chapter will demonstrate that anti-campers framed campers as dangerous men, bad citizens, and undeserving poor: those whose own moral shortcomings and bad decisions are allegedly responsible for their poverty, rendering them ineligible for public assistance (Gustafson 2009).

How did it happen that these dynamics occurred even in a movement dedicated to addressing problems of class inequality? Leondar-Wright (2014) documented how even social movement organizations like Occupy “miss class” within their own groups. In her study of activist organizations in several movement traditions, she found that groups were sometimes divided by class, yet there was a notable absence of class discourse among group members (similar to the lack of class discourse in the setting of Bettie’s (2003) research). Middle-class activists, in particular, were often oblivious to the ways in which working-class members were alienated by group language and processes. The Occupy movement was ostensibly about social class, and yet I found that members of OC, like the groups Leondar-Wright studied, missed the class divisions within their group.

By concentrating on the wealthiest one percent of Americans, Occupiers in the City were largely focused on bankers and politicians. Moreover, their populist logic of inclusion presumed that “the 99%” shared concerns, values, and experiences. Dialogue about the 99% and autonomy co-existed with dialogue that framed poor black male campers as dangerous “others” who must be controlled while ignoring—and failing to control—housed and white Occupiers who engaged in similar behaviors (such as on-site inebriation). These narratives passed one another like ships in the night, with rarely a mention of how black, poor, and homeless members were marginalized in OC. My findings moreover document the ways class- and race-conscious individuals, including people of color and lower-income individuals, were put off by the race and class dynamics within OC. Groups who lack class consciousness are prone to botching the recruitment and retention of working-class and poor

members, thus reducing their effectiveness at social change as they create homogeneous groups (Leondar-Wright 2014).

I now turn to my analysis of the fracturing of OC. I begin with showing how anti-campers capitalized on the state's emphasis on cleanliness and began framing the camp as a site of unacceptable levels of filth thanks to the moral shortcomings of its residents.<sup>28</sup> I link this to other research on Occupy that has developed the concept of political repulsion (Liboiron 2012). I then show how this repulsion with mess produced by "lazy" campers laid the groundwork for anti-campers to frame the campers as "moochers." Next, I demonstrate the ways the anti-camp crew invoked the risk imaginary of other Occupiers to convince them that some campers were excessively dangerous. Finally, I show how, once the campers were positioned as undeserving and risky, anti-campers convinced the group to make rules that revoked the autonomy of some campers. I argue that the highly valued precept of autonomy in OC was denied to individuals not solely (or "fairly") on the rational, clear basis of facts or evidence of bad behavior, but also (unfairly) on irrational racialized, gendered, and classed fears. Autonomy, then, is relationally constructed and a privilege that can be extended or denied based on status inequalities.

## POLITICAL REPULSION AND THE DEMONSTRATION OF CITIZENSHIP

The Occupy movement received a lot of mainstream media attention in the fall of 2011. Occupations from New York City to Oakland took public space with the force of

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<sup>28</sup> As some Occupiers, among them Lillian and Samuel, consistently argued, any outdoor Occupation exposed to the elements and lacking provisions like running water and sewer lines would be messy and dirty. Anti-campers countered that the OC camp exceeded reasonable expectations of filth and, importantly, was filthy due not to its structure but to the flaws (like alleged laziness) of its residents.

hundreds of campers, faced police raids and mass arrests, and received donations in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Across the U.S., the mainstream media painted Occupiers as dirty hippies and capitalized on footage depicting trash inside the camps. Mayors evicted camps on the grounds of sanitation, and news clips featured images of police clearing parks in hazmat suits and the heaping piles of “garbage” (comprised largely of things one might not typically consider garbage, like working laptops and library books) they removed. Liboiron (2012:396) calls this performance by the state “political repulsion” and argues that political repulsion is a process of “othering” that forces Occupiers to “constantly demonstrate their cleanliness in public” as they “strive to exercise their rights as citizens to assemble and protest.”

The language of trash, dirt, and filth is tied to citizenship, according to Liboiron. He asserts that state attempts to impose order and control dangerous “others” are often waged through the rhetoric of dirt and trash and result in the conflation of commitment to order and cleanliness with compliance and commitment to community. Like Panopticon prisoners (Bentham 1843), Occupiers across the nation policed themselves under the always-potentially-watching police force and news media, making sanitation a priority (*beyond* what was practically necessary) in an effort to minimize negative characterizations and diminish the legitimization of sanitation as a grounds for eviction (Liboiron 2012). As one man at OC said during a GA when the group was still on the sidewalk and contemplating a campsite, “Quite simply, all the police are gonna do is surround the piece of land and do what they’re doing here. They’ll wait a bit, watch it die down, and evict the last 20 people. They’ll cite sanitation or something.” Some Occupiers that Liboiron (2012) observed even went so far as

to ask, if people could not look after themselves in the camps, how were they going to create a new society? Informed by state policies and media attention, Occupiers nationwide adopted the media and state's equations of public displays of cleanliness with good citizenship.

As for Occupy the City, some of the earliest complaints about the camp were about cleanliness and order. In the beginning, when the group was on the sidewalk, local police who had been ordered to surveil the group frequently harassed them over belongings—such as piles of blankets, tubs of coat, tables of food, and sign-making stations—and what they considered “trash.” For instance, while environmentalist Occupiers set up a well-contained compost bin, the police ordered the group to remove it. The police surveillance did not come cheap: a local news story, which incited animosity<sup>29</sup> against the group (intentionally or not), claimed that OC's “pricey camping trip funded by local taxpayers” cost \$40,000 for police surveillance in the first 10 days. Between the media's depiction of Occupations—and Occupiers—as dirty, and the cost of having police keep the sidewalk tidy, members of OC found themselves greatly concerned about their image. Occupiers spoke frequently about appearing favorably to the public, such as when Abe said, “The more [the city] spends money cleaning up after us or watching us on the street, the more we lose the support of the 99%.” Alongside planning small, spontaneous pickets at banks, Occupiers were excessively consumed with keeping belongings and trash organized. Some Occupiers expressed concern

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<sup>29</sup> It is hard to verify the extent to which this story actually incited animosity. Someone online claimed to be organizing a counter-protest to “occupy the Occupiers”: “This is for people who are tired of the dirty hippie flea bags making our city look bad. We will be taking over their spot with signs, loud chants, and the idea of one should take a bath. Tax payers have paid for the side walk they continue to dirty with their pressence [*sic*] so we will make life diffucult [*sic*] for them. Please bring lots of people and soap to pass out.” Much to OC's dismay, no one showed up for the counter-protest; OC had brought bins to collect toiletry items from the angry crowd, which they had intended to donate to homeless shelters. With no counter-protest, they were left with nothing to donate.

about this heavy emphasis on presentability. In a forum post, David concluded, “I think many of us have been inward-facing...which is just what they want us to be.” Yet regardless of David’s and others’ cynicism toward the state’s intentions that drove Occupiers to obsession with mess, the fear of a bad image was quickly solidified in the group’s collective conscious.

While most Occupiers were concerned with mess but were satisfied with reasonable levels of tidiness and cleanliness given the conditions, the anti-campers continued to emphasize the conditions of the camp, focusing on mess and garbage and, importantly, suggesting that the campers were to blame rather than the outdoor circumstances: the campers, anti-campers asserted, were too lazy to clean up after themselves. They especially reminded people that the messy camp was the public face of OC. Marcus, for example, once posted on the forums that the campers “have left [locals] with the image of being a bunch of freeloading bums living at a downtown eyesore.” With or without references to the public image, the anti-campers frequently discussed filth. In a forum post in which she also complained about the male campers’ “filthy” language, Sandy reported that when she visited the camp one day, “there was a stack of filthy dishes two feet high.” At a meeting held just for female Occupiers, Marta accused the men of the camp of making the portable toilet (arguably gross in any circumstance and difficult to clean) “disgusting,” so much so that she would not use it. After the women’s meeting in which the state of the existing portable toilet was discussed, a woman Occupier paid for and had installed at the camp a second toilet just for women.

Sometimes pro-campers tried to counter this message and soften the unreasonably high expectations, such as when Lillian posted, “Do I see mess and chaos [at the camp], too?”

Yes. But who said revolution/occupation and changing the world was going to be clean and sanitary and look like your mother's sitting room?" Another Occupier, who had not yet visited the camp and knew of it only "what I read online through this [OC] forum," posted after his first visit ("my main focus of visiting the camp was to see for myself") that he found it "friendly and clean." Still, the "filth" narrative prevailed. My analysis suggests the success of this narrative stemmed in large part from anti-campers continuous efforts to spotlight camp mess. After his positive experience, Lindsey posted that someone had made a mess of the children's tent (filled with toys to occupy kids on-site), and this man concluded, "This is a prime example of the old saying, 'one bad apple can ruin them all.'" The man had seen the site and deemed it clean and acceptable but then, after Lindsey made a post to spotlight mess, decided there were "bad apples" among the group.

Other anti-campers participated in spotlighting messes without explaining circumstances, implying that unreasonable messes were caused by "bad apples." Ricky, the elite leader of the anti-camp crew, once emailed me a picture (see Figure 2 below) he took at the camp site the morning after a bad storm, during which campers had moved things and covered them in tarps to protect them from the rain. By the time Ricky visited, they had yet to restore the property to its previous state. Ricky included this message with the photo: "Don't recall seeing the camp looking as bad as it does now. Trash everywhere, piles of dirty dishes—all in public view." As though to explain why he sent me the email and photo, he concluded with, "For your archives." (I was a member of the "Archives" working group, collecting mementos partly for posterity's sake and partly for the sake of my research.) It felt to me that Ricky was passing the photo along to me (and likely to others in separate emails)

to convince me that the camp was indeed an unreasonably dirty mess and to turn me against it.<sup>30</sup> This is an important example, then, of Ricky turning a blind eye toward outdoor circumstances and expecting more cleanliness than was reasonable under inconvenient conditions.



Figure 2. The photo of the camp Ricky emailed to me “for [my] archives.”

Other Occupiers also expressed the belief that Ricky engaged in tactics like this for the purpose of inciting anti-camp sentiment. In his interview, Samuel reinforced the idea that (exaggerating) camp filth was of great concern to Ricky when he said, “Ricky, I’m sure, fed that rumor mill to no end about the things he would see and, ‘Oh, it’s *super* messy.’” Not only was Ricky concerned about filth, he spoke widely and freely with others about this

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<sup>30</sup> As a field worker, I worked hard to maintain a neutral position with all factions; even as I became friends with more campers than anti-campers and participated in “venting” sessions about the anti-campers, I also sympathized with Ricky and other anti-campers when they approached me about the state of the camp, rather than trying to get them to lower their standards.

concern. Importantly, he also contrasted the filth of the camp with his tidiness. In a forum post reporting on the happenings of a working-group meeting he attended at a local bar, he emphasized how he and the group members voluntarily cleaned up others' trash: "We cleaned up the patio area behind [the bar] of trash, bottles, and cig butts before we left." Here and elsewhere Ricky linked *his* cleanliness with model citizenry and contrasted it with the campers' lack of cleanliness at the camp, and he did so in ways that indicated that the cause was the campers' (and the "bad apples," who had "ruined them all") lack of good citizenship rather than setting up a tent city outdoors and with few resources.

Occasionally, those in favor of the camp hosted cleaning days in an effort to quell the concerns of anti-campers and keep the camp alive, bringing in more resources on these special days (e.g., many large trash bags, extra gallons of water for washing dishes, and quarters for several big loads of laundry) than were typically available. For instance, during one notorious GA in which the existence of the camp was hotly debated, Oliver said, "I propose every GA at 7:00, people get here 30 minutes early and help clean the camp." Some Occupiers believed that if the camp was extra clean, anti-campers would be satisfied and unable to characterize the campers as faulty human beings ("bad apples"). They expressed surprise when the camp closed despite efforts to clean it, suggesting that they believed the anti-campers were sincerely concerned about mess and were straightforward; they were angry when anti-campers continued to campaign for a camp closure despite efforts to allay purported concerns about filth. During another GA about the closure of the camp, one camper who had made many proposals aimed at satisfying the anti-camp crew said, "So

many people have tried to save this [camp]. [One camper in particular] has worked his ass off to keep the place clean.”

#### FRAMING CAMPERS AS UNDESERVING “MOOCHERS”

Ricky, Lindsey, and other anti-campers mimicked the political repulsion performed by the state and positioned themselves as model citizens and campers as bad citizens. This tactic was combined with another tactic to successfully shut down the camp and free up resources for other projects: framing the campers, those alleged bad citizens, as undeserving moochers. I now turn to an analysis of this tactic.

When OC was on the sidewalk, members began talking about what they framed as problems with the homeless. Prior to the kick-off rally, OC held its planning GAs at a local park in the heart of downtown and opposite a major bus station. Many homeless and poor people lived in and near the park or waited for buses there. According to interviewees who were involved early on or recalled the stories of others who were, OC contemplated Occupying that space but decided that they would essentially be “moving into homeless people’s home.” The sidewalk area they chose to Occupy instead was a mere three blocks from the park, however, so it was quite easy for homeless people to visit. Not everyone on the sidewalk was sympathetic to the homeless. Some Occupiers complained that the homeless were only coming by to use the group’s resources. Others alleged that homeless people would simply walk by and steal what they needed (such as coats and blankets). While the police parked across the street watching over the group might occasionally intervene to help a homeless person in distress, they did not participate in watching out for theft or

regulating who was a “real” Occupier. During this time, the group had little recourse or ways of preventing what they saw as problems with the homeless. Notably, many of the homeless in the southern city where I conducted my research were black and the majority of the Occupiers expressing fears and complaining were white and middle-class. Thus, from an early stage in the Occupation, privileged Occupiers zeroed in on “problems” caused by the homeless<sup>31</sup> and othered them.

Once OC moved to the camp, members were spending financial resources maintaining it thanks to its status as private and rented, rather than communal, property. When making the argument that OC should not spend so many resources on the camp, the anti-campers often claimed that some of the campers who were being supported by OC’s fund were not, in fact, contributing to the movement, but were only there to freeload. They ramped up this argument near the end, as many of OC’s veteran campers left and were replaced by more homeless people and people who traveled through Occupations, resting at each camp for only a little while. There could have been many reactions to the influx of newcomers, of course, some of which may have rejuvenated the movement, but anti-campers—and even some campers who wished to quell the anti-campers’ concerns—instead framed these individuals as undeserving, as I will now show.

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<sup>31</sup> Again, I do not intend to claim that the homeless presented no real problems to the group. Rather, I am critical of how this group determined what was a problem and what was not, and where they focused their attention and why. For example, one might think that people who were specifically angered by the massive amounts of evictions and foreclosures in the preceding years would be sympathetic to the homeless rather than intent on denying them coats and blankets that had been donated to the sidewalk. Claiming to focus on all problems that burdened the 99%, one would think that the group had much, much more to give attention to than the small-in-scope “problem” of homeless people taking coats and blankets.

Without presenting evidence or claiming to have been told this directly by campers, the anti-campers argued that homeless people perceived the camp to be a better place than the shelters provided by the city and churches because OC asked nothing in exchange for tenancy. Whereas campers were sometimes “initiated” with a conversation about Occupy’s political goals, they were not always. Since many people (both pro- and anti-camp) reminded and asked everyone to participate regularly during GAs and other meetings, campers were encouraged to picket or help keep the camp clean, but they were never forced to do so. (Below, however, I will discuss some rules and consequences about cleaning.) One anonymous former member, responding to the survey I issued asking why people quit, included in a long rant: “We are wasting resources. I don’t think we are helping anyone either; we are just enabling dangerous behavior. Shelters have rules. Group homes have rules. Mental hospitals have rules. There are rules everywhere. Just not at Occupy the City.” Anti-campers, like Marcus, were convinced—and angry—that the campers were there to mooch and argued that the point of Occupy was never to provide a “home”:

Last I checked that was never the intention of Occupy. I understand that feeling, and I understand some have no place else to go. I also understand that some even gave up their homes to be there, but I thought the idea was that Occupy was a standing protest. The camp was supposed to be a place of planning and outreach, as well as a statement itself. It was not supposed to be a place to engage in one’s vices.

In the same forum post, Marcus wrote, “I also wonder where the money comes from to be able to afford these nightly [partying] escapades, considering many who stay there full time

are not really working and/or homeless.” In its entirety, Marcus’s post implied that homeless campers were using OC funds to purchase substances and using the OC space to “engage in [their] vices.” Given that Occupiers decided not to Occupy the park adjacent to the bus station that was considered a “home” of sorts for the homeless, they seemed to recognize that one’s “home” could be within a public space. Yet, the anti-campers insisted that the camp was not really a home, where, presumably, one can “engage in one’s vices,” because it was a public space meant for community involvement.

The “moochers” were often rhetorically contrasted against “actual” Occupiers. Despite the fact that the group adopted a Statement of Autonomy that declared, “If you have chosen to devote resources to building this movement, especially your time and labor, then it is yours,” and despite the fact that campers were holding down the fort on cold and rainy days and at night when housed Occupiers were sleeping in comfortable beds, their time and labor at the Occupation were, as the previous chapter mentioned, devalued by anti-campers. Members spoke often of how the campers did little to nothing, comparing them to elite members who invested effort and other real Occupiers, as Lindsey does in one forum post: “There has been a difference between those that participate because they desire to change the system and those who will take advantage of the Occupiers who desire to change the system. The camp has been the second set of ‘those,’ unfortunately.” Similarly, Billy once posted, “I understand the need for the mentioning of the plight of the mentally ill and the homeless at the camp! But they are not and most have never been Occupiers. I have stated this time and time again...there are many programs where they can receive help but they decide not to, due to the convenience of this camp.” By emphasizing how campers opted for the “convenience”

Occupy offered over agentic help-seeking, campers were framed as moochers rather than real Occupiers, hanging out at the camp merely because it was better for them than a shelter with rules and obligations. The campers were aware they were being framed this way and felt alienated. Lissa, for instance, told Occupiers at a GA one night:

[One camper] is homeless and came into the camp about a week ago. He's been doing a lot of work at the camp. Our discussion of how useless the homeless are really upset him and I don't know if we'll see him anymore. He's a human being that we just hurt emotionally. I apologized to him for pointing him out as one of the people that's homeless, but [another camper] said he's more upset about comments about how we should get jobs and how we're living off other people.

Negative framing of the campers as “useless” and “living off other people” sometimes pushed them out of the group, yet most of the group did not consider it a problem that a movement against capitalism<sup>32</sup> was failing to retain some of those most hurt by it.

Notably, not only were the campers often treated as though they were not real members of the movement in forum posts and other discussions, OC also did not make an

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<sup>32</sup> When I first joined OC, we were located on the sidewalk and spent our days holding signs for those driving by to read. I wrote “Capitalism is MEAN ☹” on the first sign I made and held. Some Occupiers objected to my sign, arguing that they were not against capitalism as a system, only against what they thought of as “capitalism gone bad.” While these conversations were sometimes centered around Occupiers’ autonomy to write whatever they wanted on their signs (without group consensus on particular principles or slogans), I engaged in many conversations discussing the merits of the argument that capitalism, in any “form,” leads to inequality, pushing other Occupiers to see the inherent flaws of capitalism. While many in The City remained unconvinced, radical Occupiers elsewhere were making the same arguments I was on their social media pages, and a sociological analysis of the problems the Occupy movement sought to reconcile points to capitalism as a fundamental problem. Thus, while many in OC would not characterize Occupy as a movement against capitalism, I argue that their characterizations of the Occupy movement do not change the fact that Occupy indeed was a movement against capitalism.

effort to incorporate or draw in the campers. Leondar-Wright (2014) found that, unlike middle-class social movement organization members, poorer members often needed a great deal of mentoring and encouragement to become active in organizations. The working-class activists in her study spoke positively of how leaders within organizations took them under their wings and directly asked them to complete tasks, offering assistance with said tasks along the way. She observed that working-class members were often silent during brainstorming, but once a list of tasks was drawn up, they were happy to take on the responsibility of completing tasks. In Occupy the City, middle-class Occupiers assumed that others were like them, ready to jump into working on tasks without specific direction from a mentor. I did not see among members any recognition that those with lower class standings might need mentoring and encouragement to become active members of the group. I rarely heard anyone directly ask homeless campers to take responsibility for a specific task. Rather, anti-campers continued to complain that homeless campers would not attend meetings or protest (“Mitch sat in his car the entire last GA,” Ricky lamented once), even though they had essentially never been asked to. Moreover, events often took place off-site, and so anti-campers simultaneously expected the homeless campers to stay at the campsite and protect it while complaining that the same campers did not attend political events. Additionally, poor campers were largely cut off from the primary means of communication in OC—phones and the Internet. Even poor campers who expressed interest in helping could not participate in planning, despite repeated requests for the group to figure out how to get an Internet connection at the camp.

Further, members often held meetings at a local coffeehouse where attendees felt pressure to buy coffee and food and to tip, which homeless members were essentially unable to do. Leondar-Wright found that working-class groups frequently provided food for its members during meetings; in OC, the group expected members to pay for food at meetings. The groups in Leondar-Wright's study also provided services to their members, without expecting much in return initially; later, they hoped, the members would increase their participation and "give back" once they got on their feet. In OC, Occupiers expected homeless campers to give back immediately, so much so that there were occasional proposals to put newcomers on "probation" until they earned their place in the community by doing chores. David critiqued this tactic:

As I could swear I stated in this thread, some of those that the Occupation is supporting need that support for a time before they can start to support us back. It's another way that we build support. A very important way, I might add. When someone previously thought to be hopeless gets the care and attention they need from complete strangers who believe in something, over time they become interested. Then they realize (because well, dammit, we're right) that they want to help. This [kind of] proposal robs us of those people. Nevertheless, many middle-class members of OC, like the middle-class activists in Leondar-Wright's research, did not see how their expectations of poor campers' participation in planning and committee work could have been met with simple strategies like providing coffee at meetings rather than expecting members to buy coffee.

While no one said it outright, it is likely that members did not want to provide coffee because they saw campers as undeserving of such a perk derived from group resources, as indeed they already took issue with homeless campers using the group's resources out of alleged "convenience." While OC could have offered support to the most disenfranchised of the 99% they alleged to represent, as David advocated, they instead framed most of them as undeserving of assistance: time and again, anti-campers blamed the campers for their impoverished, needy status, and pointed to their lack of participation in the movement as evidence for how undeserving they were of the group's assistance. One white man who was active on the forums but rarely seen on-site posted,

I feel for the homeless and do wish that we can get them off the streets, but I get the feeling that the camp isn't actually helping them to be less homeless...Have the homeless been making attempts at becoming politically active, bettering their own lives through work and education (getting help with those things through various sources), or at least even being positively social? What's the point of the camp? I think it's wise to start moving in the direction of closing the camp but doing so gracefully by helping the homeless move on, shutting down the camp on our own time.

Occupiers talked about the homeless campers in ways that seem to imply they expected the campers to be hugely productive with plenty of initiative, but Leondar-Wright (2014) found this tendency typical only of middle-class activists.

Most often, elite members activated the "moocher" framework when the allocation of scarce resources was up for debate. While individual members of OC pooled together rent

money, public donations were being quickly liquidated by food and supplies for the camp and, eventually, a hefty insurance policy protecting the land owner from liability. Some elite members—on both sides of the camp divide—wanted to use the money for purposes besides the camp, such as the establishment of a community center. In one GA where a camper proposed to use \$200 of the group’s funds for camp expenses, an elite anti-camper, Ricky, stated that he did not want to use the money in that way and instead hoped it could be reserved for another project: “I also like the idea of starting a community center and am concerned that any of the funds we have now would be crucial should an opportunity arise at any time.” In order to successfully claim the money for non-camp purposes, the anti-camp Occupiers had to frame the camp as an unworthy recipient of group funds, and they did so by relying on the “moocher” narrative. In a forum post, Marcus said:

We have basically become a glorified homeless camp with many of the overnights dominated by a contingent who could care less about the actual movement. They are people who come to sleep because it is a relatively safe spot...and there are blankets, food, water, etc. available. Honestly I can’t blame them for wanting to do that in their situation, but that leaves only three to five actual occupiers to sleep alongside them on most nights.

At issue here, then, is the definition of who counted as an Occupier, for even homeless campers could save themselves from the moocher label (and be deemed worthy of group resources) if they could prove they were at the camp not for the sake of convenience, but for so-called real reasons. In his post, Marcus alleged that most of the homeless campers were not “actual Occupiers,” and he was not alone in this perception. Above, Billy differentiated

between the campers and “actual” Occupiers when he claimed that “[the mentally ill and the homeless at the camp] are not and most have never been Occupiers.”

Were Marcus, Billy, and other anti-campers correct when they alleged that none of the homeless—or all but “three to five”—were “actual” Occupiers? Whereas the group had no formal qualifications for membership, it is a reasonable conclusion to assume they counted as members anyone in the 99% who, per their Statement of Autonomy, “devote[d] resources to building this movement, especially [their] time and labor.” By those standards, all of the homeless were “actual” Occupiers as 99 percenters, and any who spent their time watching over the camp must be considered “actual” Occupiers, too. Some people, like Samuel, often spoke—as he did here in his interview—about how the campers did have just as much reason, if not more, to Occupy as anyone else, and yet few anti-campers knew their stories:

I remember more than one instance of people pointing Mitch out specifically as one of those dirty homeless guys and being like, “I mean, why is that guy even here? He doesn’t care about the movement.” I hope those people watched the documentary [made by local students interested in OC] where he describes taking out a home equity loan to send his child to college, and then the 2008 fraud-induced crash wiping him out, and the corresponding housing collapse...destroying his ability to find work in his field of construction... Blaming *the Occupation* for causing [some Occupiers] to leave [the group] is a pure distortion of the reality that, while there were issues with the Occupation... there was also plenty of problems with the behavior of [anti-

camp] people in regards to how they engaged with the Occupation and the [campers] there.

The evidence that homeless campers were indeed “actual” Occupiers who invested time and labor, though, did not overcome the anti-campers’ moocher narrative. Why? The anti-camp crew was strong in numbers and well-connected. They also had the resources to post on the forums while the campers did not.<sup>33</sup> They were able to point to a singular threat to the movement, the camp, while campers and their allies instead split focus and pointed to the varied reasons the movement was failing. The moocher narrative was so powerful that even Jamie, one of the white campers that everyone seemed to acknowledge as a hard-worker, framed other campers as moochers when she discussed the closing of the camp: “For every good person we get coming into the camp, we get 10 that are just here to mooch, that don’t contribute, that don’t give a shit about our message, that are not here for anything more than a place to sleep.” While Jamie characterized the campers in this way, by her own admission, she had spent little time at the camp in the previous weeks (a housed Occupier had offered Jamie a spare room in her home), and my fieldnotes from that time period document active involvement of campers in meetings held on-site.

To use Jamie’s language, everyone agreed that one “good person” who camped was a man named Simon. In OC, Simon was propped up as the type of camper who—despite being black, unemployed, and mostly homeless (he was able to stay with his sister occasionally)—

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<sup>33</sup> One camper, Lissa, had access to the forums via her laptop and a nearby community center’s free WiFi. Another camper, Jamie, had a laptop for a short time and would use it to access the forums from a coffee shop occasionally. A couple of other campers made a post or two on occasions when a housed Occupier brought them home for some rest, but this was rare and the great majority of campers never made a forum post. Some expressed having no real clue about how to access the forums even if they happened upon an Internet connection.

was deemed an actual Occupier who invested in the movement and was therefore entitled to any service the camp had to offer. Simon was older than most campers, small, and had serious vision impairments. His physique would have made it difficult to cast him as a threat to anyone's safety. Additionally, Simon had overcome substance addiction many years before and frequently advocated that the camp hold "12 step" meetings for those still afflicted and make rules against the consumption of alcohol on-site. Simon, in other words, sometimes advocated for the kinds of conservative solutions (encouraging campers to seek help for their substance addictions and act like upstanding citizens) that anti-campers advocated themselves (as did Jamie, who proposed many rules in efforts to appease the anti-campers). In response to Marta's "green living" proposal that included a provision for rules to make the camp "family friendly," Simon said,

In this society, we live by rules every day in our lives. Rules are made to be followed, not to be broken. This rule protects this camp. We need this rule. When the cops come here, they come to Occupy the City. We're trying to prevent a news statement that says there was a problem at OC. If you're breaking the law, why should OC have to suffer for it?

Like the anti-campers, Simon invoked the fear of a bad image (discussed more below) and reaffirmed that the campers were the face of the movement in the media. He also affirmed the anti-campers' narrative (discussed below) that women and children needed special protection in a welcoming environment: "We've all got mothers and sisters and we've been around ladies. These people want to be here. They want to support. If someone is driving from two hours away to sit in that camp and she says she can't bring her children there, we

all have to be accountable.” Because of his physique, his efforts, and his commitment to rule-enforcement, Simon was treated differently than the other campers; one woman called him “the most...decent person I see down at the camp,” a label that carries a special weight for black men (see Anderson 1999). Anti-campers praised Simon and identified him as a model camper because he echoed their sentiments and generally agreed with their calls for camp cleanliness and order.

Simon did not always agree with the anti-campers, however. In fact, I observed several instances in which he pointed to the race- and class-divisions in the movement. At one GA, he said, “I can't get on the forums. I don't have a job. Camping is what I can do for Occupy... I want to do as much as I can for Occupy the City. Can we please set up something here so we can get on the forums? And people on the forums need to come here.” In these ways, Simon attempted to alert middle-class activists that they were “missing class” and showed how, in the absence of resources, he (and other campers) saw camping as something valuable they could give to the movement. He also sometimes critiqued the anti-campers:

So many people...had their mind set on having this camp closed. The process went through...Once it got blocked, they jumped up and ran away...They don't come here any other time. They come to shut down the camp. A whole group of people because they wanted to shut [it] down. When it was blocked, they ran.

Despite this and other critiques, everyone seemed to like Simon. I suspect it is because he participated in chores and GAs and thus, as explained in the previous chapter, had some

currency in the movement. In compliance with group norms, he had earned his right to a voice through his effort and compliance.

Affection for Simon also served as a useful rhetorical tool. When discussing campers, anti-campers used Simon to engage in one of the popular practices of colorblind racism: pretending to no longer see, or care about race, and pretending to be accepting of “diverse” people. They touted their affection for Simon as proof that they did not have a problem with *all* black men or *all* homeless people, only the undeserving moochers. Their rhetoric indicated a token inclusion of minorities, another element of colorblind racism. For example, Lindsey posted on the forums, “There are several who stay with us who are homeless and participate. I have been surprised to find out some of them are homeless. I wouldn’t have known either, unless I had been told. So, the problem isn’t really an issue with the ‘homeless.’ It’s an issue with certain individuals.” Lindsey and others frequently dismissed the criticism that members of OC were marginalizing the homeless by labeling them moochers and not real activists. They highlighted instead their acceptance of some homeless members—those who were not easily identified as homeless in the first place—compared to other “certain individuals,” yet they continued to disparage as moochers other black and homeless members who did participate.

In accordance with colorblind racism, inequality created through covert discourse was easy to miss and hard to rectify. OC members’ rhetoric included statements that seemed race- or class-neutral, but were not. For example, when OC made rules forbidding drug and alcohol use at the camp, Marcus said,

Homeless or not, I don't want to see people absolutely obliterated and intoxicated at the Occupation. It is a safety concern and a credibility issue.

There is nothing the media would love more than to jump on that immediately... We have to balance issues of security, movement credibility, public perception (we have to grow our numbers, after all), and goals, and it isn't always easy.

Marcus's proposed rule and his talk of it reminds people that their "security" might be threatened by campers who pose "safety concerns." Marcus was not totally off-base: some campers did get drunk, and a small number of them acted violently. However, the frequency with which Marcus and other anti-campers brought up threats to safety far outweighed the frequency of incidents in which inebriated campers actually *were* a threat to safety.

Moreover, degrees of danger mattered: less-involved Occupiers (especially parents) heard words like "security" and "safety threat" and decided to refrain from investing in the Occupation, while my fieldnotes show few truly dangerous situations<sup>34</sup>—most incidents were quick escalations of personal feuds that were just as quickly de-escalated. Additionally, Marcus's rationale seems neutral to social class ("homeless or not") but does not take into account that after a night at one of the group's sanctioned "happy hours" off-site, privileged members of OC could go home, while most of the campers had no home to go to (as Samuel

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<sup>34</sup> As an example: Lindsey posted that she heard someone had defecated in the children's tent full of toys. While no one could confirm in the post that this had happened, and while Lindsey said that she heard the tent and toys were quickly disposed of, the thread turned into a discussion of the many dangers this situation *could have* presented, if indeed it happened. For instance, one man posted, "Typhoid fever, hepatitis A and E, cryptosporidia [*sic*], giadarsis [*sic*], E. coli, salmonella, cholera, rotavirus, shigellosous [*sic*]... Funny sounding words but not too funny in meaning. All are easily transmitted through human feces. Real talk for a second here... if I ever caught anyone purposefully exposing my daughter to this, I would be punching them in the face for each syllable of 'this is a nonviolent movement.' These are things with very real and deadly consequences for young children. This goes beyond just disgusting and well crosses the line into extremely dangerous."

articulated in a GA, “When people live at the camp, it’s not fair to tell them they can’t go out and get drunk, because they will eventually come back to the camp to sleep”)—nor does it take into account that substance abuse is more common among homeless people than those with homes (National Coalition for the Homeless 2009). While Marcus was not making an overtly elitist statement, and indeed his statement sounds quite rational, it hides the fact that some Occupiers would be subjected to particular rules while the behavior of privileged Occupiers would rarely be regulated by the same rules. Anti-campers legitimated this inequality by arguing that those who benefitted from (or, as they implied, mooched off of) group resources would have to abide by group rules if they wished to continue to have access to those resources. In this way, anti-campers adopted the same tactic as Florida governor Rick Scott, who, in 2011, called for welfare recipients to be granted access to benefits only if they passed drug tests (Kam 2015): both implied that poor people were more likely to act unruly than wealthier people, both spoke of these dangers as more rampant than evidence suggested they were, and both linked behavior to benefits in ways that allowed them justify the denial of life-sustaining benefits to those who broke rules.

#### INVOKING THE RISK IMAGINARY

Given that the sidewalk picket had all but ended, the camp became the public face of the Occupation. Having suffered the loss of active participants as the temperature turned cold, OC wanted to grow their numbers, and the group—consisting largely of white, employed, housed, middle-class people—frequently affirmed the notion that the only way to grow was to get what many members called “mainstream society” on board. With concern

about filth ever-present and a desire attract “mainstream society,” the anti-camp crew began actively engaging in discussion on the group’s online forum about campers and their activities. They consistently invoked racialized fears as they condemned and banned black campers while ignoring and forgiving the bad behavior of white campers. In this section, I will show how anti-campers invoked risk imaginaries, characterizing the men at the camp as dangerous criminals, to further the framing of the campers as bad citizens who deserved to have their autonomy revoked.

Throughout the duration of my field work, Occupiers rejected actions that they perceived would discourage the “average” citizen from protesting. The anti-campers were able to capitalize on the group’s fear of a bad image, claiming that campers were the public face of the Occupation and their drug and alcohol addictions and occasional propensity toward interpersonal violence were giving OC a bad image. While it is not untrue that some of the campers used drugs on-site, so too did anti-campers, like Ricky—yet when Samuel posted that Ricky was one of the first Occupiers to use drugs on-site, the post was deleted by an anti-camp moderator,<sup>35</sup> creating a double standard and discouraging the group from discussing anyone’s activities other than the campers’ as potentially giving OC a bad image. One anti-camper, Lindsey, wrote this message about OC’s image on the forum:

In English class the other day we were discussing the Occupy movement. A girl asks, “Can we talk to the people at the camp or is that their home?” The problem is that I felt very uncomfortable letting anyone know that they are

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<sup>35</sup> The moderator explained that he deleted Samuel’s post, which “involved personal actions of people” and “a personal attack,” for the sake of “respecting privacy.” When I was given access to the moderation logs and reviewed them, I learned that he never deleted any other similar posts that discussed campers’ activities on-site (nor had anyone else).

permitted to go to the camp to learn about OC. These days I don't know what they are going to find when they get there. The camp is supposed to be the 24/7 face of OC. Can we really say we are happy with how it is representing [OC]? If you answer yes, I would like to hear how you believe the camp beautifully represents OC.<sup>36</sup>

Lindsey felt uncomfortable encouraging her classmate to talk to the campers. As “the 24/7 face of OC,” the campers faced scrutiny by the anti-camp crew. The anti-campers frequently emphasized that anyone—especially the media—could be watching the Occupation at any time, and the movement would fail to attract the mainstream if their image was bad.

Simon (2007) has documented how risk imaginaries are invoked. In OC, the anti-camp crew invoked others' risk imaginaries to make the camp seem like a scary place for potential and even veteran Occupiers by doing things like posting on the group's online forum about the campers and their activities. I archived many forum posts in which Ricky, Lindsey, and other anti-campers discussed each misstep by a camper and dug into campers' criminal histories. In his interview, Samuel described a process (and especially Ricky's involvement in it as an elite anti-camper):

[Ricky would post], “A lot of people are doing drugs and drinking constantly,” and all this kinda stuff, even though he himself is bringing dope down to the [camp] site...I mean, we've had very little that's actually happened at the camp that's so overwhelmingly negative, and yet those few

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<sup>36</sup> While a lively debate followed this post, including posts by pro-camp Occupiers, no one actually answered her question of how the camp “beautifully represents” OC. Some members spoke well of the camp, even while acknowledging the frustrations around it, and many defended the idea that a campsite and community of Occupiers was important, but no one answered Lindsey's question directly.

things just constantly get harped on. It's amazing. And when they haven't been harped on enough, apparently, Lindsey will put up a whole bullet list of all them together. Like, "Just in case anyone forgot!" and, "For five months, these seven things have happened." It's amazing to me.

Importantly, the "rumor mill" existed largely on the online forum, which campers—in a computer-less, Wi-Fi-less camp—had little access to. They could not defend themselves—or even show others that they were friendly and safe—unless and until members visited the site themselves, which some were reluctant to do after hearing anti-campers' tales. With little to counter Ricky's, Lindsey's, and others' posts, fears of the campers successfully spread through the group, especially since Ricky would send messages to a dozen members at a time (myself included) with comments such as "Oh yeah, turns out a convicted rapist has also been hiding out in the group"<sup>37</sup> buried within the message (several of whom then responded that they would be quitting the group). This process is similar to the ways the wealthy white men who have a monopoly on mainstream news organizations exercise their power by emphasizing crime and drug use in poor communities, perpetuating controlling images (Sonnett, Johnson, and Dolan 2015). With little funding for alternative media, the few who have access to broadcasting messages have great power to control discourse.

Anti-campers expressed great concern with passersby and potential visitors. While the initial picket took place on a sidewalk that pedestrians naturally used to get from one

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<sup>37</sup> Through some investigative work, I learned the identity of the Occupier Ricky was talking about and learned about his record. He had indeed been convicted of rape, but he did not seem to be hiding his past any more than anyone else with a criminal record, myself included, was (he was not using a fake name, lying about his past, etc.). Additionally, while he showed up once a blue moon, he certainly was not actively involved or camping, and no one had reported that he had made sexual advances toward them (he was in a relationship throughout the duration of the Occupation).

place to another, the campsite was a space that one would have to intentionally enter for the purpose of visiting the Occupation. Therefore, if OC was to get their message across to people and have political conversations with those outside the group, anti-campers convinced people, the camp would have to be a “welcoming,” “safe” place for visitors to interact with strangers. Sandy, for instance, linked the fear of a bad image to the pressing need for the camp to be “welcoming” when she wrote on the forum, “They [the campers] were told that they are the public face of OC and there should not be any fighting. That should apply to verbal fighting as well as physical. They are supposed to be welcoming.” Some members of OC campaigned for the camp to be clean and safe, and for the campers to be friendly and sober.

The words “family friendly” cropped up often, both in reference to how the camp should appear and how Occupiers should behave when engaging in the activities of the Occupation. For example, Marta once proposed that OC take measures to make the camp more eco-friendly. In the midst of proposing adding mulch, making a rain barrel, and using grey water in efficient ways, Marta included this language in her proposal: “We write up something for people who would like to stay that says they will participate in Occupy rallies, protests, and GAs; will not drink or do drugs; and will help keep the camp clean and eco-friendly. As long as they abide by these rules, they may stay.” When David pressed Marta on what this part of the proposal had to do with being “green,” Marta explained, “[This part] is not a part of green living, it’s just a part I put in there, because I feel it’s important for people living in an Occupy camp to be part of Occupy... Just want this to be family-friendly.” When the group discussed things that applied to the whole group yet affected campers more than

privileged members, such as rules against being inebriated on-site, they often couched their decisions using “family friendly” language. As an example, Ricky once proposed to move a meeting off-site. He justified the move out of the camp by saying the new location was “family-friendly.”

I argue that the words “safe,” “welcoming,” and “family friendly” in OC were code words about race/ethnicity and social class. While other Occupations across the U.S. formed race-based caucuses that hosted “teach-ins” about inequality (the successes of which were numerous, but limited), OC did not form caucuses for oppressed groups<sup>38</sup> and largely did not conduct inequality teach-ins. Rather, Occupiers often used coded language to talk around, rather than about, inequality, and target the behaviors of the campers, who were mostly members of marginalized groups: most were poor, many were homeless, and almost all black members of OC were campers. The coded “family friendly” language got a lot of traction thanks to its invocation of the modern image of children as priceless and vulnerable (Rutherford 2011; Zelizer 1994)—an image that is racialized and classed (Elliott 2012; Fields 2008). When asserting that Occupy needed to be safe for children and families, anti-campers took advantage of the fact that it is hard for someone to come out “against” children and families,<sup>39</sup> and so people tended to agree with them. By using these coded words

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<sup>38</sup> The closest OC got to this structure was adding a working group called “Diversity”—someone proposed that the words “People of Color” appear in the working-group’s name, but others objected on the grounds that white members might feel alienated. The Diversity working group was sparsely attended; in fact, for most of its meetings, only one member showed up.

<sup>39</sup> When Ricky told several members about the “convicted rapist hiding out in the group,” Wendy, a mother of young children, responded that she would no longer be involved with the group. She also shamed those who were not as alarmed as she was (“I am disappointed in all of you that don’t see the severity of this issue”) and placed blame on anyone who continued to welcome children into the camp even in the rapists’ absence (“I can no longer bring my children to the camp. I can be charged with putting my children in danger. And now, if you see a child entering camp and don’t turn them away, so can all of you since you know there are sex offenders

(“welcoming,” “safe,” and “family-friendly”) to describe what the camp should be, but was allegedly not yet, anti-campers connected the marginalized campers to an implicit risk: the threat of violence, which they had not demonstrated was more likely to materialize in this setting than other settings. Samuel tried to use humor to demonstrate that risk existed everywhere:

This just in! People do stupid shit. They do stupid shit at work. They do stupid shit at home. They do stupid shit at bars. They do stupid shit while mountain climbing but generally only once. They even do stupid shit at Occupations. In fact, leading experts believe human beings are capable of doing stupid shit anywhere and as of yet our best and brightest scientists have yet to find a way to stop all humans from doing stupid shit.

Still, anti-campers ignored the many incident-less days that went by and highlighted the incidents that did arise, framing the camp as one of the most dangerous places people (and children) could be.

Sometimes, the campers were labeled as “predators” who were “preying” on people, invoking Jim Crow-era stereotypes of black men as rapists. Ricky, for example, buried the message about the “convicted rapist hiding out in the group” within a report-back on a long and contentious GA, the minutes of which would not be available to those absent for a couple of days due to the time it would take me to transcribe them. After recounting some procedural events (e.g., how many blocks and stand-asides there were, that the proposal passed), he added the part about the rapist without saying who it was, leaving recipients’

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and rapists there.”)—in fact, she pluralized “sex offenders and rapists,” suggesting there were more rapists present than people had assumed.

imaginaries to supply culturally coded images of men who are likely to be black given the profound linkages in the media between black men, criminal violence, and hypersexuality (Collins 2000; Simon 2007). Ricky's nonchalant announcement stirred some to anger, including Wendy (a white mother); in her reply, the lone rapist became "sex offenders and rapists," plural, illustrating the power of our risk imaginaries to exaggerate risks. Another white mother argued on the forums that campers should be vetted against the sex offender registry:

As a parent, it is my obligation to protect my children first and foremost and above anything else. I have camped three times at Occupy the City and have never brought my children with me...It is our obligation as a society to protect all children from sexual predators. If people aren't willing to disclose their real names or information to the group for purposes of identifying who could potentially pose a threat to "our" children, then yes, I have a big problem with that. This kind of threat should be taken very seriously. These are children we are talking about; these children are our future. These children have the right to be in society that does the most it can to protect them, even if that means having to check everyone's background, and if this bothers some people, then I would pose this question: what are you trying to hide?

This woman never brought her children, and indeed, save for one child (Mal and David's daughter), I rarely saw children at the camp. Yet many times, the anti-camp crew invoked the safety of *potential* visitors, especially children, as a reason to make a decision that restricted the behavior of the campers. Sandy proposed banning some campers from the camp by

asking, “I know we’re all about being inclusive, but...has anyone tallied up how many women and their children walked away because of bad behavior? I know I wouldn’t have brought my children to the camp when they were small.” Another time, Carmen proposed the group de-fund the camp and instead fund an indoor community center, noting, “The camp is not safe, especially for children. The community center would be a place the public at large might feel more comfortable and safe visiting...I think [funding a center] is about evolving it into something permanent that can be more inclusive for a greater range of people than [the camp].”

When the anti-camp crew spoke of “including” people, a core value of a movement representing the 99%, they almost always alluded to hypothetical children rather than actual campers. The group frequently discussed how to attract children to a political movement full of adults, however unlikely that was. These discussions often included speculation and a lack of evidence. Carmen, for example, asked on the forum,

I think there are people already out there who get what we are saying and support it and have seen invites to actions but are being held back by something else. How do we get those people—people who are already informed and waiting for us to make a spark—to re-ignite the movement?...What about the rights of the people who have been assaulted, stolen from, and preyed upon by a sex offender? What about the 1 in 3 supporters who are parents who won’t consider bringing their children to the camp because of safety concerns?

Carmen did not cite any source to back up her claim that “1 in 3 supporters” are “parents who won’t consider bring their children to the camp because of safety concerns.” Just as the Occupation of the sidewalk began, Carmen was responsible for releasing the results of an early survey of OC members to the press, and within her press release, she noted that roughly one in three respondents were parents of young children living at home. The survey, of course, did not ask about whether those parents would “consider bringing their children to the camp because of safety concerns”—indeed, there was not yet a camp. Carmen, then, exaggerated the numbers of parents who felt the camp was too dangerous for their children. As Gans asserts, “once imagining and stereotyping are allowed to take over, then judgments...can be made without much concern for empirical accuracy” (1994:275-276).

Anti-campers were persistent in their efforts to link the marginalized campers to violence. The coded “family friendly” language got a lot of traction as it invoked the idea of precious children in need of protection. In focusing on how “certain individuals” of the Occupation might pose a threat to innocent others, anti-campers successfully invoked the risk imaginary. They were successful, in part, because the individuals they were trying to position as a threat were largely poor, male, and black. Because these members were already disenfranchised and white people already hold deeply embedded stereotypes about black men as hypersexual and dangerous, the coded language circulating on the forums and in meetings was highly effective at activating preexisting biases. Thus, support for efforts to control and expel campers was rarely challenged. It is this restriction of autonomy and exclusion to which I now turn.

## THE SUSPENSION OF AUTONOMY

Thus far, I have argued that anti-campers positioned the campers as posing two problems for the rest of the group: they were a drain on the group's resources and they were a threat to everyone's safety. Both of these problems were costly for the group, anti-campers consistently maintained. Akin to Reagan's assertion that the state had a legitimate interest in controlling the actions of costly "welfare queens" (Gustafson 2009), the anti-campers began to convince others that the costs to OC gave the group a legitimate interest in controlling the campers—even convincing some campers themselves—by making rules that essentially only applied to campers, and pushing non-compliant campers out with bans. Jamie—who was a camper, yet was also prone to making rules that she hoped would satisfy the anti-campers since these rules echoed their concerns and rhetoric—made this disclaimer when she proposed a 48-hour probationary period for all newcomers: "I realize that this [proposal] may seem to conflict with the ideals of an open and inclusive movement, but the encampment is a public face of our movement...the people at the camp have legitimate, and sometimes serious, safety and interpersonal concerns that should be overriding." Given that autonomy came to be seen in the group as a privilege among the deserving, anti-campers successfully mobilized to suspend the movement's core values of autonomy and inclusion for the campers with broad support from others in the group. One white woman, who did not appear in my fieldnotes until the week of this GA, said during a GA that the camp "is like a zoo out here," invoking an image of animals that needed containing. Historically, dehumanization has been an important component of racism and other systems of oppression (Collins 2000).

The campers were not taken seriously as “actual” Occupiers, and there is perhaps no stronger evidence for this than the fact that group decisions were frequently made in their absence. General Assemblies continued to take place on the sidewalk months after it became abundantly clear that no one would occupy the sidewalk. Eventually, the group reduced GAs to two per week, one of which would be held at the camp; it also became a group rule that camp-related proposals could be made *only* at the GA held at the camp, with an exception for emergency proposals. Since emergency proposals were common, it was not unusual for an emergency proposal regulating camp behavior or dealing with one individual camper to come before the GA when the GA was not held at the camp. Various working groups were tasked with coming up with and enforcing camp rules (mostly, though, the De-escalation working group, or De-esc WG, was in charge), but the GA was the only recognized decision-making body with power to validate a rule or carry out a consequence for a rule-breaker. The campers were not well-represented in the GA process, and ultimately, a group of white, housed, mostly middle-class people made decisions for and about mostly homeless, black, substance-addicted men.<sup>40</sup> Mal explained at one GA how the campers were frequently disenfranchised:

The other day, there was a women’s caucus, which is great, that’s fine. But nobody except me, [another woman], and Rachel were people who ever spent the night there, and here they were talking about all these camp issues. And the people who actually camp were outside of this meeting, knowing they

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<sup>40</sup> There were problems with both groups trying to work together: as white, middle-class anti-campers framed the campers as dangerous, campers were turned off at the idea of getting to know the anti-campers. The lack of interaction between the two groups did little to show the anti-campers that the campers were largely friendly and safe, and so the cycle continued.

were being talked about, knowing decisions were being made about them, and they had no input on that at all. That happens a lot. People who don't camp make decisions about the camp and they don't camp. So they feel a little disenfranchised because people are making decisions for them who aren't even there.

The rules in question largely affected campers more than non-campers, such as rules against intoxication, discussed earlier.

Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, most Occupiers, like Jamie, bent over backward to appease the calls of the anti-campers to make, and enforce, rules. Perhaps because they were “missing class” (Leondar-Wright 2014) and race, rules were often made about interpersonal behaviors that scholars document are common among poor and black members. For example, Anderson (1999) documents a “code of the street” in which interpersonal violence—or the threat of it—is used to instill a sense of respect, with the outcome that someone is less likely to be messed with if they are respected and feared (see also Jones 2009). The threat of violence, in other words, is a precautionary measure that actually ensures safety and a lack of actual violence. At OC, campers were prohibited from settling a dispute with the threat of violence and instead told they must seek out a member of the De-esc WG. Yet campers preferred to handle issues themselves. Seeking out a De-esc WG member might communicate that a camper was unable to handle a dispute on his own, leaving that person vulnerable when no De-esc WG members were around. Anti-campers seemed unaware that many campers might be operating under a code of the street and read their interactions only as rude and violent, “unwelcoming” and not “family friendly.” As

Marcus explained on behalf of anti-campers who were dealing with marginalized members of society in an intimate setting for the first time, “For many of us, we are dealing with elements of society that we may have never encountered before firsthand. We are witnessing what the worst of the system we are fighting has to offer...To many, that is absolutely frightening.” While I am not arguing that anti-campers should have learned about the “code of the street” and then allowed violence to solve disputes, being informed about such a code would have helped them empathize and brainstorm solutions other than a camper seeking out the De-esc WG and making himself vulnerable.

To manage the risks Occupiers perceived, Occupiers put forth complicated proposals of rules and multi-step processes to deal with those who violated rules. The longest GA debates were always about these rules and process. Additionally, special “camp concerns” meetings were held once a week, and members of the De-esc WG worked hard to show anti-campers they were keeping order in the camp and recounting any incidents to the General Assembly. Here is a list of evolving rules I documented during my field work, some of which were simply announced by a person with enough authority (usually Mal and James) while others were passed through the GA:

1. Leave plastic bins on the sidewalk in place.
2. Only medics can use the medical bins on the sidewalk.
3. No wet clothes may be left about on the sidewalk.
4. Rotate food on the sidewalk using a dot system.
5. Replace trash containers with a new bag if you see it’s full.
6. Pick up cigarette butts on the sidewalk.
7. Only the kitchen staff may enter the kitchen (or give others permission to enter it).
8. Meals are only to be prepared at 8:00 a.m., noon, and 7:30 p.m.
9. Kitchen staff must clean up the kitchen after cooking meals.
  - a. Express consequence: if you do not, you will be removed from kitchen staff (and thus can’t enter the kitchen).

- b. *Implemented later*: Kitchen staff must cook and clean in teams of 2 or 4.
- 10. Quiet time will be observed from midnight to 8:00 a.m.
- 11. Only approved people are allowed to have the code to the storage shed.
- 12. No using drugs and alcohol at the camp.
- 13. No violence at the camp.
- 14. No planning the violent takeover of any property at the camp.
- 15. Respect others at the camp.
- 16. Respect the students of a local school who sometimes use the camp property as a playground.
- 17. No camper may violate the movement's nonviolent stance.
- 18. Keep the camp safe and sanitary.
- 19. No breaking city laws while at the camp.
- 20. You must clean the camp.
  - a. Express consequence: if you don't clean, you can't eat dinner or stay there.
- 21. The De-escalation working group must keep a log of those on probation at the camp.
- 22. Smokers at the camp must use the designated smoking area.
- 23. No one is allowed in the medical tent.
- 24. No one is allowed to accept cash donations on-site.
- 25. Campers must give their legal names to be vetted against sex offender registry.
- 26. No one is allowed to keep personal belongings in the library tent.
- 27. All campers must agree to the following (*some old rules, some new rules, adopted as a set*):
  - a. We are a diverse group. We agree to treat each other and the camp with respect.
  - b. We agree not to drink or use drugs in the vicinity.
  - c. We agree not to be visibly or disruptively intoxicated while here.
  - d. We agree to be nonviolent.
  - e. We agree that quiet time is midnight to 8:00 am.
  - f. We agree not to steal from the camp or each other.
- 28. Newcomers to the camp will be on a 48-hour probation, during which they must learn camp rules, learn about the Occupy movement, and participate in cleaning.
- 29. No one is allowed to enter restricted areas of the campsite.
  - a. Express consequence: if someone enters an area controlled by a working-group, they will be subject to the de-escalation procedure.
  - b. Express consequence: if someone enters a personal tent that does not belong to them, the entrance will be treated as theft even if nothing is taken. Theft is not forgiven and the person will be banned from the camp.
- 30. No sleeping in the library tent.
- 31. No sleeping in the medical tent (unless Mal grants someone special permission).
- 32. If you are absent from the camp for a period of time, your tent will be removed.

These rules restricted campers’—and usually *only* campers’—autonomy and their bodies: while all the rules technically applied to all Occupiers, whether they camped or not, few rules would reasonably be encountered by non-campers under normal conditions. Should someone violate a rule, he might be subject to: a) a heads-up from others that a rule existed, b) a “de-escalation” by the De-esc WG, or c) a ban issued by the De-esc WG, an individual, or the General Assembly, depending on which rule was broken, how many times, how egregiously, and what process was currently in place. These are the procedures for handling rule-breakers that I documented during my field work:

1. An Occupier will be given three warnings before they are banned.
  - a. Multiple warnings will not be given for the “unforgivable crimes” of theft and violence (the latter of which is subject to arrest and criminal charges).
2. In order to ask someone to leave camp, the following has to happen:
  - a. The De-esc WG announces a de-escalation meeting in general terms.
  - b. The De-esc WG meets to discuss said person and have those air grievances who are willing.
  - c. The De-esc WG discusses proper repayment, apology, or action suitable for current issues.
  - d. The De-esc WG discusses appropriate length of probationary period or temporary ban, up to 48 hours.
  - e. The De-esc WG meets with said person to discuss the grievances campers have discussed.
  - f. The De-esc WG offers said person a chance to speak to discuss current issues, offer solutions, etc.
  - g. Upon reception of admittance and solutions, a 48-hour probationary period begins.
    - i. In case of theft, the 48-hour probationary period does not begin until the reception of lost goods or cash. Unless the reception of goods or cash takes place, the person is temporarily banned.
  - h. After 48 hours are up, the De-esc WG re-evaluates and examines the situation.
3. Before anyone is banned, the De-esc WG will supply them with a list of resources (shelters, soup kitchens, and so on). The new De-escalation procedure is:
  - a. In all cases, we will act with compassion and respect for all people involved.
  - b. When a person breaks a group agreement, engage the person in a personal conversation.

- c. Tell the person they can be asked to leave the camp. Or, if the broken agreement endangers the safety of the camp, de-escalators will go straight to asking the person to leave.
  - d. Ask the person to leave the camp until the next morning or the next camp meeting. The consensus of the people present at the camp is required before asking the person to leave.
  - e. Ask the person to permanently disassociate themselves from the camp once the GA approves.
4. Any individual can ban someone until the person in question makes their case at GA.

Both the consequences for violating rules and de-escalation procedures were ignored at various points in time. According to my field notes, all people forgiven for breaking rules were white; black members were only ever banned, never forgiven. For example, theft was deemed early on as “unforgivable,” yet one white male Occupier was forgiven and allowed to continue participating. While cash donations were not allowed to be accepted on-site (to prevent theft), Mal announced once that she had accepted cash and no one seemed to have a problem with it. Lissa, as the next chapter will detail, admitted to incidents of violence and to being inebriated on-site and was never banned. Two white male campers were frequently drunk and fought with one another, but they were always welcome on-site.

In one incident perhaps most telling of a race-based double-standard, one white male camper, Jared, was involved in an incidence of violence with a black female camper, Clarice—Clarice was banned, while Jared was not. The story I was able to document (primarily from Clarice herself; Jared was present but did not add to or alter the story) was that Jared arrived at the camp on-foot to find Clarice squatting and urinating on the running boards of his vehicle—or so he thought. Clarice insisted that, because the portable toilet on-site had been continuously occupied, she asked Mitch to cover her while she squatted and

relieved herself outside. “It was bad enough that I went outside anyway, but I won’t do it on someone’s vehicle,” she explained, defending her actions. The dispute was sent to the De-esc WG, and after talking with them, Clarice agreed to stay away from Jared. Later that evening, though, Clarice was playing a radio too loudly for Jared’s liking, and after she ignored his requests to turn down the volume, uninvited, he entered her tent to turn down the volume himself. According to Clarice, Jared, and a witness, Jared pushed Clarice, and De-esc WG members rushed over to prevent a fight. After about 10 minutes of separation, Clarice walked over to Jared and hit him in return.

When the GA discussed banning Clarice, she cried, explained how much Occupy meant to her, took full responsibility for urinating outside, promised never to be drunk on-site, apologized profusely to Jared (who was present and apologized to her in exchange) even though she “felt a certain way about a man putting his hands on a woman in the first place because [she] watched [her] dad beat [her] mom,” and asked the group not to ban her as she had nowhere else to go. The group did ban her, however, at which point she asked if her ban could start the following morning so she could sleep in her tent on this cold and rainy night; the group denied her request.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Incidentally, some were also upset with Clarice for making transphobic remarks during a separate incident. The group decided to host a teach-in on transphobia (that, to my knowledge, never happened anyway), and when Clarice asked if she could come to the teach-in to learn, they told her she could not, as it was being held at the camp, the very space she was banned from visiting. I consider Clarice’s ban and the lack of permission to attend a teach-in a missed opportunity for genuine change. At one point, the group considered banning a homeless black male camper who could be a little vulgar with his language, especially with women—but, a very patient David led a long conversation between this man and other group members who expressed how the man’s language made them feel, and he demonstrated an understanding of how his remarks had been sexist and a sincere desire to change. Over time, he worked hard to make everyone feel at ease around him, and he participated with the group for a long time. Once, he made a comment during a GA that was described as “very insightful,” and he leaned over to me and said with pride, “See, growth,” and winked.

Finally, Clarice asked the group for equal treatment: “I feel like if I get in trouble, [Jared] should, too.” Additionally, the witness to Clarice and Jared’s fight brought up the violations of rules against drunkenness and fighting by other white campers. Though I was not on-site when Clarice and Jared fought the night before, I was on-site later that night and witnessed two other white campers—the pair who, at times, fought with one another—drunk and violent, and yet no one had discussed banning them. The witness to Clarice and Jared’s fight said as much in the GA, and still these two white men did not become the center of discussion of a ban. The witness argued at the GA:

This incident [between Jared and Clarice] did not happen in isolation. It’s easy to point at individuals when things go wrong, to say there’s a lack of morals or a problem of discipline...These incidents [last night] made me extremely uncomfortable. I feel hypocritical in passing judgment on this issue when we allow others to act in very similar ways...We can’t pretend we are sticking to our values of treating everybody equally if we pick and choose who we enact our philosophies upon.

As this case demonstrates, white Occupiers were not held accountable to rules and de-escalation procedures in the same ways that black campers were. The rules, it turned out, were contingent upon the race of the rule-breaker, much like the rules at an elementary school Ferguson (2000) observed wherein black male students were disproportionately punished.

Before I move on with a discussion of how rules were rationalized and what happened to rule-breakers, it is worth noting that, just as the meaning of the word

“autonomy” shifted over time (discussed in the previous chapter), so too did the meaning of the word “de-escalate.” At the start of the Occupation, the De-esc WG was formed to de-escalate, or cool off, those who were angry and needed an intervention to ward off violence. By the end of the Occupation, however, the word became shorthand for “subjected to the rule-violation protocol.” (So, for example, someone might say, “he was de-escalated last night,” meaning, “he broke a rule and we began the process of implementing consequences,” not necessarily meaning, “he was angry and so needed to be calmed down.”)

Not all rules had to be rationalized before the group. Some, especially when the group was still on the sidewalk, were merely announced at a General Assembly and the group accepted the authority of the person or working group making the announcement. Others were made at the discretion of an authorized working group and did not need to be approved by the General Assembly, especially before the GA officially incorporated the camp as part of OC. Many, however, came through the GA and were subjected to the process of debate, clarification, and justification. Some were justified on the basis of “safety” and made for the sake of “children.” Others were justified on the basis of the camp being the public face of OC and needing to represent a positive image. Both of these rationalizations appealed to the narratives that I have argued were advanced by the anti-camp crew.

Yet other rules were contested and involved conflicting principles. Most often, Occupiers debated whether a rule violated someone’s autonomy, freedom, or civil liberties, or resembled the kind of overbearing policy the state might make. For example, when a proposal was made to keep a logbook of participants on-site, David cautioned against viewing this as an example of the Occupation stepping on freedoms and instead urged people

to see the policy as a simple and innocent record-keeping matter: “This is not the beginning of a police state where you have to have a wrist band to walk in the door. It’s just to generally get an idea of how many people are on-site.” Proposals that restricted campers’ autonomy routinely passed, despite critiques they were too restrictive or the kinds of policies from which the 1% have benefitted. For instance, when Jaime announced that members of the De-esc WG would be vetting campers against the sex offender registry after one anti-camp woman discovered that Jared was on it, Lissa implored her to understand that “forming this policy is the type of governing that’s fucked up the world. It’s too severe to form a policy like this in response to an incident.” She argued that some people had valid reasons to avoid sharing their legal name (she, as a transwoman, preferred that no one knew the masculine name she was assigned at birth) and that forcing them to share could result in excluding them from the group if they did not comply. A man argued in favor of the policy (which, as an “autonomous” action taken on behalf of De-esc WG members, did not need to pass as a proposal through the GA), asserting that autonomy was not to be granted to those who had made bad choices: “Someone in my family was convicted of a sex offense. That’s his problem. He has to pay for his bad choices. I understand your desire to be inclusive. But who are you including? One sex offender, or everyone else who can’t otherwise come here while one sex offender is here?” After a bit more objection to the policy by Lissa, Ricky said, “Let’s move on,” and Lissa replied, “Good, because this is bullshit.” The discourse that rationalized rules focused on personal responsibility and whether people made good or bad choices.

Similarly, sometimes offenders were asked if they could account for their behavior in individualistic ways. When one camper stole money from a donation, after prompting he accounted by telling the GA, “I have no family. I was neglected... I have a tendency to forget things I am told. I have ADD. I also have bipolar and brain damage. I never really tell anybody. I have a problem with myself. I can’t comprehend certain things very well. When I was born, my umbilical cord was wrapped around me.” The facilitator accepted his account, responding, “Thank you for telling us. That makes a difference.” Individualistic accounts depoliticized race and class inequality, and Occupiers focused on why individuals might make “bad choices” outside of a sociological context. Occupiers frequently argued that they could not help rule-breakers because they “were not social workers.”

One camper, Seth, said that the rules reflected a white, middle-class subjectivity. He did so when the group considered adopting a rule that no one was to consume alcohol or use drugs “in the vicinity” of the camp. The proposal included language that defined “the vicinity” broadly: “These agreements apply to the encampment and surrounding areas, including the parking area and anywhere your behavior may reflect on the camp. If you can see it from here, it’s part of the camp.” Seth—who lived with his girlfriend when their relationship was peaceful but was homeless during long periods of time that he and his girlfriend were at odds, including during most of the Occupation—reacted immediately by proclaiming the proposal “bullshit”; he challenged the property boundaries and the group’s “jurisdiction” over behavior outside of the property their lease controlled. Others tried to justify the expansive language by arguing that a passerby witnessing someone consuming substances in the parking lot would reasonably assume that person was an Occupier and so

the behavior would reflect badly on the group. Seth said the group was getting “overzealous” in their efforts to “control people,” just as the 1% were doing: “We’re out here trying to solve that issue now.” Further, he argued that by defining what reflects poorly on someone, “You’re always trying to make rules about what is socially acceptable for you, even if it’s not socially acceptable for me.... I see certain factions trying to impose rules on other people’s rights.” When no one would come around to Seth’s point of view, he declared, “I’m done crying about my personal rights,” and the group passed the proposal.

In this instance, the group engaged Seth’s concerns (even if they did not end up agreeing with him), other times, however, campers’ concerns were ignored. Campers were often characterized as the perpetrators rather than victims; the rules were adopted to protect others from the campers, not necessarily to protect the campers themselves. For example, despite the rule that anyone who entered another’s tent would be treated as a thief, Jace complained at one GA that earlier that morning, “personal belongings and tents were mishandled. They were packed up [and] moved, without consensus.” After ascertaining that no one was missing any belongings, anti-camper Marcus tried to close the conversation by saying, “I think that conversation would normally be had in a de-esc meeting and not part of GA.” Likely trying to soften the brush-off, Oliver offered that Jace could bring this concern up at the next “camp concerns” meeting a few days later. Dismayed at the idea that the group would not assist him, Jace insisted, “This is very important to us [campers]. We’re out here. It’s important.” When the feedback he received was that the camp was about to close anyway and so this issue did not really need to be handled, Jace declared, “I’m done.” Thus, while anti-campers were often zealous in their efforts to impose rules and punish rule-breakers,

their concerns resided primarily with protecting non-campers and making the camp inviting and family friendly to the mainstream.

Female anti-campers were often the driving force behind ideas to establish control over the camp and campers. They expressed the most dismay about what they perceived as widespread problems with the campers' behavior, such as frequent swearing, drinking and arguments over belongings. They also expressed concerns about their vulnerability as women. At the women's meeting held in January 2012 to discuss concerns about campers, a few women proposed solutions that involved a considerable degree of micromanagement. One woman proposed that there be "clearly-stated roles, responsibilities, and schedules" for campers, including "putting together a schedule and maybe even a menu." LeeAnn, presuming that "everyone needs their own quiet time," suggested that the men use the library tent to "do puzzles." Enforcing a set menu and imposing puzzle time were the kinds of paternalistic solutions suggested for campers that were never suggested for non-campers. Through these proposals and others, anti-campers suggested that if these men could just make the right decisions, such as taking some "quiet time" to do a puzzle, they would be eligible for the label of "deserving."

While it might be hard to enforce something like puzzle time, Occupiers found that they had one means of enforcing rules that was not available to them on a public sidewalk but available at a private, rented campsite: calling the police. They now had the power to call the police and have someone removed from the space or arrested for trespassing. This power was especially useful for campers with little authority or capital who otherwise found that people did not always listen to them when they tried to enforce rules. As Simon once

pondered, “When the police came here, it was a camper that called the police. What was the camper supposed to do? He [had already] told the people to leave.” Yet, calling the police to ban someone from the site was also broadly endorsed by the group. Once the De-esc WG had fulfilled its obligation to “de-escalate” a rule-breaker, calling the police was deemed an acceptable solution to deal with further rule violations, with little conversation about how involvement with the legal system might impact an already-disenfranchised camper. As Foucault (1980:47) asked, “What makes the presence and control of the police tolerable for the population, if not fear of the criminal?” There was also no conversation about how some campers might be more subject to this form of social control than others. Especially near the end of the camping phase, when campers were trying desperately to keep order and delegitimize anti-campers’ claims that the camp was a threat to everyone’s safety, “blue light de-escalations,” as they came to be called thanks to the blue lights on police vehicles, became more common. While Occupiers once actively resisted police power (for example, the group passed a proposal that if the police told them again to remove everything from the sidewalk, they would not comply) and made posters like the one pictured below in which a cop is depicted beating a (white) protestor, they eventually came to accept and rely upon police power—placing posters stating camp rules (see Figure 4 below) just beside such political posters (see Figure 3 below) in the library tent. While efforts had been made to rescue some Occupiers from jail for crimes unrelated to protests (e.g., Lindsey was arrested for owing child support to her child’s father, and the group collected \$700 for her bail payment), no one assisted anyone jailed in a de-escalation, to my knowledge.

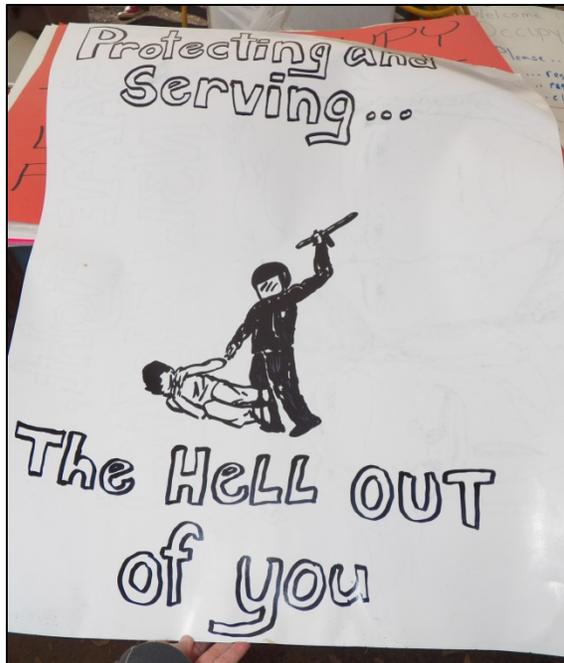


Figure 3. A political poster.

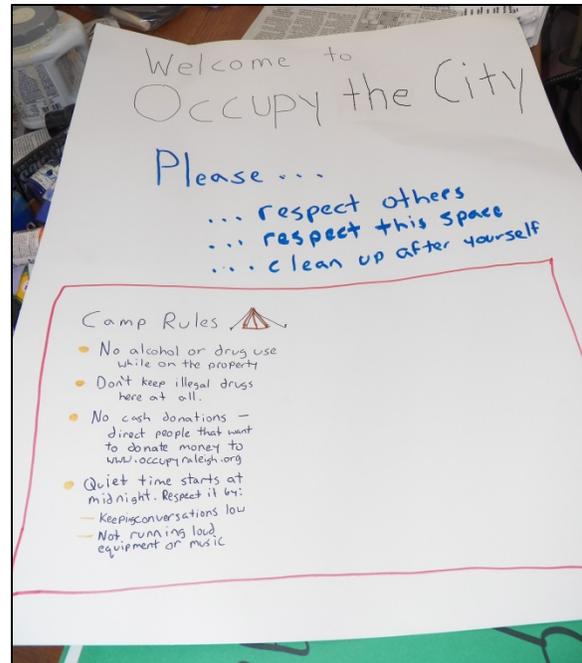


Figure 4. A poster stating camp rules.

After a “blue light de-escalation,” a person was sometimes banned from the site: the leaseholder could trespass someone through a magistrate, but the police also had the authority—or at least, convinced the campers they did—to ban someone from the site at the request of the group. Other times, Occupiers banned rule violators from coming onto the camp’s property (informally, through the GA, or formally, through a magistrate) or even participating in any OC events off-site. Banning was seemingly taken seriously by all members as the most extreme form of revoking someone’s citizenship in the Occupy community, even though disagreements occurred over what or who deserved banning. Initially, the De-esc WG had the power to ban an individual temporarily or permanently; eventually, it became a rule that bans could be passed only through the GA. (One work-around was that the De-esc WG would issue a temporary ban. Quite often, the offender, for

whatever reason, did not want to deal with appealing to the GA and so would simply leave and never return, giving the De-esc WG de facto power to push someone out permanently.) Every person who was banned (temporarily or permanently) after breaking a rule was homeless. I recorded at least a dozen bans in my field notes, not including a report of a ban on a whole group of people (executed by a fed-up Henry) just days before the camp closed, of which I was never able to get details. Reasons for bans varied, though most involved drugs or alcohol and fighting. Stealing from group donations, threats of fighting, drunkenness, assaults, and the subjective “failure to maintain personal space” were all cited as reasons for banning someone (to my knowledge, each account of rule-breaking resulting in a ban did reflect an incident that actually occurred; in other words, no one was banned for behavior that wasn’t proven). However, as I discussed above, the rules were not always equally applied.

The rules the group created and the processes of enforcement severely restricted the autonomy of campers and even, in some cases, resulted in excluding people from the movement. Thus, I argue that autonomy is tied to citizenship, and members who are deemed bad citizens (due to a combination of their own rule-breaking and racial bias on behalf of the person judging them) are given little of it. Through the use of coded language, the processes of establishing who was a moocher and suspending autonomy for the “undeserving” were depoliticized: Occupiers focused on an individual’s choices, given that it is now socially unacceptable to judge someone on the basis of race and only acceptable to judge on the basis of behavior—behavior that is shaped by processes of racialization, even while people are no longer supposed to see it. Autonomy, then, is relational in nature and is a privilege to be

extended or revoked. Group process can create an autonomy that is racialized, gendered, and classed.

## CONCLUSION

The state's emphasis on the cleanliness of the sidewalk and the challenges of occupying the sidewalk, combined with a scarcity of resources, led the group to accept settling on land acquired through a participation in the rent economy. The case of OC demonstrates how a repressive state may push groups into contentious decisions that, once members are consumed with these decisions, diminish the group's likelihood of achieving their political goals, and so social movement organizations must, early on, consent to shared values. Early on, the broad frames of cleanliness and filth informed the micro dynamics I observed, and Occupiers were not committed to rejecting the ideology of the state; instead, some came to adopt the state's perspective, and there was no recourse to be found in an emphasis on ideological alignment among members. Elite anti-camp Occupiers mimicked the state's political repulsion (Liboiron 2012) and invoked an opposition to filth and the people allegedly responsible for it.

The practices the anti-campers engaged in—framing the campers as undeserving moochers and invoking the risk imaginary—were tactics for achieving two goals: redirecting group resources away from the camp and toward other projects, and growing the movement by recruiting white, middle-class people instead of members of marginalized groups who, perhaps more than anyone, have felt the effects of capitalism. One member, Eli, was outspoken in his criticisms of the goal to attract “mainstream” people. Eli posted this kind of

message frequently: “It is time to realize we cannot control how the media frame us by dressing in suits and looking respectable. The only way to get what we want is by moving left and building a strong movement. To do that we need to involve more, many more, African-Americans and Latinos.” One black woman, Millicent, who attended just a few meetings, quickly articulated this expression of how the group alienated those they othered:

We have the 1% and 99%, but I feel like there’s a division in the 99%, and some of it’s based on class. If you can’t get along with someone who is at the bottom, or of a different sexual orientation, there’s so much strife, and the camp is a mini-mural of what’s going on in the organization. That’s why we can’t do anything. I see a lot of people come in, and as soon as they come in, they leave, because people are not trying to include people who are not like their clique.

Despite these and other criticisms that the group was not inclusive of members of oppressed groups, the anti-camp crew was effective in their campaign to rid the group of “undesirable elements,” erode the liberty of campers, and eventually shut down the camp, thanks to tactics that made it difficult to rebut, like focusing on the threat the campers presented to vulnerable children. One night in a meeting, LeeAnn said, “The camp was about fear, because we were scared—and I’m saying ‘we’ because many times I’ve been against [the camp]—but when bad things were happening here, we were like, ‘If something really bad happened here, it would have destroyed OC.’” Henry, responded, “That’s hypothetical. We can build on, ‘Nothing bad did happen.’ [The camp] didn’t destroy OC. OC destroyed itself.” The discursive tactics practiced by privileged anti-campers further marginalized members of

oppressed groups and led to self-selection and homogeneity, outcomes that are counterproductive to social movement organizations' goal to grow a mass movement and, ultimately, to the Occupy movement's goal of representing the 99%.

Anti-campers advanced colorblind racism and a populist logic of inclusion (Maharawal 2013) in which “the 99%” is a taken-for-granted category of which all Occupiers are already, and equally, members. The presumption that there is a “we” in the 99% obscures large class and race differences and lived experiences between members. Social movement organizations must be mindful of these inequalities and aware of privilege and othering and develop strategies to counter them. Such strategies—to be discussed more in the final chapter of the dissertation—may include awareness of how disenfranchised members might become scapegoats for group problems and paying attention to the ways white, middle-class members alienate others with race- and class-based coded language.

Leondar-Wright (2014) describes three types of movement cultures, two of which are a culture of avoidance (turning a blind eye to conflict and pretending it does not exist in formal venues, like meetings) and a fight culture (the tendency to address conflicts head-on). She argues that movements are fluid and can alternate between cultures at various points in time. I, however, saw both cultures within OC at the same time: when it came to elites' bad behaviors, there was a culture of avoidance, yet fight culture was fully in play when it came to campers' bad behaviors. While it may seem like most group problems came from campers, the next chapter will explore elites' bad behaviors and analyze how differently they were treated by the group.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**“THE RULES WERE NEVER THE SAME FOR EVERYBODY”:  
INFORMAL ELITES AND THE ESCAPE OF CONSEQUENCES**

The previous chapter showed that Occupy the City made many rules and even banned people. In this chapter, I offer a contrasting case: how OC handled a more privileged group of Occupiers who posed a threat to the success of the Occupation in ways that never ended up being regulated by the group. I ask how the elites escaped regulation and what consequences their escape had for democracy. I open this chapter with a story to illustrate the kinds of destructive behaviors that elites—both pro-camp and anti-camp—engaged in and got away with and how they undermined the group’s commitment to democracy. As this story will show, Ricky, in addition to campaigning against the camp (as we saw in the previous chapter), instigated the single most important catalyst in the camp closure by trying to close it in secret, subverting the General Assembly’s power to make decisions.

During February of 2012, the month that I was the leaseholder for the camp (a little over two months after its inception and a week after Ricky’s proposal to de-endorse the camp failed), Ricky called me to say that he and two other Occupiers (Marcus and Wendy) were meeting at Wendy’s house to talk about the camp, and I was invited (“We have some ideas we’d like to run by you,” he said). I am not sure if Ricky invited me because I was the leaseholder; as a researcher, many people would call me to tell me about things I had missed or make sure I knew of future happenings so I could be present. Ricky frequently forwarded me information with little notes like, “For your research.” He may have invited me to this meeting as the leaseholder, as a researcher, or as a fellow Occupier who might be (or might

be turned into) an ally in his plan. Upon arriving at the meeting, I was surprised to find that Ricky and the other two had devised a plan in the previous days to shut down the camp “without going to GA” (Ricky ensured the notes I was taking on the meeting were not minutes that would be posted on the group’s website). The plan was to convince the landlord that it was an unsafe environment (“I’m concerned that soon there will be an assault or maybe even a murder,” Ricky said, and so this plan was in the interest of “saving a life”<sup>42</sup>) and that, if anyone should get hurt on-site, the landlord might be sued, so it was in his best interest to “sign in blood that he will not renew the lease in March” and evict the campers.

Stunned, I agreed to go with Ricky to talk to the landlord so that I could document the conversation for my field notes.<sup>43</sup> I listened as Ricky explained to the landlord that, since transparency was a core value of the movement, he “felt [he] needed to tell [the landlord] some things.” He continued, “We’re concerned about your liability and that you’ll experience a permanent insurance hike” and told the landlord that “we” wanted “to cut the cord” yet the group would not agree to close the camp through the GA. Ricky told the landlord, “What we really want is for you to pull the lease and just say that you got wind of things that were going on at the camp—but don’t say where it came from—and you can no longer support us.” Ricky asked the landlord to evict the campers by pulling the lease that very day, but the landlord informed Ricky that eviction was a process that typically involved taking a tenant to court, and he was not sure what he could do, legally, until the end of the lease.

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<sup>42</sup> When I asked him if he knew of anyone planning these things, he said he did not.

<sup>43</sup> I explained to the group that I was concerned about my ability as a field researcher to maintain good connections if pro-camp Occupiers found out I accompanied Ricky; he, Wendy, and Marcus promised to tell no one that I had witnessed this conversation without stopping it or telling others about it.

The landlord then called his lawyer to learn how to go about legally evicting his tenant(s). He explained that “a few of the core group” were concerned about “undesirable campers” and wanted to disband and asked the lawyer if he could evict today, but the lawyer told him he must give one week’s written notice of eviction, which he could do by posting notices on the trees at the camp. The landlord agreed that he would evict the campers and, since Ricky asked him to give a “positive” reason that would allow OC to save face in the press (an eviction due to extreme safety concerns would not), said he would cite sanitation as the reason if pressed. He shared that he would go to the camp to post eviction notices the following morning, so I made sure to be present.

When the landlord arrived at the camp and posted eviction notices, the campers pressed him for a reason. When Evan (a white camper in his 20s who took the lead in speaking to the landlord) asked if there was any way the camp could stay open, the landlord said yes—they could procure insurance. The landlord told Evan and the campers he “had no problems leasing to you guys, but [he had] a family and [he] can’t get wrapped up in things”—there was no insurance for the site and he needed to protect himself. He said Occupiers could purchase an insurance policy that would cost about \$1,000 and had to be procured in the next 14 days. Evan told the landlord he “seemed like a good guy” and that the group would procure a policy. As the landlord was leaving, he pulled me aside (which did not appear to seem suspicious to the Occupiers present since I was the lease-holder that month) to apologize if he gave the group “false hope.”

After a few days of scrambling, an anonymous donor came through with the money needed for insurance. OC’s Statement of Autonomy said that only the GA could decide how

to spend the money, not the donors themselves, so Lissa proposed to the GA that the group use the \$1,000 donation to purchase insurance for the camp. Immediately after (within the same GA), a proposal was brought by an anti-camper to *not* use the donation for insurance. In this contentious GA, people questioned why the camp existed at all, whether the campers were “pulling their weight,” whether money should be invested in resources other than the camp, and what the principles of the movement were anymore. Though the proposal to use the money for insurance passed, this GA deepened the divide between factions, generated expressions of hurt feelings and resentment on both sides of the camp divide, and was filled with characterizations from anti-campers that cast the camp in an especially negative light. Within six weeks, the GA voted to close the camp.

Despite Ricky’s subversion of the GA process and his responsibility for tanking morale, he was never banned from OC. Thanks to this and other actions he engaged in, almost everyone was uncomfortable around him and many believed he had hurt the Occupation in numerous ways, even some who believed that he cared about the movement and was genuinely concerned about safety. Gabby, for instance, often shared Ricky’s concerns about the camp(ers), but even she conceded that he seemed to be motivated less by “the good of Occupy” and more by a desire for power. Speaking of a few particular elite members of OC, she said, “We didn’t always agree on everything, but I felt that they kind of had the good of Occupy in mind...Ricky, I don’t know? Sometimes it felt like he was kind of making a power play.” Yet the GA, having never made rules against the kinds of actions Ricky engaged in, had no way of framing a decision to eject him from what was called an “inclusive” movement. Consistently during my fieldwork, white, middle-class informal elites

in the group engaged in harmful actions, such as subverting movement values by creating exclusive affinity groups, spreading gossip, and withholding resources. These actions reduced morale and caused in-fighting, but violated no explicit rules. I argue in this chapter that the rules in OC favored elites and I uncover some of the processes by which the elite escaped consequences: controlling resources, closing ranks, and co-opting venues for grievances. I also show that *non*-elites also engaged in burnishing elites' reputations when they were in trouble.

These processes, I argue, undermined the group's ability to function as a true democracy (their ideal) and instead enabled an oligarchy. The discrepancy in treatment between elites and campers mirrors broader inequality schemas in the U.S., where those with power can "rig the game" (Schwalbe 2008) by writing rules in their favor and blocking those that restrict their desires or punish their behaviors. While Occupiers critiqued the 1% of wealthiest Americans, their behaviors, and mainstream beliefs about power, the group itself became an oligarchy—all the while claiming to be democratic. Just as the movement value of autonomy was subverted by elites, so too was the principle of participatory democracy, as a minority came to control resources, disproportionately occupy important roles, and influence decision-making. The group mobilized rhetoric—that of "inclusivity"—to cater to elite members, even while ejecting marginalized members.

In what follows, I argue that elites benefitted not only from never having rules made about their behavior, but also benefitted from never being punished, like campers, when their behavior angered or upset others. These movement elites engaged in three processes that "real" elites in our society also engage in to maintain their status and privilege: controlling

resources, closing ranks, and co-opting and eliminating venues for grievances. I develop “closing ranks” in particular as a form of boundary maintenance, and I also describe how non-elite members assisted in burnishing elites’ reputations, trading power for patronage. My analysis is thus in conversation with and adds to Schwalbe et al.’s (2000) generic processes of inequality. In addition, I draw on theories of oligarchy (Leach 2005; Michels 1962; Turner 1991) to show that even activist organizations that aim for pure democracy may become more akin to oligarchy in the context of scarce resources and slow, consensus-based decision-making processes.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Occupiers sometimes compared the group—its members and processes—to that of mainstream society riddled with inequality. Recall from the previous chapter, for example, that Seth accused anti-campers of being just like the 1% in their efforts to control people, and Lissa, critiquing reactionary and oppressive camp policies, equated those policies with policies of a repressive state. In many ways, these comparisons held water. Both Occupy the City and the United States pride themselves on being democracies. At the same time, both have elite members who exert disproportional influence over important decisions and get away with bad behavior. Even as part of a resistance movement, the group resembled the mainstream it rejected. Therefore, the analysis in this chapter is informed by literature on generic processes of the reproduction of inequality. It is also informed by literature on democracies and oligarchies.

Much research on the reproduction of inequality focuses on the behaviors of subordinates, leaving a gap in our understanding of inequality: what do elites do to reproduce inequality (Schwalbe et al. 2000)? This chapter addresses this gap. Through a thorough review of the existing literature, Schwalbe et al. (2000) identified several generic processes that elites engage in, namely, othering, boundary maintenance, and emotion management. While the previous chapter demonstrated how elite Occupiers engaged in othering the campers, in this chapter, I show how movement elites erected and maintained boundaries between themselves and campers and managed emotion.

Boundary maintenance, according to Schwalbe et al. (2000), happens in a few ways. Sometimes elites ensure the transmission of cultural capital amongst themselves, specifically cultural capital that is highly valued and separates them from subordinates whose cultural capital is devalued. Elites also control access to “the key networks through which information is traded, decisions and deals are made, and rewards are disbursed” (Schwalbe et al. 2000:432). Occasionally, these boundaries are protected by the use of violence, or at least the threat of it. I add to these tactics that of closing ranks, or garnering the support of other elites at times of criticism. Elites can protect one another by insulating each other from criticism, reminding subordinates of the valuable contributions each has made to the group (resources that would be lost if elites stopped participating), and standing in solidarity with one another. Closing ranks, then, is one way to create and preserve a “we” against a “you,” signify alliance, and differentiate one group from another on the basis of value to the organization.

Once acquired, elites preserve their status by “rigging the game” (Schwalbe 2008). Elites may become the state or “capture” the state, meaning they “exercise dominant influence over the making, interpreting, and enforcing of laws and policies” (Schwalbe 2008:58). Elites may also capture the means of administration of a society. That is, they may occupy key roles in the bodies in charge of making and interpreting rules, deciding how and whether to enforce which rules, and distributing resources. Capturing the state or the means of administration allows them to make rules in their favor and prevent rules that restrict their privileges from being made. I observed similar dynamics in Occupy the City and show in this chapter how elite Occupiers captured the state (the GA) and the means of administration (working groups) to exert disproportionate influence.

When a small minority is able to exert disproportionate influence over a group, the group becomes an oligarchy. Leach’s (2005) article about oligarchies across organizational forms—including democratic and collectivist organizations—was especially informative for this analysis. Leach defines an oligarchy as “a concentration of entrenched illegitimate authority and/or influence in the hands of a minority, such that de facto what that minority wants is generally what comes to pass, even when it goes against the wishes (whether actively or passively expressed) of the majority” (2005:329). According to this definition, even organizations like OC, in which every member has veto power, can become oligarchies when a minority is able to exert power (what I have, to this point, been calling “disproportionate influence”).

Indeed, Michels (1962) predicted in his 1911 book that social movement organizations *will* become oligarchies, because, he asserts, *all* organizations become

oligarchies. Is his assertion correct? Leach (2005:312) points out that “despite almost a century of scholarly debate on this question, however, there is still no consensus about whether and under what conditions Michels’s claim holds true.” My research, then, becomes another piece in a larger puzzle. Leach (2005:313-314) explains that scholars need to study organizations like OC to test whether oligarchy arises in all organizations, even small, nonbureaucratic ones:

In the 1980s, a few scholars began to criticize the exclusive focus in the iron law literature on formal bureaucratic organizations. They challenged Michels on the basis of his foundational assumption that all organizations would take on a bureaucratic structure. Even though his primary referent, the German Social Democratic Party, was in fact a large-scale bureaucratic organization, Michels explicitly stated that he was talking about all types of nominally democratic organizations...Critics felt that the wave of workers’ collectives, communes, cooperatives, and political groups born of the New Left’s commitment to participatory democracy could pose a serious challenge to the iron law, yet because nonbureaucratic organizations were being perceived as disorganized rather than differently organized, these potentially exceptional cases were falling through a theoretical loophole.

As readers will see in this chapter, OC was not immune from oligarchy, despite its structure.

A small minority was able to exercise illegitimate power.

While we typically think of the majority having power and the minority having influence, Leach calls for sociologists to conceptualize minority *power*. Groups in which a minority holds power exhibit signs typical of an oligarchy when that power is come by illegitimately, by “using means that are not officially sanctioned to squelch dissent” (Leach 2005:326), some of which include “lack of leadership turnover, minority control of resources, and low levels of participation in governance” (Leach 2005:316). Once a minority has power in an oligarchy, the minority will use undemocratic means to keep that power. They might use a few commonly-known “moves” in social movement organizations, such as installing a particular facilitator who will favor them or even postpone decisions until a time when they can garner more support (Haug and Rucht 2015). These “moves” fit within the structure of consensus-based groups and so do not appear to be against the rules, yet they undermine democracy nonetheless. I therefore put forth here that the structure and decision-making processes of a democratic organization can still encourage oligarchy, as happened in OC.

#### ESCAPE OF CONSEQUENCES

In Occupy the City, elites—a status that only about 10 Occupiers ever achieved, permanently (like Mal and James) or temporarily (like David and Sandy)—escaped punishment for a great range of behavior. Their “crimes” were both small, such as speaking disrespectfully to others, and large, like Ricky’s collusion with the landlord. Despite the praise they received from non-elites, I also heard non-elites express anger with them and other negative emotions many times. These revelations often occurred in private, be it a

formal interview or a phone call from someone who wanted to gossip, but sometimes also played out on the forums. Through these discussions, I learned that Occupiers considered the some of the elites' behavior not just offensive, but destructive to the movement. The destruction usually took the form of costing the group resources (including members) and bringing down morale.

For example, Samuel became enraged when he found out that Carmen, a founding member who helped plan the kick-off rally and gained elite status through her early involvement, had taken responsibility for handling emails sent to the group and then seemingly neglected that responsibility. He gained access to the email account a few months into the Occupation and logged in to find that hundreds of emails had not been responded to and, indeed, had never been opened. Upon confronting Carmen about this neglect, she revealed to him that she had set up the account so that all emails received would be forwarded to her personal account. Though she tried to reassure Samuel (and others) that she had read and responded to emails and he simply could not see that without accessing her personal account, Samuel was dismayed that Carmen had violated a commitment to transparency (an ideal of the movement) and concerned that Carmen was exerting so much control over the email account. (I will analyze later how this incident was discussed and handled.)

After taking over the email account himself and working on it for a few months, Samuel quit this job when he found out that Carmen also tried to get the man who donated the portable toilet to secretly remove it from the camp without the group's knowledge or consent. When he announced he would no longer be tending to the email at a GA, he said:

I've become disillusioned with OC. I have mistrust for some people here. I feel like, who needs to worry about the 1% when we have Occupiers using 1% tactics against each other?...Someone [tried] to pull the porta-potty to close down the camp and not [go] through the GA. The 1% literally did that to Occupations... I've spent so much of my own money [on this Occupation] that I can't afford. I've been unemployed the whole time and yet I've put in as much money as anyone here...But the biggest problem I have is, there's no solidarity. And that's the only thing grassroots movements have, is trusting the person next to you, and I don't feel like I can trust quite a few people.

Samuel withdrew not only his labor, but his funds, as a result of his frustration over Carmen's actions. While anti-camp elites focused on the camp as the source of all the group's problems, pointing to the campers as the reason people quit participating in OC, I watched as the group lost members (on both sides of the camp divide) and money from people who said they were leaving due to the elites' behavior. Yet, while rule after rule was made to regulate the camp, no rules were made to regulate elites. As campers were put on "probation" and banned, elites faced no similar sanctions.

Elites played an outsized role in the movement and left a lasting impression. Gabby directly connected her decision to leave with elites. In her interview, she revealed feeling uncomfortable around Mal and James, who she felt were rude to her and others and were only nice when they needed something from someone:

I just always felt like really, I felt threatened. I really did, even though they didn't say anything directly to me, but just always felt like they were trying to

sabotage kind of anything that wasn't going to get them something. I mean, even at the home defense, I remember [the homeowner and I were] being interviewed [by a news crew] on camera, and Mal stood behind us while we were being interviewed and said, "I'm bored." Things like that, disrespectful, rude, not appropriate, etc.... I always felt [like], "goddamn."

When she heard that Mal and James had quit participating in the group, Gabby decided to attend one of OC's "conventions" in the summer of 2012 in light of the clique leaders not being there: "That was a motivation for—that made me feel more like attending, because I thought they wouldn't be there." Yet, Mal and James also attended the convention, and Gabby did not come back to the group once she had spent the day with them again. Rather than continuing to invest in OC, Gabby directed her efforts to another group fighting the big banks on behalf of the 99%.

Samuel and Gabby joined the ranks of people who connected their decision to quit directly to elites they believed were behaving badly. Yet, if the elites upset members and led some to quit, why weren't their actions regulated given that the restriction of autonomy was actually common in the movement (as demonstrated in the previous chapter)? I now turn to the processes elites and others engaged in that protected elites from facing consequences for their behavior: controlling resources; closing ranks and burnishing reputations; and co-opting and eliminating venues for grievances.

## Controlling Resources

Recall from the previous chapter that after the first several weeks of the Occupation donations from the public virtually ceased, leaving Occupiers—in the absence of fundraising attempts—to budget what was left in the general fund and otherwise fund the movement themselves. Just as capitalists are praised as “job creators” in need of lenient tax codes to keep jobs in America, the informal elite of OC were able to escape official sanctioning in part because of the valuable resources they emphasized they contributed in the context of scarcity (even if they also harmed the movement at the same time). No one was willing to ban bad behavior, or even just collectively address behavior that made members feel uncomfortable, enacted by those who contributed and controlled a great deal of money and resources. In OC, the dominant culture of ownership trumped a culture of collectivism: as individuals purchased resources for the group with their own money (rather than group money), they felt entitled to control those resources rather than allow the group to make decisions about the resources.<sup>44</sup> Minority control of resources—an indication of oligarchy—left Occupiers beholden to a few elites.

Valuable resources in OC included money, participants’ time, food, water, and camp supplies, and networks of communication (namely phone numbers and email addresses).

Elite members were able to provide and tap into those resources to keep the Occupation

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<sup>44</sup> Sometimes, a feeling of ownership applied to things that were not purchased with money—for example, Mal’s guarding of contact information (like phone numbers) for other members conveyed that she “owned” that information and had the right to decide whether to share it, as did Carmen’s guarding of the group’s email account (she was extremely reluctant to share the password to the email account, trying to convince others that she had handled all of the emails and so they did not need to check on the account, and dragging a conversation about the password out for days on end—once, when I hacked the account, she insisted she was “about to” send me the password later that night).

running. Elites like James, Mal, David, and Ricky contributed rent money and often provided supplies, like signs for protests, out-of-pocket; James, Mal, and David were also chosen by the GA to access the group's bank account via the fiscal sponsor<sup>45</sup> and so were able to purchase communal food, water, and other camp supplies like medicine and tarps. Given that they could afford cell phones and Internet access, elites, like Carmen, largely handled communications for the group, which ranged from emailing supporters to sending urgent news through a phone tree. Sometimes they guarded contact information, such as when I asked Mal for David's phone number early on; rather than giving it to me, she texted David a message on my behalf instead. All of these resources, of course, were acquired or utilized through elites' time—in other words, elites spent many hours of their days grocery shopping and cooking (arguably what Lissa spent the most time doing for the group), writing and sending press releases, and so on. This was a failure of organizational structure in OC: the loss of a single elite member meant the group's resources might take a huge hit.

One elite member who provided and controlled essential resources was Mal. Before the Occupy movement began, Mal was a stay-at-home mother who homeschooled her six-year-old daughter. When the Occupation started, Mal threw herself completely into the movement, ceasing her daughter's schooling and bringing the child with her to the camp during the day and most evenings and weekends. Mal, who donated to the camp rent each month, also provided transportation for several car-less Occupiers to get to work, and as a member of the Human Needs working group and a liaison to the fiscal sponsor, she routinely

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<sup>45</sup> Because OC wanted to remain an autonomous group, they were unwilling to incorporate as a non-profit or sign up for a bank account that only one or two individuals would have access to. Following in the footsteps of other Occupations, OC found a fiscal sponsor—a local, left-wing non-profit—who would hold and disburse their donations in legal ways that complied with tax codes.

ran errands for the camp, like procuring groceries. When OC began, Mal was a member of just three working groups; by the time she quit the group, she frequently advertised that she was in 14 working groups, and her influence had grown tremendously. Mal (and James, as the two essentially came as a pair and dominated all of the working groups) had successfully captured the means of administration (Schwalbe 2008) in OC.

When Mal did not want to bring her daughter along, she frequently left the child in the care of those at the camp. Mal was typically gone much longer than anticipated, leaving people in the uncomfortable position of needing to leave the camp but being unable to without abandoning the child. OC members often felt like Mal, who could be unfriendly unless a favor was being exchanged, “used” them for daycare. Upset members—mostly non-campers who found themselves waiting for Mal to return so they could go home—talked privately about feeling used, but they also expressed a desire to feel included in Mal’s exclusive clique. A sense of belonging turned out to be a pretty important “side bet” (Schwalbe 2008) riding on members’ participation in the group: members spoke routinely of how this group made them feel like part of a community. Samuel, for example, spoke often of being a bit of a “hermit” before joining the group and enjoying the new connections:

I had become a virtual hermit before Occupy because I’d gotten so fed up with how everything was going, and then when I tried to talk to people at work, my friends, and family, no one really seemed to care that much about what was going on...so I was like, “Well, if no one else is willing to talk about this, then fuck it. I’m not gonna put myself any further out there”...I literally spent probably 99 percent of my time at home...I didn’t realize how much I was

missing [being with people] until I started Occupying and realized, once I started feeling those interconnections again, I was like, “Wow, I really did miss this. I just didn’t realize it.” People like you and James and Mal and David and Dillon, it’s all like family now.

Enjoying their newfound sense of belonging, some non-elite members may have “traded power for patronage” (Schwalbe et al. 2000) and avoided confronting Mal out of fear that this might have precluded the possibility of being included later. They made comments about Mal running hot and cold (Trista remarked during her interview, “And she was fine and [she’d] call me out of the blue all of the sudden, ‘Well how are you doing?’ And then you knew when you would tell her, she really didn’t care, really didn’t wanna know.”) and indicated that they would make efforts to be included by Mal and become disheartened when she was cold to them. As OC fractured into affinity groups, belonging to an affinity group also meant a possibility for instant political action (the kind of action that the GA could be slow to organize), and Mal frequently bragged that the affinity group she belonged to was very active and perhaps the only group doing anything.<sup>46</sup>

Mal served for a time as the liaison between the Finance working group and the Occupation’s fiscal sponsor and was responsible for holding \$500 of the group’s cash each month, buying food, and turning in receipts to the group’s fiscal sponsor for reimbursements.

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<sup>46</sup> Mal had a tendency to eviscerate. It was not uncommon for her to claim that “no one” was doing “anything,” when the case actually was that plenty of people were doing plenty of things, but none that she found worthwhile. As discussed in Chapter 2, she was among the elites who denied others’ efforts in attempts to highlight her own, building her currency in the movement. As an example, at one GA, she said, “No one was on the sidewalk before this camp started except me, James, [one other man], and [one other woman].” Her statement stuck me as bizarre, given that it could easily be dismissed as false by all the GA participants who had also, in fact, been on the sidewalk, yet it was not out-of-the-ordinary behavior for her.

Yet members recounted stories in their interviews that, when they pressed Mal for documentation on finances, she was sometimes unable to provide things like receipts. One time, when money had gone missing, Mal told others the money had been stolen from her car. Some members worried that Mal was keeping the money for herself, especially when they observed the camp kitchen low on groceries despite a recent infusion of cash. One camper told the group during Mal's tenure as the liaison:

A lot of the campers are hearing that there is money, but we never see it.

People will bring stuff we need, but we don't see any actual money. When we ask for Human Needs stuff, they say, "We're broke." We ask what they spent it on, and they say, "Food." But we know all the food got donated. So they'll say, "Well, we spent it on medical supplies." We say, "It sounds like that's what *you* wanted. We didn't get a say-so in how the money got spent. You just bought it because you had access to the money."

Members also found that things they had donated to the camp through Mal, such as Robitussin, were frequently missing, and they began to wonder if Mal was essentially trading drugs for things like support on proposals at GA (an example of the kind of undemocratic means elites in oligarchies use to maintain their power). Gabby told me during her interview, "I felt like there was some definite—I don't know a better word for it—bribery going on, like sort of, you know, 'Oh, you guys are going to agree with me on this if I give you, you know, if I buy you a drink, right, or if I give you a little something-something.'"

The grievances against Mal stacked up, yet there was no collective response to her behaviors. She frequently asked Occupiers (rhetorically) how the group would survive

without her; already strained, no one wanted to find out. Just as it is difficult to confront an employer who controls whether requests are granted, campers, especially, were nervous about confronting her about the lack of food in the kitchen, despite the cash she carried for the purpose of providing groceries, in fear that, if they offended her, she might delay the provision of food out of spite. Much the same way that politicians cater to powerful and profitable companies who threaten to move overseas if politicians do not act in their favor, members of OC spoke of their need to please Mal in order to retain the resources she provided. When complaints about Mal were brought up, members reasserted how much Mal contributed to the group, including Mal herself. During one GA, Mal “created a powerful virtual self” (Schwalbe et al. 2000) by announcing to the group:

I have thrown every single thing I have at this Occupation. I spent more money than I have. I don't spend enough time with my daughter. My relationship is a disaster. My house is full of Occupiers. It looks like Camp: Phase Two. I don't have any time. I wake up in the morning and go to bed at night thinking about the Occupation. Every day I have two working-group meetings and maybe a GA, and I go down to the camp to see what they need.

By saying this, Mal was communicating to the group that members owed her deference and respect in exchange for her contributions.

Without a collective response to Mal's behaviors, those individuals who were “not good with confrontation” (as one woman put it in her interview when I asked if she had ever spoken to Mal about her complaints) simply “dropped out,” a generic process of the reproduction of inequality that “allow[s] things to go on as they are” (Schwalbe et al.

2000:429). When I asked LeeAnn what she perceived as the reason some people quit, she responded, “Um, the clique... I do think that people—that James and Mal and David were a big part of it.” When asked why she quit, another woman replied, “Cliques. Little Napoleons.” As I will soon show, when these members quit, no one panicked as they did when contemplating what would happen if Mal—and others who contributed and controlled resources—were to leave the group.

Before she quit, Mal was able to use *threats* of quitting against proposals she did not like. For example, Jaime once planned to propose that “all new persons at the encampment who are not actively involved in Occupy the City activities, including General Assemblies, will require consensus of the members at the encampment before being allowed to stay overnight.” Members began debating the proposal on the forums. While some offered support and others presented critiques, Mal—who was usually pro-camp, even as she devalued campers’ investments while highlighting her own—entered the discussion with this objection:

I am chiming in to say that I strongly disagree with the bureaucracy-and-discrimination-in-the-name-of-safety nature of this proposal. I did not fight and work my ass off for that camp/Occupation so that people could be preemptively excluded, however temporarily...This proposal contains too many blocking concerns for me to ignore. If it passes, I will very likely walk away from Occupy the City. I am dead serious.

Without offering constructive criticism of the proposal, Mal immediately evoked her status as a hard-worker for the movement. She also threatened to leave—on the heels of reminding

people what they would lose if she walked away. It is important to note that I am not arguing that her disagreement with the proposal was somehow wrong, nor do I mean to make it sound like she was the only one ever to issue such threats. I merely mean to show that, as an informal elite, her threats worked, whereas threats did not work in the case of others. Despite broad support for the proposal from the anti-campers, Jaime rescinded it: “This is not going to pass as currently worded. I withdraw the proposal and will try to work on a better wording.”

Another elite who used this tactic was James. Regarding the very same proposal, James added to Mal’s threat, “If this passes, I’m leaving...I’m not *pretending* I’m leaving and coming back in three or four days.” The latter part of his statement referred to others who did threaten to quit<sup>47</sup> when they were not getting their way, but upon finding out that the group would not bend to their will, returned a short time later. James, however, could count on getting his way. He used this tactic several times, sometimes being very specific about exactly which resources were under his control and leaving with him. For example, he once posted on the forums that he considered the camp “dead” after he visited it and found that it was messy. After listing all he had done to build the camp (“I have advocated for the camp harder than almost anybody. I have pushed to keep it. I have paid large portions of the rent. I have donated over \$1,000 of supplies to the camp. I have set up a large portion of the on-site infrastructure. I have personally donated almost half the books. I built the floors for both the kitchen and library. I have, every day, reorganized the messes that people have left all

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<sup>47</sup> As I will soon show, not everyone was able to leverage the group successfully by threatening to quit. An important condition in the success of this tactic was whether the group member had clout *and* resources that would disappear with them.

over.”), he stated that “clearly my donations, my effort, and my time have not gone appreciated” and swore to “donate to better causes. I will use my money for real action, real change.” Further, he told Occupiers about a particular resource he would no longer be providing: “I was going to pay the \$766.25 for the insurance for the [camp]. At our [affinity group meeting] we talked about why that was a good idea. I have since changed my mind.”

In the wake of the landlord’s sudden request for such an expensive insurance policy after Ricky’s conversation with him about eviction, the insurance policy meant life or death for the camp. Occupiers got very upset that James was walking away from the group, and taking his money with him, at such a critical time. LeeAnn scolded James for his post, “Serious??? You are punking us, right? Yes, you have spoken the loudest about the camp. You told us ALL we can’t impose rules or standards or a social contract. And NOW you walk away when we have the Statewide GA planned?” Jace chimed in, “Are we all just telling everyone what we have done to make [the] camp better and each chore we have done to hype ourselves up? James, this post sounds kind of condescending.” At the same time, the outcry was limited, and some preferred not to question James publicly. Samuel sent me a private message:

Just two weeks ago, James said he had no money to contribute to helping pay the rent. I chipped in again even though I really hadn’t planned on doing that more than once because my own financial situation is not good. Now he says he was “going to pay the \$766.25 for the insurance for the [camp].” Really? Where did that money come from all the sudden?

Nonetheless, the group tried to appease James—especially since appeasing him involved a major camp clean-up, an event that many members saw as necessary anyway before hosting out-of-towners for the Statewide GA. One of the anti-campers, Marcus, suggested that there be a massive camp clean-up event, and Jaime organized it, reporting back that it was a success. James did not provide the insurance money, but he also got what he wanted (camp improvement and cleanliness) and did not quit.

While money donated to OC by the public had to go through the fiscal sponsor and, according to the group's Statement of Autonomy, be allocated by consensus at the GA, group members could invoke the revered principle of "autonomy" to do what they wanted with their money. In other words, James could have donated the money (if, indeed, he had it) for the insurance policy and let the group decide to use it that way, but instead, he and his affinity group devised a plan for how to use the money, and, because of a dominant culture of ownership, he had every right to later refuse to spend money at all. The autonomy that the group so loved turned out to undermine the democracy they desired to create; because it allowed a minority to gain control over resources and withhold them from the group, the group found itself beholden to minority power, an important indication of oligarchy. Autonomy was allowed, even encouraged, in the group, and members saw autonomy as linked to democracy; yet, in taking advantage of their autonomy, James and other elites *undermined* democracy, taking control of resources rather than allowing the group to own and allocate them.

When an affinity group voted that James would be the leaseholder one month and other Occupiers objected, arguing that the leaseholder should be chosen by the GA, James

argued for his autonomy. He explained that others had given him money for the rent, and so he merely signed the lease and donated the land. Invoking a dominant culture of ownership, he declared, “If I need to make a proposal about how I spend my money, then I quit... It’s not Occupy the City’s money. The money belongs to six autonomous individuals. Those individuals met and decided how to spend their money.” James used “his” money—money that had been donated by several people for the group—in the way he saw fit and fought against the idea of putting decisions about how to spend money and who should hold the lease in the hands of the democratic GA. Autonomy afforded him a great deal of control over the group’s resources, undermining the group’s commitment to shared power.

As a contrast, consider the case of Albert, a *non*-elite Occupier. Albert owned a server and had the skills and money to host, build, and fix websites. He set up the group’s sites, including the forums. Albert and elite member Carmen had conflicting beliefs about whether a national political group should be promoted on any of OC’s webpages. Albert felt uncomfortable hosting any site that promoted the organization (the aims of which he disagreed with), but Carmen argued that members of that organization could be OC’s allies and that, indeed, there were no rules against promoting any group on OC’s pages. Albert announced to the group, “I’m done. Have a nice day, and enjoy the sweet, sweet feeling of being co-opted by the Democrat fundraising machine. And by done, I mean you officially have no sysadmins...my own efforts are being used to promote something that is fundamentally in opposition to my beliefs.” In response, Ethan essentially just wished him health and happiness:

I don't know how critical it is for our movement to have a "sysadmin," but I hope we will start recruiting a new person very soon. Once someone in a trusted position holds over my head that which I need, in order to make me agree with them, I see there is no mutual respect or trust... and no basis for further affiliation (no matter the merits of their argument).

No matter how important Albert and his resources were to the operations of the group, he did not have the cachet to get away with threatening to remove the resources he controlled, even though group members considered their website and forums essential resources. Since he had little currency (status)<sup>48</sup> to "spend," trying to "hold the resource over everyone's heads" cost him "respect and trust." His case stands in stark contrast to those of elites who, by threatening to remove themselves and their resources, exerted influence and got their way. (His case also demonstrates that, among privileged Occupiers who quit, the costs of leaving were close to zero. Among Occupiers who were banned, however, the costs of leaving the group were high: Clarice, for instance, begged the group not to ban her as she had nowhere else to go, and she immediately faced the prospect of sleeping out in the cold and rain with no more access to OC's kitchen or bathroom facilities.)

Akin to how Ricky tried to subvert the will of the GA through a secret conversation with the landlord, other elites were accused of undermining the group's commitment to democracy and transparency with "dirty, behind-closed-doors political tricks." That is how one man described Carmen's attempt to exert control over resources without the group's

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<sup>48</sup> Albert's case demonstrates the importance of not just investing effort by laboring for the group, but also making everyone aware of your contributions and their value. While elites talked up their efforts and gained status, Albert invested many hours in building websites and troubleshooting problems, but he failed to remind others frequently that he had done so, and thus, he earned little in the way of currency.

consent. After the group procured the insurance policy, anti-camper Carmen (who, as an elite in the same faction as Ricky, likely heard about the plan to evict—and its failure—from Ricky) emailed Abe, who had been paying for the camp’s portable toilet, and told him the conditions at the camp had been “deteriorating.” She asked if he would pull the resource from the camp and redirect his resources toward the community center that the anti-campers wanted to see replace the camp. Unbeknownst to Carmen, Abe had spent a lot of time on the sidewalk with Samuel and the two of them had become good friends. Perhaps because Abe trusted Samuel’s opinions, he emailed Samuel (and me—I do not know why) to ask about the conditions of the camp and whether we thought he should quit funding the toilet. Samuel was outraged.

Without revealing that it was Carmen who sent the email (at Abe’s request), Samuel posted about the matter on the forums and brought it up at a GA, drawing on language that vilified Carmen by comparing her to the 1%: “[She] literally played the role of the 1% using tactics from their playbook...These actions are one of a gutless saboteur using backroom private lobbying to get what a small faction wants, apparently through any means available.” Jaime spoke similarly at the GA: “Obviously we have some back-room politicking going on that is really disruptive to the movement. People have tried to take this through the GA and failed to destroy the camp through the GA process, so now they’re doing it through back-room deals and misinformation.” Like elites who network with politicians and convince them to pledge money toward causes important to them, Carmen was relying on networking with Abe to divert his resources away from the camp (a tactic that Ricky discussed as a back-up

plan should the landlord's eviction fail) and toward her pet project. She did not count on Abe being transparent about her actions with other members of the Occupation.

Interestingly, Carmen did respond to Samuel's forum post about the incident (she did not reveal herself as the "gutless saboteur"). In her post, Carmen largely ignored Samuel's point about her undemocratic means of controlling resources and, instead, attempted to redirect focus to the "real" problem of the camp(ers):

I find this post irritating because it paints the campers as helpless and dependent upon one individual's private donation to survive. It reflects that sense of entitlement that causes some people to dismiss the Occupy movement...A summit meeting would be helpful to see if there is a way to move forward as a single group. I also think it should be on neutral ground. There has been far too much trouble at the camp, including recent assaults by campers, to expect people to feel safe about meeting there.

Just as Samuel did not publicly question James's claim that he planned to pay for the insurance, he did not reveal that it was Carmen who lobbied for the removal of resources from the camp. This might have been because Carmen had allies who would have protected her and, given their successes in campaigning against the camp, had proven themselves a force to be reckoned with. It is this strategy (closing ranks) to which I now turn.

### **Closing Ranks**

After a few months of camping, the Occupation was in jeopardy. Money was running low, as was people's tolerance for group decisions that did not align with their personal

preferences (especially if they were funding the camp—again, the dominant culture of ownership prevailed). In light of this dearth of resources, participation was critical to keeping the group alive. Elites—those who invested more efforts than others and advocated for high status because of it—became even more powerful. They consolidated their power by closing ranks around one another; elite members were able to garner the support of other valorized group members (i.e., each other) at times of criticism and protect each other when an elite was in trouble and being criticized by other Occupiers. Generally, elites reminded everyone that they were too valuable to lose. Schwalbe et al. (2000:443) state, “To understand inequality we need to study how it is maintained by those with the power to do so.” Here, I argue that closing ranks is an additional kind of “boundary maintenance” process (Schwalbe et al. 2000), enacted by elites rather than subordinates, that reproduces inequality. Elites set themselves apart from other members as—thanks to their investments and provision—deserving of insulation from criticism, of protection from punishment, and of optimism and generosity in assumptions of their motives and intentions. Elites constructed one another as inherently good people who only and always wanted the best for the group, even if they made mistakes from time to time. They encouraged members to trust them and reminded them of the many things they had done to prove their commitment to the movement.

One case exemplifies this strategy. In this case, the elite in trouble, Lissa, was also a camper—in other words, she was (as the previous chapter demonstrated) a member of a marginalized group who, if not for her elite status, would likely have been at risk of being banned, even if only temporarily. Elites and non-elites frequently spoke of Lissa as a real asset to the camp because she took the initiative to cook, clean, organize the kitchen, and

keep supplies stocked. She frequently referred to her efforts—namely, providing hot meals and keeping campers out of harm’s way—as “mothering,” reflecting a gendered division of labor in the camp. She shared with me how exhausting “mothering” was just before she left the group:

I need to go step back from all this shit and—the problem of it, too, is I get to the point where I’m really just putting my energy out just to make sure that [the campers have] food to eat...All that shit then has nothing to do with the real [political] issues. I’m mothering them. That’s all I’m doing. They need a mother. And then it’s like, you know what, guys, I didn’t get involved in this to adopt 20 people... I’m here to make sure that everyone’s okay. [No Occupiers] actually gets hurt if we can prevent that. We can prevent shootings in New York or prevent fights in the City, whatever.

As a traveler, many wondered how the camp would function without Lissa whenever she decided to move on to her next location. Lissa told me that she gained her elite status because she effectively ran the camp for a period of time:

Everybody says I’m in charge of the camp...All the campers—when someone walks in and there’s a question—this has been going on for a month now. Since at least the beginning of March, that whenever there’s someone new that arrives, any question whatsoever, they’re like, “Where’s Lissa? Go ask Lissa. She’s in charge.”

While many in the group were hesitant to use the word “leader,” Lissa was not. She acknowledged that she was a leader and had no problem identifying as such.

Lissa's efforts were admired by everyone, and she was able to cash in on that admiration—and the privilege of owning a cell phone—by being able to ask for things and generally getting them. She used her phone to call someone with Internet access who could post requests for camp supplies on the forum. While some folks did not trust some campers enough to give them their cell numbers or bring them to their houses, Lissa was well-connected and able to get breaks from the camp for showers, home-cooked meals, and real beds (or at least couches) in Occupiers' homes (including my own and Mal's). When she asked for something for the camp, Occupiers generally trusted that the supply was truly needed and that Lissa would not squander it away for personal benefit, which they suspected other campers, who did not work as hard as Lissa, might do. In her interview, Lissa couched people's willingness to give her what she wanted in terms of the currency she had earned with her efforts: "I think I earn it more than some people. You know what I mean? I work my ass off and people are like, 'Lissa, but you've done so much. What can I do for you?'" While some Occupiers endeavored to discover campers' criminal histories before inviting them home, any potential information about Lissa—who concealed her legal name because she no longer identified with the sex she was categorized as at birth—could not be found, and yet she still procured the trust of many.

One night, Lissa got away with behavior that resulted in bans for less popular campers. Occupiers found out about this incident when a man visiting from another Occupation posted a blog of his account online, which then got posted on the OC forums by an anti-camper. According to the visitor, two passersby entered the camp and began taking pictures. Lissa and a couple of other campers did not want their pictures taken, so they

threatened the passersby with violence<sup>49</sup> and chased them to their cars. When someone in the camp voiced their disapproval of Lissa and the others' violent response, Lissa told this person to leave, shoved him, and—according to some versions of the story, but not Lissa's own—choked him.<sup>50</sup>

Violence of this nature was expressly prohibited at the camp, and Occupiers were angry that Lissa had engaged in it. Some voiced their concerns that Lissa's behavior was bad for OC's public relations; Marcus posted, "Another major outreach FAIL!" Others claimed that they feared for their safety now that they knew what Lissa was capable of and apparently

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<sup>49</sup> While OC considered itself a non-violent group, Lissa—who disagreed with many principles of the movement—told me in her interview that she thought the non-violence stance was a bit foolish: "We want a non-violent movement to somehow stop [the 1%] from doing what they're doing. And that's like, okay, so one day Cruella de Vil, Jafar, and all the other Disney villains of the universe are going to be like, 'You're right, I'm bad; cuff me.' Is that ever going to work, logically? Is that ever going to work? I don't think so. And that's still the way that we're going about this. If we just keep yelling about what a villain that villain is, then he's going to come turn himself in? It's not going to work. That's another strategic logic fail."

Despite her disagreement with the commitment to non-violence, Lissa made a decision to respect it while engaging in Occupy activities. For instance, during her interview we discussed whether she had become friends with other Occupiers, and she shared with me that, at times, she was tempted to hurt James, but she refrained from doing so because of the setting: "But there are other people, like James, that I talk to about things, up until a moment, and then when I say something and [he] makes a look at me, like gives me a stupid look. I'm like, 'Bitch, you're lucky we're not at a party, because if we weren't in non-violent circumstances, I'd have bitch-slapped you for cocking your eyebrow at me like that, you 21-year-old snot-nosed little know it all. I will bitch slap you for fucking treating me like that. You have no respect.'"

Clearly, even though Lissa had made a decision to respect the non-violent stance while at the Occupation despite her disagreement with it, her commitment to that decision faltered a few times (potentially including the incident at hand, and by her own admission—see next footnote—a few days later during a separate incident) and some masculine habitus revealed itself.

<sup>50</sup> Lissa insists that she did not choke this man, but that she did start to choke another man during a separate incident. At a GA, she explained both incidents: "There was a blog post that people were chased out of camp. That was not how it happened. We were sitting at the campfire and two people came to campsite with cameras. They were told that they could take pictures of structure, but need to get permission to take pictures of people. They took pictures of people anyway and then they came and said rude things to us and tormented [us] and took pictures. I asked him, 'Would you like to get your ass kicked by a tranny?' One guy said, 'Yeah, I'd like to see that. I'll pay you 25 bucks.' They started to leave and I made a gesture to say, 'Where is my money?' [Then later] there was a man here Friday night that disrespected me by refusing to use feminine pronouns. I did put my hands on him, but [another OC member] de-escalated the situation."

willing to do. Yet there was never a proposal to ban her from the camp, even as Occupiers—fully empowered to make a proposal to ban her if they wanted, as indeed they had banned other campers (see previous chapter)—complained that she should be banned. Some Occupiers expressed that Lissa was getting special treatment thanks to the status she had in the group. They compared her to campers who had less currency, who surely would have been banned for the same behavior. LeeAnn said in her interview, “I just know what I’ve read about the incident where [Lissa] choked somebody. If she wouldn’t have been cooking and cleaning the kitchen like she was, she wouldn’t still be there. I mean, she’d have been asked to leave. You know it. I know it. So the rules were never the same for everybody.” Not banning Lissa even drove some members to quit; Marcus explained to me in a private message, “I can’t be a part of Occupy the City. The double standard for de-esc when it came to Lissa versus others said a lot.” One woman posted about the incident, “I only know that things are out of control and I can no longer provide any material support to the camp.”

Rather than proposing to ban Lissa, pro-camp elites successfully framed the dilemma as such: Lissa’s service was too valuable and if she were to leave, the camp would fall apart. Sally explained that elites were closing ranks by saying, “People down there were covering for other people.” Even after other members quit because of this incident, keeping Lissa—whom the elite extolled for contributing more than those members (“The remaining group seems to look up to her in some way,” Marcus concluded)—outweighed retaining other members who invested less effort in the movement. By closing ranks around her, elites communicated to Occupiers that Lissa was different from others who broke rules. Without others stepping up to share the labor—one of several possibilities OC could have

employed—banning a member who kept the camp running would have sped up the demise that ultimately followed Lissa’s (voluntary) departure a few weeks later.

Another example of closing ranks involved James. When the original land donor quit the group and refused to renew the lease, James announced that he would be the new leaseholder. As noted earlier, other Occupiers asked him to propose it through the General Assembly, but he refused, angering a lot of people as he got his way over the objections of the majority (another indication of oligarchy). Occupiers began complaining that James was trying to subvert the GA process, violating group principles. Mal came to his defense, arguing that indeed he was facilitating another important group principle, transparency:

This is ridiculous....We now have more transparency. We know who the donor is. We know who the leaseholder is. Nothing is a secret. Nothing is shady...[James] asking [the De-escalation working group] to work on drawing [rules] up, rather than drawing them up himself (as was done by the previous donor) is another act of transparency. Again, anyone could join de-escalation and have a hand in drawing up those guidelines.

David, whom many considered an elite at this time, also came to James’s defense on the forum. He invoked the effort James had invested in the group and alleged that such efforts proved his trustworthiness and that James would not harm the group he clearly cared about:

I trust James as the lease holder. I don’t see James power-tripping on it either. So if you feel you can’t trust James for whatever reason, and I will not have a discussion on whether or not that is warranted at this time, then trust me in my trust in James... My evidence to [his trustworthiness] is any given day on the

sidewalk at 2:00 p.m. when James would sit on a bench with **literally the entirety of Occupy the City's infrastructure on his lap. Alone.** There is photographic evidence of this occurrence. [emphasis in original]

David warded off some criticism of James by stating that he would “not have a discussion” about whether James was trustworthy. Rather, he implored other members to simply trust *him*, since he also had status in the group. In case there was any doubt about David's word, though, he reminded others of the efforts James had invested as proof of his goodwill toward the Occupation. While the group debated campers' trustworthiness and whether campers could only earn trust through background checks as a matter of policy, through the process of closing ranks, elites were marked as distinct and eternally worthy of trust.

Just as elite campers and elite clique members benefitted from elites closing ranks around them, so too did Carmen, an elite anti-camper. As I mentioned before, Carmen controlled the OC email account and rerouted emails through her personal account. Samuel, concerned that Carmen may have neglected emails or spoken on behalf of the Occupation, proposed that Carmen be removed from email access by way of changing the password and refraining from supplying her with the new password. Ricky came to Carmen's defense. He argued that Carmen had a busy personal life, that she set up an effective auto-reply that redirected anyone emailing OC to their various social media sites, and that if anyone failed to contact OC through those, that they must not have cared too much about getting in touch with OC. Trista, though, rebuked his claims with information not previously known to the group:

I distinctly recall offering my help to Carmen. I recall that drama. Carmen was very protective of the right to get to manage that email. She didn't utilize a team approach. I have very little sympathy. She had teams of people willing to do this, myself included, and she ignored every attempt to help her. I have no empathy; I'll just be honest; she did it to herself.

James then countered Trista's point with a reminder of Carmen's initial efforts: "Suggesting that there's a huge trust issue with Carmen (while I understand that feeling), who was a big organizer of the original rally, may be overstated." Because Carmen had invested so much and so early, she was worthy of unwavering trust, James argued. Carmen herself contributed to the discussion by reinforcing that ranks had been closed around her. She said to Samuel, "You changed [the password] to lock me out for some 'breach of trust' you imagined even though the only two people who responded to your forum post [about this proposal] did not agree with you." Ultimately, Samuel's proposal failed, and Carmen continued to have access to the email account.

Part of closing ranks included invoking the movement ideal of inclusivity. Even as campers were banned with little discussion of the group's commitment to inclusion, the group invoked the principle as an argument for retaining elite members and their resources. When Samuel tried to remove Carmen's email access, even Trista—who expressed "little sympathy" for Carmen—blocked the proposal, explaining, "As much as I have trust issues with Carmen, I do believe there's a way to handle this that doesn't hurt. Ethically, [restricting her access] isn't the wisest move. We need to be inclusive, not hurtful." Concerns about inclusivity for campers were almost always outweighed by concerns for "safety," being

“family friendly,” and so on, as the previous chapter demonstrated. With elites, however, Occupiers used inclusivity as a compelling ideal worth realizing. In this way, elites were set apart from non-elites and treated differently and better.

Carmen continued to be a controversial character in the group, as did other elites who were held in high regard at the same time that they upset members. Despite controversy, elites closed ranks around one another and spoke out in support of each other. Ethan explained how elite Occupiers used their networks to close ranks and exert influence: “There are people who are so socially adept at making friends and influencing people. And a lot of these people gravitate toward the political, because they find they can get people’s support. And that means, ‘hey, I can get power.’” Sometimes, elite members were supported in times of controversy by *non*-elites in their network. Non-elites participated in burnishing reputations, protecting elites further.

### **Burnishing Reputations**

Elite Occupiers and their friends engaged in a process of burnishing reputations to defend their privileged positions as organic leaders. They did this in some ways already described, such as reminding others how committed elites were to the group (for which effort served as proof). Other ways of burnishing included praising those who got arrested for the cause and highlighting an elite’s commitment to the movement conveyed in a media story. Arrests and news stories were exciting to the Occupiers and, importantly, created documentation of one’s efforts, commitment, passion, and, at times, wit. Media attention also amplified elites’ voices and widened the platform from which elites could be heard.

During my time as a fieldworker, Occupy the City protests resulted in arrests five times. The first was the night of the kick-off rally in October 2011, when the park permit expired. While most Occupiers left the park and moved to a barricaded sidewalk (where police indicated no arrests would be made, and where the Occupation then lived for about five weeks), 19 Occupiers remained in the park and were arrested. About two weeks later, the police ordered Occupiers to remove everything from the sidewalk, and when Sandy refused to remove the chair she used for her disability, police arrested her and a handful of supporters who formed a circle around her. A month later, in November 2011, some Occupiers were arrested at a local mall for a Black Friday protest. Then in January 2012, OC was marching downtown when some Occupiers began marching in the street instead of on a sidewalk, and police arrested two men on the street. Finally, in April 2012, several members of OC (myself included) were arrested in a home defense action against foreclosure, one of whom was Sandy, one of only a few Occupiers to be arrested twice.<sup>51</sup>

In most cases, arrestees were lauded as brave souls standing up for what they believed in (despite OC's conservative attitude and preference for "family friendly" events, covered in the previous chapter). Supporters rallied around them, those off-site called elected officials, bail money was collected, and Occupiers waited at the jail with food and water as arrestees

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<sup>51</sup> Dillon was one Occupier arrested twice. He was willingly arrested at the home defense, but unintentionally arrested at the mall. Police identified Dillon, and also David, who were at the mall but not protesting, as being friends with the other protestors and arrested them, too. The same day, a woman who was arrested the first night of Occupy was similarly arrested at the mall for associating with the protestors even though she herself was not protesting that day. Additionally, James was first arrested the night of the kick-off rally; he did not participate in the home defense six months later, but did go to the home the same evening with another Occupier while police were still there, and both were arrested for trespassing. While some Occupiers found James foolish for such a thing, others were enthralled by his story, especially when he livestreamed his arrest from a cell phone without the police knowing. I do not believe the arrest increased James's overall cachet, but his nonchalant attitude toward the arrest and his "defiance" vis-à-vis livestreaming (even though he had no audience) contributed to his reputation as "hardcore."

were released. Occupiers kept track of arrestees' many court dates and even joined them for "courtroom solidarity." I say "most cases" because it is important to note that this kind of support was not provided for the two men arrested while marching in the street; these men were campers, and as the previous chapter showed, campers by and large were not valued members of the Occupation. All other arrestees, though, were praised and supported in emotional and material ways. Some elites gained their status in part through their arrests, like Mal and James, who were arrested the first night. And of course, some could afford to be arrested *because* they were the kinds of people who could gain elite status—that is, they had the support needed to get through the system, and arrests were not a major risk for them as white, middle-class, unemployed people. Other Occupiers did not have the resources to be arrested and could not risk bodily harm or losing their jobs.

Occupiers who were arrested for the cause were seen by other members as brave, committed, and willing to go beyond the call of duty. The elite status they procured was then maintained in part through non-elites burnishing their reputations. For example, Sandy became a movement martyr after the police arrested her for refusing to remove her chair from the sidewalk—which she needed because she had a disability—during a time when all belongings were banned. Once, when she complained of being mistreated by some of the campers, Frank, a white Occupier in his 40s or so, was outraged, claiming that she deserved better treatment thanks to her arrest: "Sandy's been part of Occupy the City from the start, and was one of the people arrested in support of the movement. Do any of you think that it's acceptable for her to be shown disrespect by anyone?" Sandy's elite status did not last forever (once she aligned herself with the anti-campers and decreased her involvement, her

status fell and became eclipsed by anti-camp elites like Ricky and Carmen), but Frank and others often reminded people that she was arrested “in support of the movement” and therefore deserved to be taken seriously.

Elite members often did not wait for someone to burnish their reputation for them, opting instead to do it themselves. James, for example, was arrested the first night of the Occupation, and over the next few days, as people were getting to know one another, held a sign that read “AWAKE FOR X+ HOURS AND ARRESTED, YET I AM STILL HERE,” changing the number of hours as they increased. New members quickly learned that he was one of the initial arrestees and was committed to the cause, Occupying overnight, too. When I asked Marcus what he remembered of the first few days, he answered, “James was there with an ‘I haven’t slept in god knows how many hours and I’ve been arrested’ sign.” James even captured the attention of the local media with his sign. A reporter interviewed James and, in his write-up, described James’s inordinate efforts in the first few days of the protest, including his arrest. Risking arrest distinguished elite Occupiers from non-elite members and, if an elite Ocer was in trouble with the group later, could be the basis upon which his reputation was burnished.

In fact, being quoted in the media at all was a way for elites to burnish their reputations. While any member of OC could talk to the media, as some members became well practiced at it (and, as knowledge of goings-on was concentrated among a few individuals), other Occupiers deferred to them, and the same names popped up in news articles over and over again. The media—not schooled in OC’s organizational structure—often called these Occupiers leaders, spokespeople, or OC representatives. New Occupiers

and those who were only marginally involved often expressed confusion—did OC suddenly have leaders?—or a distrust of those called leaders by the media, wondering if this was not a mistake but rather if the elites presented themselves as leaders. One marginally-involved member, for example, asked in a forum post, “Are unseen forces speaking behind the scenes for the entire Occupy the City?” This member went on to say: “I think it is about time that the ‘few’ who have been controlling the ‘press releases’ need to come before the General Assembly and apologize for co-opting the General Assembly messages the past four weeks.” While most Occupiers reasserted that the media got it wrong (as David replied to the man, “that’s just the sort of crap they [the media] do”), elite Occupiers who were quoted certainly gained recognition within the movement and were praised for doing a good job of giving voice to the group’s concerns.

While arrests and media stories were important, elites’ reputations were also burnished via stories of day-to-day investment in the movement. This was especially true for James, who, like Mal, had an attitude that angered many people, but who undeniably contributed to the movement in important ways. James burnished his own reputation so consistently that he took the floor at practically every GA to give a report-back on what he had done for the movement since the last GA. When he argued passionately for a course of action, he often seemed to imply that his idea was the strongest one among the options because he knew what was best for the movement since he had invested so much in it. For instance, he typically included asides like these in his recommendations: “Let me just say this: about six or seven times I was THE ONLY person on that sidewalk. Had I gone to work, the bathroom, been arrested, etc., the constant presence would have been broken.” When

James's condescending attitude upset people, non-elites burnished his reputation, reminding everyone that he was a great asset to the movement and that they should forgive him and try to see the best side of him; the framing, then, reflected the frames of elites who closed ranks, urging trustworthiness and forgiveness, as these processes reinforced one another. Closing ranks was how elites protected one another, whereas burnishing reputations was done by elites and non-elites. The processes were similar, but burnishing reputations often involved subordinates participating in "propping up dominants" (Ezzell 2009). One woman called James "a true patriot and a brother" for his consistent presence on the sidewalk. Another member called him the "Occupy Superhero" (and, as I have mentioned, he was often referred to as the "King" of the Occupation).

The process of burnishing reputations was heavily displayed when James engaged in some bad behavior during his last GA as an Occupier (after he quit the group, he did attend one more GA and one more meeting as an "outsider" curious to see what had been happening in the group). At the end of April 2012, most Occupiers had come around to the anti-campers' perspective that it was time to close the camp. Even those who supported the camp most of all reported being tired of the day-to-day maintenance and were ready to move on with new ideas. (The community center idea became popular, but never amounted to anything—indeed, once the camp was closed, the group accomplished very little before it dwindled out.) At a long and emotional GA, the group finally came to consensus on closing the camp—and then James "blocked" the proposal, preventing it from passing.

While OC typically encouraged blocking only on the basis that a proposal somehow undermined or was contrary to the values of the movement, James's block was of a different

sort. James blocked by saying, “My concern is that I don’t believe that this body has the moral or ethical integrity to make this decision... I don’t think we can make these decisions anymore.” Occupiers, myself included, expressed confusion and tried to get James to explain what he meant; after all, how could the GA not be able to make decisions at a GA anymore? All James would say was, “Whenever this discussion is done, I have an emergency proposal to bring that will probably answer these questions.” Once James’s block was noted, the process called for the proposal to be tabled for another day when the block could be resolved. The GA, then, did not come to a decision to close the camp that evening, much to the dismay of everyone who had emotionally prepared themselves for it and wanted closure.

James’s “emergency” proposal (which, generally speaking, did not adhere to the rules that defined an emergency, but he was allowed to present it nonetheless, even after I questioned whether and why it was an emergency) was to “dissolve this General Assembly.” The group fell silent as everyone tried to understand what James meant; a few laughed or scoffed. People began to ask clarifying questions, such as this exchange between Marta and James:

Marta: What you’re saying, not having any more GAs at all, and in regards to the camp, the camp making a decision for themselves?

James: I’m saying we dissolve the GA, and if we want to continue to function as a group, to decide upon a process as a group.

Marta: How will that be different than a GA?

James: We can call it whatever we want, but we decide it instead of being told we are following it. [At the kick-off rally], we were told we were following a consensus model. We didn't decide that.

While some Occupiers took the proposal seriously and began debating the merits of the GA process, I questioned whether this conversation was a distraction and whether James's proposal was genuine, or whether it was a means to an end. "No end game?" I asked. "No," he said. People laughed, as it would not be the first time James played games with people. As a researcher studying the GA process, I asked many questions during this GA to ensure that I understood what was happening (under the assumption that James was not playing a game). With James's insistence that he believed in the proposal, an earnest conversation ensued among those who stayed (others, fed up that the camp closure proposal still hung in the air, left out of frustration). Word spread via texting that James was trying to dissolve the GA, and more Occupiers drove to the camp to state their objections and block the proposal. For instance, David arrived and delivered a passionate speech:

[OC's GA] is the very heart of OC. We ideally should be bringing our decisions here. We should be bringing our solidarity here. This is where we get things done. I came here sick today because I care about this GA and I heard that there was an emergency proposal to dissolve this GA. The GA process works if you work it. I don't see that the problem is the process itself. I see the problem we have right now is we do not work the process itself. We do not have functioning working groups that we utilize to get things done. We don't utilize those working groups. Instead what we do is say, "Fuck the

working group we don't like," and instead we go off and we form another thing, like...affinity groups, to skip the process. The process is difficult. The process is hard. It's not meant to be easy. It's difficult. But it is how we build solidarity. Through understanding. Through discussion. Through open-mindedness and a willingness to compromise. That's what the GA is and what it is for. I will block this proposal.

The group entertained a few more questions and comments, and after finding themselves in the same spiral of confusion and objections, the facilitator decided it was time to call the question. At this point, James revealed that the proposal was not genuine:

I want to make a comment. A lot of you guys are about to be really mad at what I'm about to say. This is the most ridiculous proposal that has ever come before the GA. This is absolute bullshit. Everything I just said highlights why I made this proposal...This was the best discussion we've had in a GA in a really long time. And I really hope you guys take something from this... But I want you guys to see. We've been arguing and fighting about nothing for a really long time.

By revealing that his proposal was made for the sake of having the "best discussion" we had had in a while, and with the implicit condescension that James was above the very "bullshit" he orchestrated, the GA dissolved into anger. Occupiers began telling James that they were angry he had toyed with them, especially, in the course of it, blocking a proposal that itself had been the subject of a very good discussion an hour earlier (the waste of time that late in the night also stung). Trista said:

With all due respect, James, like, really, like, really, I mean this in the nicest way, but you can be very cocky and arrogant sometimes, and that was, like, not a good moment. There's a lot of intelligence in this group, and I know I'm really quiet, but you really disrespect people who sit back and try really hard to communicate and really try to work on group process and have good ideas. I think it's unhealthy and manipulative and inauthentic... That being said, I think we could focus on solutions to our problem, working together to come up with better ways, and this is not helping. That's the bottom line.

Despite Mal's interventions on James's behalf, anger was not abated, and James gave up: "Clearly this didn't do what I wanted it to do. I want to withdraw this proposal, my block, and myself from this Occupation. Sorry, guys."

Over the next couple of days, news spread of James's block and his proposal. Anger toward him grew, and people spoke candidly on the forums about their (generally negative) feelings about James. Despite what appeared to be a pervasive sentiment, Occupiers continued to burnish James's reputation. For instance, Oliver posted:

James? I hate what he did, but him, I love. And if he has read any of this public bashing, I imagine it will be quite some time before he even thinks about returning. But it would take a whole lot more bad to nullify the good he has done for Occupy the City. His hours of sidewalk vigil and scores of direct actions multiplied by his constant enthusiasm (earlier) [made him] someone valuable and needed.... I believe in James.

Oliver invoked the effort James had invested early on and argued that no amount of bad behavior could ruin his reputation. Indeed, when James later attended another OC GA and meeting, he was welcomed back and treated with kindness; no one continued to express their anger towards him. Despite months of private discussions about how James brought down morale and undermined the GA (mainly through the formation of affinity groups), the collective expression of anger after his final proposal was the closest the group got to recourse, as James then quit before the group could prohibit that kind of behavior in the future. The group made no rules against the kinds of behavior James engaged in, never recommended putting him through a “de-escalation” process, and certainly never banned him. He benefitted from his own and others’ burnishing of his reputation and even after quitting was praised for how important he was to the Occupation.

As I showed earlier, some people quit participating when they saw elites get special treatment for behaviors that might have been punished had they not been elites. One member, LeeAnn, was often openly critical of those who “dropped out” (Schwalbe et al. 2000): “We need to stand up, and you make your voice heard. If you’re disgruntled, you have to talk about it. You can’t just sneak away.” However, given the closing of ranks and burnishing reputations, as well as the discomfort one might face confronting elites who could be hostile, making one’s voice heard was easier said than done. One member quit after Lissa told her during a contentious GA, “Pop a Xanax and go fuck yourself.” Members were uncertain where they should take complaints about elite members who spoke in disparaging ways in public meetings without sanction. What was the appropriate venue in which to express one’s feelings about the behaviors of the informal elite? As I will explain now, few options were

available to members of OC, leaving members to resort to private gossip and/or quitting as the elites' behavior went uncorrected.

### **Co-opting Venues for Grievances**

Elites can “rig the game” by capturing the means of administration in a group (Schwalbe 2008), such as by infiltrating all of the working groups of an Occupation. In OC, elites like Mal—who often reminded others that she was a member of 14 working groups—and James exercised power by participating in nearly every group that made, interpreted, and enforced rules. Elites, then, became the ones to whom others were instructed to address their complaints. Because of their heavy involvement, they were able to contain, minimize, and deflect criticisms, leaving members with little recourse for their grievances. Their heavy involvement also put them in a position to regulate discourse—a process Schwalbe et al. (2000) identify as one tactic to manage emotions—implementing informal rules about who can say what to whom, and how (Potter and Whetherell 1987).

When the Occupation began in October 2011, organizers encouraged those who were interested in participating to sign up for an e-mail listserv. The listserv functioned as the first and primary means of electronic communication among Occupiers for several weeks, and message topics ranged from general inquiries (such as when and where the GAs were held) to requests for supplies from those on the sidewalk (usually food or coffee) to coordination of tasks assigned to working groups (like report-backs on jobs done). Members also exchanged messages involving disagreements, such as over a planned course of action. The volume of e-mail generated daily was hefty, leaving lots of Occupiers to feel about the listserv like Marta

did when she called it “the dreaded listserv.” David mused, in the midst of one listserv argument, “If I am ever given the choice between \$1 million and joining a listserv, or a match and a gallon of gasoline, I will go out like a Tibetan monk on a *Rage against the Machine* album cover.”

One particular disagreement over how to manage the cash donations OC had received involved more people than ever, as two prominent members of OC, Carmen and Charlie, argued with one another and other members came to their defense. Many of those emails, however, merely asked for people to stop the discussion, including emails by those who had already risen as informal elites within the movement. Sandy, who had already been arrested for asserting her right—as a person with a disability—to have a chair on the sidewalk and thus was seen as a heroine by many, said, “Let’s all try to be respectful and kind. Internal drama makes us look bad and reduces our effectiveness.” People suggested that, since anyone could join the listserv, members of the media may be reading the “internal drama.” Other non-elite members of OC chimed in, too, with messages encouraging Carmen and Charlie to take their dispute offline, like this one from a white, male college instructor who had participated in the Civil Rights Movement:

I am a rank-and-filer in the [OC] movement. People like me don’t have time for the GAs. I want our “facilitators” to keep up the good work. When people begin to wrangle with them, writing accusatory posts, ordinary members like me see no reason for anything but dismay, and that’s especially true about money, which can be replaced without such unpleasantness.

Before long, members were disagreeing about whether people were allowed to chime in with opinions if they had not put in effort on the sidewalk. One woman wrote, “I will be the first to say that I have never been to a GA meeting so I have never been part of the process. I almost feel like I don’t have a right to voice my feelings because of my inability to be more actively involved.” Another woman who had been very involved, especially with supplying costly flyers, wrote to those who were trying to shut down the argument, “Don’t you keep coming on here trying to derail what a lot of us have been pounding the pavement and banging our heads against the walls to try and make things better for EVERYONE!” She challenged those whose names she did not recognize (including my own) to come to GA and “make sure to say hello” to her, essentially asking them to prove their involvement before they could have a right to an opinion. The disagreement ceased within minutes after Trista, well-known already as a frequent facilitator at GA, posted, “We agreed, as a group, at GA, to not have these kinds of discussions on line, did we not?????” Later that night, the group set up an online forum; Occupiers could communicate with one another by visiting that site. Although conversation shifted to the online forums (which were more heavily regulated than the listserv), the same rule applied and members were discouraged from arguing online.

Time and again, elites attempted to shut down discussions on the forums. James, in particular, typically called for people to end a discussion, and he made no efforts to hide his bluntness. For instance, he once posted,

To those of you who continue to complain, and whine, and bitch, and moan about the camp—just fucking stop. We are all tired of hearing it. If you have a problem at the camp, come fix it...To the people sitting on the sidelines

complaining about shit they don't even know about, or heard about distorted and third-hand—it's ridiculous. You are worse than a bunch of five-year-olds. Start acting your own age (and yes I have the audacity to say that). Come have a discussion. Have it at the camp... This stupid gossip and banter has to stop. Act like adults. Get your shit together. Everyone is tired of it. And also, I will not be monitoring this thread religiously. Many campers don't have the ability to even view the forums. You want a solution, come down and talk with us... If you have a problem with the camp, please take it to where it can actually be worked on, i.e., the camp. Nothing else will work in any capacity. This is the last time I will be reading this thread. Please take your camp issues to the camp where they can actually be worked on.

James's post includes a combination of urging people to stop posting, describing those who post in disparaging terms, and an insistence that—despite hoping people will read his post—*he* will not be reading any more posts in the thread.

It was not uncommon for James to swear off any further reading once he had had his say. Once, when Jaime made a proposal that James (and Mal) disliked (both having threatened to quit if it passed), James ended his explanation of his objection with, "If you want to discuss this with me further, you can do it in person. I'm out of this thread."

Similarly, when Trista critiqued one of James's proposals that included reducing the number of GAs quite drastically—which Trista thought would decrease face-to-face interactions and thus a sense of community—James told her, "I'm sorry if you feel isolated. I really truly am. If there's anything I can do, please talk to me about it—in person. This forum is not the place

for these types of arguments. It makes no sense.” James did not make clear what types of arguments *did* “make sense” on the forum, but his posting record indicated that very little was appropriate for the forums if it did not come from James himself.

Occasionally, members expressed frustration that they were “not permitted” to share critiques on the forum. Sandy voiced her frustration:

[At one meeting supposedly about mortgage fraud], we didn’t talk about mortgage fraud as much as I would have liked, but some of us needed to vent because it seems we are not permitted to talk about the camp on the forums, because supposedly we get all of our information from rumors. There are plenty of people who I trust and care about, whose information I consider completely reliable.

I also heard Trista say that she was tired of feeling shut down when elites controlled venues for grievances:

As long as you have that dynamic of four or five people, or people who are so possessive of a particular group, you’re gonna continue to have this kind of problem, with people feeling alienated. We have to hold people like that accountable. I’m not interested in calling out names or talking about people when they’re not around, but on the other hand, how do you hold accountable people who refuse to listen to an alternative point of view?

When Marta responded to Trista that she had, on occasion, approached someone personally to air a grievance, Trista replied in such a way that connected one’s ability to air grievances to or about an elite with the principle of democracy:

I've tried and been told, "We're not having this discussion, goodbye."... Humility is a core democratic principle, operating by not treating certain people as somebodies and certain people as nobodies. When I've tried to disagree with Ricky, I've been told, "I refuse to talk to you." I can't be in a working group with someone who treats me like that, like, "get out of the Occupation, I'm not gonna hear you." When something like that happens, it's showing an authoritarianism and refusing to incorporate others' views in your agenda.

LeeAnn joined Trista in agreement: "That's been part of my problem from the beginning, with James always telling me, 'No.'" Just as people were dissuaded from bring complaints against elites on the listserv in favor of discussing those things on the forums, so too did they get dissuaded from posting on the forums in favor of (potentially intimidating) face-to-face conversations that, from Occupiers' reports, were not much more successful.

With elites consistently telling members not to air their grievances online, there were only two official venues for such disputes offline. First was the GA itself, but that, too, was quickly restricted as a venue for folks to air grievances. While other Occupations across the country were reportedly rotating through many facilitators, OC—significantly smaller than Occupations in cities like New York or Oakland—rotated through only about a half-dozen facilitators. By playing a visible and important role on a daily basis, the early facilitators were among the first to gain informal elite status.<sup>52</sup> With the power to control the direction of the conversation, facilitators called a "point of process" when people brought what they

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<sup>52</sup> They did not all retain status nor stay involved with the group. Some, like Trista, lost status as quickly as she gained it, while others left the movement early on.

called “personal problems” to the GA and would not allow the conversation to continue. In this way, facilitators participated in regulating discourse (Potter and Whetherell 1987; Schwalbe et al. 2000). Once, when Ricky blocked a proposal, Mal accused him of only blocking for “retaliatory and personal” reasons, leading Ricky to say that Mal had “personally attacked” him. Despite Mal having made an implication about Ricky’s character, later, when James made the proposal to dissolve the GA and Occupiers expressed anger toward him, Mal alleged that “never before in a GA have we freely allowed personal attacks, like name calling or calling out someone’s character.”

Some Occupiers felt that certain facilitators, like Mal, had let their elite status get to their heads and were “condescending” to members, which LeeAnn articulated in Chapter 2. The GA, then, would not be a space in which members could lodge complaints against elites as long as elites were facilitating and facilitators had the power to regulate discourse. For instance, Samuel told me in his interview:

Ricky is not suited to be a facilitator at any stretch of the imagination. And I don’t know if that’s intentional or not, but like when he started the facilitation of [one GA during which it was proposed to ban a camper] and people were trying to bring up stuff, he would just [say], “Shut down! Movin’ on! Shut down! Move it—” I was like, “Whoa, Ricky,” things like that. Like, he just, like, it’s not supposed to be a position where you have a lot of executive power and that’s how he uses it when he was facilitating, and that’s the opposite of what it is.

Sometimes, Ricky adopted a facilitator role even when he was not the facilitator, claiming the (illegitimate) authority to regulate discourse. When others were critical of him or tried to address his bad behavior in front of the group, he would act as facilitator to shut down the conversation. For example, he once proposed a working-group that would be responsible for a local public television show about the Occupy movement. Since he had been actively campaigning for the camp closure, Lissa asked him during the “clarifying questions” portion of the GA, “Will this TV show be used to promote an agenda of trying to shut this Occupation down?” Rather than answer her question, and rather than allow the facilitator to direct the conversation or the stack-taker to call on another person, Ricky himself simply said, “Next question.” Another camper tried to call attention to Ricky’s exertion of control: “I’m concerned that Lissa’s question was not answered. It was avoided completely. The question was completely ignored.” Lissa again asserted that she had a “valid concern” but the facilitator did not direct Ricky to answer it, and in frustration, Lissa gave up on insisting he respond to her; Ricky successfully prevented Lissa, an elite from the opposing faction, and the others from engaging in a critique of his behavior.

Since OC members were shut down from complaining online and could not bring grievances with elites’ behavior to the GA—despite the fact that it was fair game to report on, critique, and devise rules about campers’ bad behaviors at a GA—the last official venue was the De-escalation working group (WG), often shortened to “De-esc.” As discussed in the previous chapter, the De-esc WG was tasked with smoothing over conflicts, be it two members disagreeing so vehemently as to disable progress in a working group or calming down the pair of Occupiers who tended to drink and fight with one another at the camp. This

venue, too, failed to provide a space for members to complain about the behaviors of the elite, as elite members occupied the working group. LeeAnn made a poignant observation about how the inclusive nature of Occupy enabled a small, committed group to eventually “run everything”:

I think that it should have been a limit.<sup>53</sup> You need to diversify. But like I said, I don’t think that it was intentional, that they said “ok we’re gonna”—cause it’s like [the clique] co-opted the movement. Because they were, you know, all in the working groups that were essential. So like I said, I don’t think that it was intentional. Just, they wanted to be a part of everything. So, and then when people started dwindling down and left, you know, it is, it does seem like it’s just one group running everything.

It is not inherently bad for one small group to be in charge of the most essential functions of a movement, but this small group used its status to defend insiders when others complained about their behavior. The elite closed ranks and, in effect, the De-esc WG protected themselves when members complained about their behavior. Sally told me in her interview, “When [problems] did happen, like people minimized—it was minimized. A lot was minimized.” Occupiers, then, could not expect the De-escalation working-group—“co-opted” by elites—to take their concerns seriously.

Without a De-esc group that made everyone feel comfortable, many Occupiers felt like the only space in which they could complain about elites’ behavior was in a gossip-centric phone tree. This phone tree was not so “natural” a development as members

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<sup>53</sup> Despite LeeAnn’s and others’ ideas about limiting individuals’ involvement in working groups, no one ever made a proposal to limit such involvement.

perceived it to be. Because the informal elite of OC effectively co-opted the places criticisms were brought, and because they deflected criticisms by shutting down the venue, policing it for “personal” issues, or building their own numbers so their voices outweighed others’, the phone tree was the last remaining option to discuss elites’ behavior. As such, elites escaped consequences for the behaviors that angered members, brought down morale in the group, and violated core principles like democracy and transparency.

## CONCLUSION

Chapter 2 analyzed the ways the group structure, decision-making process, and member interactions presented challenges to democracy as informal elites gained power and subverted the principle of autonomy. Chapter 3 analyzed how scarce resources led members to adopt defensive practices that reduced heterogeneity, marginalized voices, restricted autonomy, and defied their commitment to inclusion. In this chapter, I analyzed how the informal elites who gained power in this precarious social movement organization capitalized on their status and control of resources to escape regulation and bring some of their desires to fruition. White, middle-class informal elites engaged in actions that reduced morale and increased fracturing, but no rules were made to prohibit these behaviors or punish those who engaged in them.

This chapter demonstrates that under the conditions faced by OC—a small group with few resources, repressed by a conservative state, adopting a slow consensus-based decision-making process and emphasizing autonomy—an oligarchy may arise in place of the democracy sought by members. My conclusion is based on the satisfaction of these criteria

from Leach (2005:329): “before we can say a nominally democratic organization is oligarchic, we must show first that a minority is wielding illegitimate power, second, that the majority is in some way resisting that power, and third, that there is a pattern of the minority being able to overcome such resistance on issues it feels are important.” Whereas the small size of the Occupation and the work of Occupying required some committed members, this chapter demonstrates that the majority of OC members were frequently upset by the behavior of a small group of elite actors who controlled resources and influenced decisions made by the General Assembly. I conclude that the structure, decision-making processes, and resources available to an organization can encourage oligarchy even among groups who call themselves democratic.

The case of Occupy the City helps us to refine the concept of oligarchy (Michels (1962) by documenting the conditions under which it arises even in small, nonbureaucratic organizations. This case demonstrates that there is an important link between power and *the ownership of property*—or at least the ability to secure property—something Michels does not incorporate into his discussion of what grants people power in organizations. It was this link that elites of OC successfully employed: their power was made possible by exercising their own financial privilege to purchase property (both land, in renting the camp, and camp essentials, like tents) or secure property (which Lissa was able to do in the absence of paying for it herself) *and* making sure that others knew of their contributions. Because the group did not have a strong culture of collectivism, the dominant culture of ownership enabled elites to make claims on the resources they owned without much resistance from other members. Scholars must determine whether this link between power and ownership of property is

critical, or if property-less members at the pinnacles of organizations can truly exercise power.

As endorsing the dominant culture of ownership shows, members of OC thought and acted in mainstream ways, reproducing inequality despite their political goals of eradicating it. While they framed the U.S. as an oligarchy (using the word in their Statement of Independence) and claimed to practice democracy amongst themselves, they, too, unwittingly became an oligarchy. Polletta asserts that, because consensus is a slow process, some members “are forced to operate behind the scenes” and, in leaderless movements, deny “their own leadership for fear of being perceived as directive” (2014:86). Seasoned activists are likely aware of this inclination in democratic groups; yet, Occupy billed itself as a movement for the unseasoned. Comprised of brand new activists, members of the group were unaware of this potential hazard for democratic groups. The group’s chosen organizational structure and decision-making process, then, were especially risky for a group hoping to practice democracy; unprepared to combat these hazards, the group began to mirror the mainstream society of which they were critical.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

When Occupy the City held its kick-off rally in October 2011, I presumed that supporters would gather for a typical day-long rally and then dissipate; I could not imagine that, in this conservative Southern state, activists could successfully occupy a space for longer than a few hours. Indeed, in a news article published a few weeks later, one member was quoted as saying that “in [the City], it’s a very polite society” and so occupying space illegally “wasn’t going to be the most effective way of getting our message across.” The group’s solution to this problem—renting space for a camp site—enabled a public presence for almost seven months straight. This made Occupy the City unique among Occupations in the Occupy Wall Street movement; OC was not only one of very few long-running Occupations in the South, but also, as far as I can confirm, the only Occupation to have rented their camp site.<sup>54</sup>

While it was the very act of renting that enabled OC to evade police raids and exist for as long as it did, it also presented unique challenges, namely the need for additional funds for rent and insurance, but also the early ideological division discussed in Chapter 3. While other Occupations shared some of the challenges of OC, like substance abuse among Occupiers and threats of violence, OC was uniquely positioned to ban people from the space, and the question of who should hold that power and sign the lease became a contentious decision for OC, a decision with which an Occupation on public land would not have had to

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<sup>54</sup> Occupy Wall Street in New York City leased office space once the movement spread globally; other Occupations may have done something similar. I have not been able to find another Occupation that rented the land upon which they set up camp.

grapple. This case study, then, is a study of leaderless democracy in a particular social context, and researchers in other Occupy groups have had different analyses of how inequality worked (Maharawal 2013; Schein 2012; Smith, Castaneda, and Heyman 2012). Before I discuss the implications of my analysis of this unique case for sociologists and activists, I remind readers of my research methods and provide an overview of chapters.

## METHODS AND CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Over the course of nine (frenzied) months, I completely immersed myself in OC, logging over 600 hours with the group as I attended every General Assembly and working-group meeting I could and slept many winter nights in a tent, while also archiving massive quantities of emails, forum posts, blogs, and private messages. Transcripts of in-depth interviews with core members complemented my field notes; this large body of qualitative data allowed me to analyze how inequality in the group was created and recreated by group members. I conducted this research using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 1983, 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967), writing thumbnail sketches and analytic memos as I coded for emergent themes.

In this dissertation, I analyzed how inequality between members may arise in a leaderless movement practicing participatory democracy. I examined how several factors mattered in creating and maintaining inequality, including group structure and decision-making processes, members' values and interactions, and the contexts (political and economic) within which the group operated. My findings revealed the challenges that this

prefigurative social movement organization encountered and the strategies it adopted that played a role in inhibiting their success.

Chapter 2 featured the decision-making process and movement principles and how they aided the consolidation of power among a few privileged group members who became elites. White, middle-class elites, already privileged by their social location, largely consolidated and maintained power by recounting the efforts they had invested in the movement and asserting the importance of those efforts. They also crafted narratives that tapped into movement principles such as “autonomy.” Additionally, elites gained power in OC by using and reifying the GA process to deflect criticism.

Chapter 3 featured members’ interactions and the context within which OC was situated, namely a capitalist economy and repressive state. I revealed how Occupiers’ interactions and the economic and political contexts influenced the rules Occupy the City designed that punished marginalized members. I also examined the narratives OC employed to rationalize those rules. Importantly, this chapter analyzed how the group redefined autonomy as a privilege that could be extended or revoked based on an individual’s conduct. I argued, then, that the concepts of autonomy and citizenship are related and that OC’s tactics alienated members who were disenfranchised, reducing the size of their movement.

Chapter 4 again featured elite members. I showed the kinds of damaging activities for which elites escaped consequences and revealed how they diminished the democracy the group claimed to have. Their subversion of movement principles enabled a minority to control resources and influence decision-making. Ultimately, I argued that even “democratic” social justice organizations can come to resemble an oligarchy if they have few resources,

employ tedious decision-making processes that elite members can subvert, and do not make efforts to address inequality within the group. I will now discuss the implications of my analysis for the field of sociology and provide some recommendations for social movement activists.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

I add to the literature a case study of a new generation bringing leaderless, consensus-based groups back to life. In this analysis, I wed two arguments: Freeman's (1972) proposition that unstructured leaderless groups are prone to see the rise of an informal elite, and Levine's (1979) assertion that the solution to the problems a lack of structure poses did not lie in more structures and rules, but instead involves developing a culture alternative to the mainstream. I show how the adoption of pre-fabricated solution—the General Assembly—posed problems for a group, including providing dominant group members with a tool that could be subverted to enhance and protect their status as elites. I also show how the culture of the group was quite mainstream: non-elites attributed leadership to “strong personalities” while elites positioned affinity groups as a “natural inevitability.” Elites used tools of colorblind racism to invoke the risk imaginary shaped by the mainstream media. In addition, elites and non-elites alike subscribed to a dominant culture of ownership rather than developing a culture of collectivism. Ultimately, and unfortunately, my analysis supports Treloar's allegation that the consensus process “is undemocratic. It is unwieldy. It is usually time-consuming. It is easily subject to the whims of the facilitator. It is frequently just another tool of manipulation when white activists work with communities of color” (2003:2).

Even as a purportedly democratic group turns oligarchic in nature, members reify an idealized consensus process “because they believe in the myths surrounding the process” (Treloar 2003:2), despite the actual outcomes.

Recall from the introduction of this dissertation that Polletta (2014) has theorized that consensus has been revived by a new generation of activists who belong to a cohort that is excluded by old political institutions beholden to the wealthy. This generation is used to participation and organization by way of the Internet. My research advances our understanding of what happens when a generation that is used to participating online brings those practices to a social movement in which membership is defined *purely* by participation: I found that phone and Internet access deepened the divide between members of dominant and marginalized groups. As the Internet became a space that could be Occupied<sup>55</sup> and tools like online forums were more frequently used as an organizational tool, those who lacked access to the Internet (or even to the group’s phone tree)—namely low-income and homeless campers—were excluded from making plans, gathering information, and engaging in direct actions.

This digital divide among social movement participants in OC made showing up to the table as equals increasingly difficult, hampering the effectiveness of consensus. In a movement in which status and currency were gained through participation, the potential for members of subordinate groups—people of color and poor people—to gain elite status was

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<sup>55</sup> Members of OC congratulated each other on Occupying the Internet, either by using their social media accounts as messaging platforms or by “fighting the good fight” in comments sections underneath news articles about OC. For example, Marcus frequently addressed negative comments about OC on a major local newspaper’s website, and when other Occupiers read the articles and then the comments, they could see that he had been spending much of his time advocating for the group.

further diminished. If consensus works only when “everyone shows up to the table as equals” (Schwalbe 2008), social movement organizations will need to have processes in place that can level the playing field for members. As the consensus process got more difficult, tedious, and contentious, those who wanted to get things done progressively operated behind the scenes, undermining democracy within the group.

Bearing this in mind, I add to the literature on inequality a case study of elite behavior, addressing Schwalbe and colleagues’ (2000) call to study elites and how they maintain inequality. My analysis reveals a number of behaviors elites can engage in to raise their status, escape consequences for bad behavior, and portray themselves as model citizens deserving of autonomy, while labeling and marginalizing others and restricting their autonomy with rules. I also add a generic process of inequality (Schwalbe et al. 2000)—closing ranks—as a type of boundary maintenance, showing how elites buffer one another from criticism and potential punishment. These analyses reveal “how actors in a setting cooperate to valorize the cultural capital they share and use to signify superior selves” (Schwalbe et al. 2000:442), a lesson that may apply beyond this particular case to other groups. In fact, while Schwalbe et al. were perhaps calling for the study of *societal* elites, generic processes apply to groups large and small—indeed, these processes were derived from research on small groups such as female Ku Klux Klan members (Blee 1996), residents and volunteers at a homeless shelter (Holden 1997), and temp workers and employees (Rogers 1995). Scholars with a stake in this literature should continue to document and analyze any generic processes used to maintain inequality “by those with the power to do so” (Schwalbe et al. 2000:443) in any group, across contexts.

My findings have direct implications for social movement organizing. As many ideas as I can put forth to help social movement organizations that wish to be inclusive and diverse in the future, any resistance movement in the U.S. will be, by its very nature, resisting at least two very powerful forces—the state and capitalism—and perhaps a third as well: organization itself, if Michels’ (1962) assertion that all organizations will become oligarchies holds true in all circumstances. This resistance will necessarily produce struggle no matter how thoughtful, careful, and optimistic activists are. The suggestions I provide here, then, do not guarantee success. But it is my hope that groups who adopt them may have a better chance of thriving than OC did, especially in light of scholarship that emphasizes how leaders can promote democratic practices in groups (Ganz 2000; Western 2008). Political organizing is messy and even as I recommend some courses of action that may decrease inequality within groups, I realize their limitations and that the usefulness of my suggestions will vary depending on the social context of the group to which my ideas must be adapted (indeed, in some cases, my suggestions are merely seedlings of thought, reflecting the notion that groups should not adopt prefabricated solutions).

As I met with members of other Occupations in the U.S., I learned about a few ideals that were not being put into practice in OC. Among them were role rotations and post-meeting reflections in General Assemblies. In OC, a handful of facilitators became “the” facilitators; little effort was made to teach others how to facilitate, especially after the first month, and no more than about six members of OC facilitated more than once or twice. Additionally, other Occupations built in a reflection period at the end of a GA, soliciting Occupiers’ opinions about how the meeting went, how the process was working for

everyone, and so on (whereas in OC, the process was reified and members were discouraged from critiquing it). My first suggestion, then, is for activists to be intentional about group processes; for example, my findings strongly point to the need to monitor and curtail the behaviors of elite members and to rein in elites, taking seriously the group dynamics. Groups, for instance, should decide whether a post-GA reflection period is useful and, if incorporated, be on alert for whether members use that space to reify the process. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to analyze whether these kinds of practices were effective at reducing inequality in other Occupations, but I put them forth as suggestions with firm belief that inequality in OC would have been reduced had they been implemented here.

Next, I encourage activists using consensus to think carefully about how to handle dissent, especially the framing of a block of a proposal. In OC, facilitators told members that blocks mean, “If this proposal passes, I am leaving the movement.” This framing gave lots of leverage to elite members, like Mal, who could activate fears that elites were invaluable members without whom the group would fall apart. It was not until I traveled to a GA of Occupy Wall Street in Manhattan that I heard blocks explained differently and learned that some Occupations actually *invalidated* some blocks. While OC facilitators did tell members that blocks should be used only if the proposal posed a threat to group safety or undermined the values of the movement, at OWS the group found it acceptable to hear a block and then vote to dismiss it on the grounds that the group did not agree that a proposal threatened their safety or undermined their values. In other words, at OWS, those participating in the GA were empowered to say, “I hear your concern for this group, but *we are* the group and we do

not share that concern.” This invalidation, which certainly may have its own problems,<sup>56</sup> kept power in the hands of the majority who could not be held hostage by a powerful minority.

Continuing in the vein of empowering the group and limiting the power of an (elite) individual, in the name of developing a culture of collectivism, I also suggest that activists take great care to ensure that all resources are owned and transparently controlled by the group rather than individuals. This might be especially true in the case of money. In OC, thanks to participation in the rent economy and dwindling donations from the public, individual Occupiers paid directly for things they were interested in, bypassing the official donation and GA allocation processes. In an ideal situation, individuals would have sent their money to OC’s pot and then had the GA allocate that money for two purposes: first, so as to better represent the interests of all rather than the interests of a few; and secondly, so as to reduce any individual’s claim over “their” money (and, therefore, reduce their “right” to exert control). Instead, setting up affinity groups, for example, to collect and pay rent money as well as choose someone to sign the lease allowed James and others to make decisions for the group—indeed, allowed them to *claim entitlement* to making decisions for the group—and make threats of withholding money if they did not get their way. Again, my solutions are not a panacea: contributions will be unequal as middle-class have more to donate than working-class and poor members, and even items purchased with GA consent have the potential to be manipulated by elites who join the working groups assigned to control those

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<sup>56</sup> The particular problem that a group might face by invalidating blocks would be the potential to dismiss concerns of people of color and other disenfranchised members who face a white, middle-class majority. Mansbridge (1983:170) postulates that when groups use consensus, there effectively is no minority: “In a consensual system, the minority is, in a sense, eliminated. After it agrees to go along, it leaves no trace. Its objections go unrecorded.”

items. Still, an increase in transparency and shared ownership should be an improvement over OC's process.

Additionally, ensuring group ownership of resources would limit the power of affinity groups—groups not sanctioned by the GA and formed for the purposes of escaping GA regulation. Another measure that can be taken to limit the power of affinity groups is to make a rule that proposals must come from working groups rather than individuals (who “represent” affinity groups). While working-group meetings were publicly announced on OC's calendar and open to anyone, affinity groups often met in secret and were exclusive. Affinity group members then came to the GA with proposals that often represented the interests of those in the affinity group; meanwhile, other Occupiers at the GA felt excluded and betrayed, and the meetings became contentious as various factions used the public space to negotiate deals they had engineered in private, lowering morale and cohesion. Mandating that proposals come from working groups would increase the likelihood of a proposal being a product of diverse interests and decrease the likelihood that the Occupation's resources would be allocated to people who wanted to take advantage of resources while escaping regulation.

Because so much of the inequality within OC was fomented outside of the General Assembly itself, measures need to be taken to ensure that member interactions in a social movement are not alienating to marginalized people. To that end, I have a few recommendations. One idea is to ensure that all members have access to the network of members outside of face-to-face official meetings. For example, contact information, like phone numbers, should be accessible to all (while still securing the safety of the activists

from antagonistic outsiders); in OC, elite members collected members' phone numbers and were often reluctant to share those phone numbers with other members, offering instead to pass messages, which allowed them to control access and information. Organizations need to protect against the notion that elite members' ability to collect more contact information translates to "owning" that information and thus to a right to exercise control over it.

I also believe the suggestions I have provided would be most successful in a group that forms special-interest caucuses that can build safe spaces, act collectively, and present teach-ins about inequality. Leondar-Wright (2014) reported that, among the consensus-based groups she studied, race-based caucuses were the only effective solution to the problem of getting marginalized members to participate, while Juris et al. (2012:435) described how Occupy Boston used various strategies, including building caucuses and hosting teach-ins, to address "in a collective and public way, the significant differences and power relations that, despite the populist rhetoric, continue to permeate the 99%." In OC, the sole working group responsible for managing inequality was named "Diversity" and almost always landed on the calendar in a very late time slot (such as 9:00 p.m. or later); it was sparsely attended and few teach-ins about inequality were ever held, while special-interest caucuses were never formed, even after some of the women of the Occupation held a meeting and discussed such a remedy. A social movement organization could increase ideological alignment by promoting the importance of a working group to educate about inequality and by supporting its events (e.g., by incorporating teach-ins before or after<sup>57</sup> General Assemblies). Activities like teach-

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<sup>57</sup> I would caution against teach-ins during General Assemblies—while GAs are attended voluntarily, some might see a teach-in during a GA as "mandatory" for anyone who wishes to be present to vote on a proposal,

ins, importantly grounded in theory (Paluck 2006), could increase members' awareness of inequality by, for instance, revealing how coded language functions.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As my research interests quickly shifted to include the interactions of members outside of General Assemblies and working-group meetings, I felt daunted by the realization that Occupy the City was a huge, and non-delineated, field site. Discussions around the camp fire, 2:00 a.m. goings-on at the camp, morning camp clean-up sessions, and forum threads—all of these *were* the Occupation, and it would certainly be a mighty struggle to capture it all in documentation and fieldnotes. I did my best to capture everything I could, but it was, of course, impossible to see it all, especially with the copious amounts of data to transcribe and field notes to be written.

I was especially aware that I had gaps in two groups: the clique, and the most marginalized campers.<sup>58</sup> The clique was exclusive and operated on an invite-only basis for both their affinity group meetings and their social gatherings, like parties at members' houses. While they sometimes included members from whom they wanted support on contentious proposals, it is possible that, because I played such a neutral role as a researcher, they decided it was not worthwhile to try to get me on their side. Additionally, for reasons outlined in Chapter 1, I was not typically granted access to the clique's hang-outs, nor did

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and research by Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2006) suggests that mandatory diversity training is less effective than voluntary.

<sup>58</sup> Of course, I also did not have access to data from an important source: the government officials whose power to suppress protest is backed by the state. The field would benefit from research from social movement scholars who gain access to state officials, government documents, and so on.

they grant me interviews. Meanwhile, the most marginalized campers often made themselves scarce, hanging out off-site, likely because the camp could be a hostile site for them, as Chapter 3 demonstrated. Their routines included using substances off-site or in parked cars at the camp as well as substantial amounts of time at the nearby bus hub either waiting for a ride or visiting with friends. I spent less time with them than other group members, due in part to this scarcity but also because studying how inequality was created and maintained meant studying those who were powerful enough to create and maintain it—in other words, studying the actions of elite members (as Schwalbe et al. 2000 call on sociologists to do, and as I argue, should be done with both societal elites and small-group elites).

Though I believe I had adequate rapport with the campers, I also wonder how my analysis, and the data with which I constructed it, may have differed had I been a man, or black, or poor. Because most members of OC were white and middle-class, I shared a social location with the majority of the group. At the same time, as a woman and a student, I performed more than my share of the “grunt work,” like taking notes for the group, and as a researcher concerned with shaping the direction of the group, I contributed fewer ideas than some others. Among the men, in particular, then, I may have been excluded from more strategizing and scheming than I realize and perhaps might have had access to different data had I held more social status.

Despite these limitations, my analysis reveals how—under the right conditions—democratic organizations may become oligarchic. I was able to take advantage of an unusual occasion: mostly first-time white, middle-class activists protesting for months on end by Occupying space shared with other activists who are disenfranchised members of society and

engaging in behaviors, like sleeping outside, that are typically limited to the unhoused. Given the wildfire spread of this tactic, other movements may mimic this strategy<sup>59</sup> in the near future. Sociologists, then, should be prepared to join these groups and analyze their structure, rules, rhetoric, and member interactions, as well as the context within which they are situated, with an eye toward power relations and the allocation of resources. As the U.S. continues to be a highly unequal society and social movements continue to play an important role in raising awareness about inequality, it is my hope that future scholars can build on this work by embedding themselves within elite cliques as well as the daily activities of the most marginalized members.

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<sup>59</sup> A critic might argue that groups are unlikely to adopt the tactic of occupation since the Occupy Wall Street movement faced such serious challenges, including being derided in the media. Yet other groups already have adopted this tactic. As examples, the local chapter of the NAACP occupied the state legislative building—including arrests—on a weekly basis during the summer of 2013, and on the other side of the political spectrum, armed conservative protestors occupied a wildlife refuge in Oregon for 41 days in early 2016.

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