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Negotiating the In-Between: LGBTIQ Participation in Broad-based Organising - A Case Study from the NSW Community Alliance

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Abstract

This article explores the perspectives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or queer (LGBTIQ) people participating within broad-based organisations "in the mix" with leaders from socially conservative religious and cultural organisations who may fundamentally disagree with or disregard their identity or expression. Their experiences, and my own, not only show that common cause across such diversity is possible, but also useful in practicing pluralism. In order to contribute to the greater good through this form of organising, LGBTIQ people can draw on the practices and teaching of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). This article examines some opposition from within the LGBTIQ community towards broad-based organising and how the IAF approach might respond. I draw on scholarship, qualitative interviews with ten diverse LGBTIQ leaders who participated in broad based organisations in Sydney and Newcastle in Australia between 2015-2023, and my own experience as the lead organiser of the Sydney Alliance (the Alliance) during the same period; a period which included a national plebiscite and the passage of legislation for marriage equality. I conclude briefly with practical suggestions for practitioners hoping to build diverse broad-based organisations that include LGBTIQ leaders.

Keywords: community organising, community organizing, industrial areas foundation, LGBTIQ, queer, Sydney, marriage equality, pluralism, LGBT, broad based organizing

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Introduction

Very little has been written about broad-based organising in relation to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or queer (LGBTIQ) experience, yet our LGBTIQ communities and leaders are a vibrant feature of urban and community life the world over. Durable, democratic broad-based organisations built on intentional relationships, that build leadership, act collectively, achieve substantive and concrete goals on housing, renewables, jobs, and migration can only be stronger with greater participation of LGBTIQ leaders. Exploring relevant Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) theory and practice through an LGBTIQ lens and the experience of LGBTIQ leaders during a unique moment in Australian history provides insights to practitioners hoping to solve a unique problem for broad-based organisations; how to attract and retain LGBTIQ leaders and communities in alliances with significant participation of socially conservative religious and cultural institutions and vice versa. To succeed not only means building stronger broad-based organisations, but, in a world of online polarisation, it also provides a living example of "the commons" and practical plurality. To explore these concepts, I start by defining the parameters of the study, placing the study within the organising, geographic and LGBTIQ context. Following a short description of the methodology, I outline the commonly experienced apprehension and critiques LGBTIQ people express related to broad-based. In responding through the exploration of IAF theory and practice, I will draw on my own experience and interviews with ten leaders of various LGBTIQ identities who have participated in broad-based organising, predominantly in Sydney and some in Newcastle in New South Wales, Australia. I conclude with practical suggestions. But first, a story.

A Story – It Started Over Dinner

One evening in 2016, at a downtown Sydney café, I gathered with a group of socially conservative millennials from a Christian organisation for a discussion about the impact on Sydney families of the lack of affordable housing. My role at the time was as the Lead Organiser of the Sydney Alliance (the Alliance). Among them included a pair of young-adult leaders from migrant communities who were well respected for their commitment to both social justice and conservative morality issues; a socially conservative trade unionist; and a senior journalist and lawyer who would later become a prominent spokesperson for the "No" campaign in the lead up to the nationwide Same Sex Marriage Postal Survey in 2017. The meeting started relationally, with stories of self and experiences of the housing crisis and finished with a commitment to work together. Specifically, to engage a senior church leader to take a public leadership role with the Alliance on housing and homelessness. A year later, that intervention proved decisive in applying pressure to a conservative political decision maker from the same denomination. As a result, thousands of affordable homes would be delivered over the next decade.

The warm, public relationships between us continued through the following year when in 2017, Sydney became the epicentre of the polarised debate on marriage equality, leading into the national postal-survey plebiscite and subsequent passage of legislation enabling same-sex marriage. These leaders knew I was a gay man with an intention to marry my now husband. Participation through the Alliance provided a philosophy, practice, and framework to maintain and deepen these relationships, without having to compromise on our own values, while delivering on an outcome we shared in common.

Defining Parameters - Which Organising?

Community organising is "a process by which communities identify their assets and concerns, prioritize and select issues, and intentionally build power" (Minkler and Wakimoto 2022, 10). Broad-based organisations, such as the Sydney Alliance, bring diverse faith, community and

union groups together to organise. The members of the Alliance are civic institutions, not individuals. There are multiple networks of broad-based organisations. The Alliance is a member of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) Pacific and uses the IAF approach. The IAF, founded by Saul Alinsky and significantly transformed and developed by Ed Chambers and Dick Harmon (Chambers 2005, 35-36, 46), further iterated and developed by Ernie Cortez, Sr Christine Stephens and Mike Gecan (Rubio, 2024) embeds relational practice and is organised around a curriculum of national training used throughout a global network of broad-based organisations. The IAF approach to organising is characterised as taking a nonideological, pragmatic view of social change, retaining professional organisers, training local leaders who own and represent the organisation (Sen 2003, xlv-xlvi); focusing on building people power through an organising cycle that includes listening, discerning and planning specific and concrete issue campaigns that target individual decision makers through actions, and a culture of iterative evaluation (Tattersall 2015, Hancock 2023). Relational meetings between leaders of institutions builds trust that enables the negotiation of diverse interests (Stauffer 2021). Within the Alliance, leaders and staff seek to achieve five outcomes:

1. The identification, development, and recruitment of leaders to civil society;
2. Strengthening civil society organisations;
3. Building the Alliance itself as a practice of organising across difference;
4. Winning on concrete issues; and
5. Shifting the landscape of power (Tattersall 2015, 392).

The Sydney Alliance was the first broad-based organisation in Australia and adapted the universals of the IAF approach to the local context (Tattersall 2015)[1]. It was followed by the establishment of the Hunter Community Alliance in the NSW Hunter Valley in 2024.

Characteristics of IAF Organizing
• Holds nonideological and pragmatic view of social change • Trains local leaders who own and represent the organisation • Focuses on building people power through organising cycles that includes listening, discerning and planning specific and concrete issue campaigns that target individual decision makers through actions • Retains professional organisers • Maintains culture of iterative evaluation

Based on Sen 2003, Tattersall 2015, Hancock 2023

Defining Parameters – Which Lens?

This article focuses on the challenge that broad based organisations may struggle with to recruit and retain wary LGBTIQ leaders because of the presence of social conservative religious and cultural institutions and leaders; or conversely that are unable to recruit and retain socially conservative leaders who are wary of secular organisations that practice, in the words of interviewee Reverend Adam "exclusive inclusivity"[2]. Social conservatives will have their own perspective on these matters. My goal is to focus here on the LGBTIQ experience and lens on broad-based organising rather than the experience or lens of social conservatives leaders, who

[1] For a comprehensive review of the broad-based model in Sydney see also (Iveson, K., Tattersall, A. 2020) (Hancock 2023)
[2] All interviews were conducted in 2023. The quotes throughout the text are attributed to each participant by their name or chosen pseudonym

draw from radically different and legitimate traditions to inform their participation. Solid, conservative apologia for both pluralism and broad-based organising exists elsewhere.

Defining Parameters – Which Community?

Sydney was highly polarised on the issue of LGBTIQ inclusion during the 2010s-2020s with distinct focal points, starting with the removal of 108 discrimination laws by the Rudd Federal Government in 2008. This was then followed by the internal campaigns run within the Labor and Liberal parties on marriage equality between 2010-2017, which led to the approval of a binding vote for Federal Labor Party Members of Parliament (MPs), and a conscience vote for Federal Liberal Party MPs. Finally, Prime Minister Tony Abbott, and his successor Malcolm Turnbull, made the legislatively unnecessary but politically convenient decision to undertake a nationwide postal survey on the question of legalising same-sex marriage in 2017. This culminated in both sides of the debate running public advertising campaigns to persuade the population how to respond to the survey. The result: 61.6% of the responses (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017) indicated 'yes' in favour of legalising same-sex marriage; and the legislation passed through parliament later that year. Between 2018-2022, the debate moved to questions of whether government-funded religious schools could discriminate against LGBTIQ staff and students, a potential federal religious anti-discrimination act, and a series of moral panics related to transgender issues and inclusion.

Sydney was a crucible for these debates since arguably, Sydney is "the epicentre of LGBTIQA+ life, history and culture in Australia and is home to the highest population of LGBTIQA+ people in Australia" (City of Sydney 2023, section 2), while simultaneously "New South Wales had the lowest 'yes' vote as a result of Western Sydney electorates with high immigrant populations voting against" (Beaumont 2017, para. 1) page number). Sydney also hosted leading global conservative Christian figures and organisations at the time. Cardinal George Pell was the Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney. The Sydney Anglican Diocese led the charge against marriage equality within the global Anglican communion. Sydney remains the headquarters of the C3 Christian City Church and Sydney Chinese Christian Association. The conservative Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church and the Baptist Ministries Australia and many expressions of Eastern Orthodox churches have strong support in Sydney. All of these groups were partners in the Coalition for Marriage and against marriage equality (Coalition for Marriage 2017).

Sydney is also home to more than half of Australian Muslims, over 300,000 (Hassan 2018), with many Islamic institutions taking public positions for a no response in the plebiscite (Bagshaw 2017). At the time of the plebiscite, four Muslim organisations participated in the Sydney Alliance as well as two Catholic Dioceses, the statewide Baptist organisation and many individual leaders from a range of cultural, secular and religious institutions that held conservative views on LGBTIQ matters. Other institutional members of the Alliance, such as progressive community groups, faith groups and trade unions, were public in their support of marriage equality. Additionally, some active members of conservative institutions were personally supportive of marriage equality, confronting rigid stereotypes on all sides. As an issue that divided the Alliance's organisational membership, the Alliance did not take a position on marriage equality, nor on the subsequent LGBTIQ debates listed above. This was an implicitly understood and occasionally explicitly articulated stance by leaders and staff. The Alliance sought to stand for the whole; and remains one of the few institutions with broad, active representation across the political, cultural, and geographic spectrum of Sydney's communities.

Defining Parameters – Which Terms, LGBTIQ And/Or Queer?

LGBTIQ is used for the collective of individual identities within the community. I use context-specific terms such as *lesbian* or *trans*. I use *queer* intentionally and separately not as an umbrella term to replace an unwieldy acronym (Hébert 2014, 157) but rather as a distinct political identity. Warner (2002) identifies the root of the political queer identity as rooted in 'dignity in shame', an ethic born of an intimate experience of being despised and rejected in a "world of norms that they now recognise as false morality" (35-36). Queer identity aligns with 'liberationists' who seek a "a revolutionary struggle that seeks the eradication of heterosexism" (p.14). Central to the queer identity is a critique of heteronormativity (Berlant and Warner 1998, 548-553) (Harr and Kane 2008, 285) (Sedgwick 2008, xvi)[3]. Liberationists are sometimes contrasted with 'assimilationists' who focus on formal and legal equality (Hébert 2014, 157). Interviewee Andrew McCloud notes "queer for me denotes a worldview and politics. But I only say that when I feel like the other person is going to understand what the hell that means".

Methodology and Research Caveats

I engage in research on these questions to reflect on my own political practice and on the nature of democratic politics more broadly (Iveson, K., Tattersall, A. 2020; Wills 2012). I take the view that I participate in ethnographic research with complete participation and full membership (Adler and Adler 1987). I draw on 13 years of organising, reflecting on my experience as an organiser, along with a set of interviews with LGBTIQ leaders from the Alliance. I am a double insider (LaSala 2003). Firstly, as Lead Organiser and trainer I was chief steward for the culture, values, and parameters of the Alliance. Secondly, I am an insider as someone with lived experience of being gay. Michael La Sala identifies the importance of insiders within LGBTIQ research as enabling research questions and hypotheses that may not occur to outsiders and the ability to build rapport with interviewees through shared experiences (2003, 17).

I also recognise that my experience comes from significant privilege as a middle class, educated, white, abled, cisgender gay man. I recognise my experience will be significantly different from other members of the LGBTIQ community (Harr and Kane 2008, 284; Seidman 1994, 172), given the tendency for my subset of the community to dominate LGBTIQ scholarship and prioritise their issues over others (Conerly 1996; Meek 2012; Goldman 1996; Pallotta-Chiarolli and Arjun Rajkhowa 2017; Sycamore 2008). I recognise that for both me and some interviewees, we carry an additional privilege of being able to 'pass/blend' as part of the heterosexual community, a privilege not shared by all members of the LGBTIQ community (Klein 2014). For those who cannot 'pass/blend', their very presence or expression elicits reactionary responses (Stryker 2008, 6), with even stronger reactions directed towards LGBTIQ people of colour (Caraves 2019). These academic caveats have a broader application to the Alliance itself and the importance of recognising and organising with the diversity of LGBTIQ leaders. Meek (2012) highlights the broader implication by quoting one of their research participants, Rita: "White middle-class gay men. I feel like when you reach a certain level of privilege in mainstream society, you tend to not want to be dragged down by the other people who cannot assimilate" (190).

As such, I contacted fifteen diverse LGBTIQ leaders who had participated in the Alliance and ten responded giving written and verbal consent. To protect privacy, participants chose how they wished to be named, with some choosing pseudonyms and others with full attribution. Interviewees have the right to review the material and the right to withdraw their quotations. Using a self-reflexive practice rather than pre-drawn identities (Rumens 2016, 91), I asked, "How

[3] For a more fulsome investigation of heteronormativity see Berlant & Warner's *Sex in Public*, 1998.

do you identify?" Interviewees identified a variety of LGBTIQ identities, religious, cultural, ethnic, economic. However, I ensured a mix of union, faith and community backgrounds, varying ages and different levels of engagement in the Sydney or Hunter Community Alliance.

LGBTIQ Hesitancy and Critique Towards Broad-Based Organising

It was my experience as a double insider, and it was confirmed by interviewees, that when faced with the prospect of working with conservative religious leaders, many LGBTIQ friends and colleagues chose to find other outlets for their political participation.

A number of interviewees themselves expressed initial apprehension about becoming involved in the Alliance. McCloud said "I was apprehensive much more in the earlier days of my involvement with the Alliance" Jasmine Tenemas Jover said "Before I actually started placement at the Alliance, I was kind of freaking out a little bit". Shayma El-helou said "Coming into the Alliance with my experiences, I felt I may not have been accepted, but that was quickly changed when I shared my story and was met with acceptance not judgement". Kylie shared that some of her friends felt viscerally uncomfortable at Alliance meetings hosted in churches. "They used the terms 'exposed' and 'unsafe'. And I think that's because of that stereotype of people in positional power, but it's also rightfully understandable as well".

Others reported bemusement or outright hostility towards broad-based organising from LGBTIQ friends or colleagues. A queer woman union leader not involved in the Alliance remarked to me "I'm glad you are there behind *enemy* lines." (relational meeting notes, 2016). A gay staffer from the moderate wing of the conservative party argued to me that working with those who seek to suppress gay and lesbian rights is at best naïve and at worst giving socially conservative institutions unearned social licence (relational meeting notes, 2017).

A longtime community health advocate explained the principles of her own non-participation in the Alliance; participation in a broad-based organisation dilutes the power (ability to act) of LGBTIQ individuals and communities. Firstly, because *individuals* suppress their identities to appease the implicit dominant heteronormative culture established when social conservatives are in the room, a culture more conservative than general secular society. Secondly, because many LGBTIQ *collective* concerns are not areas of common ground with religious conservatives. LGBTIQ leaders and communities are being asked to deprioritise their own liberation in favour of 'non-controversial' issues (relational meeting notes, 2013).

This final critique against broad-based organisations tends to resonate strongest when LGBTIQ interests are interpreted through a narrow lens whereby LGBTIQ communities' only political concerns are the pursuit of *LGBTIQ-specific* policies, legal equality, and rights. Politically queer leaders tend to operate with a 'wide lens' where economic, environmental and intersectional concerns are recognised as queer issues. Queer perspectives may also critique broad-based organising. Queer perspectives are informed by significant experiences of organising separately from heteronormative institutions[4] (Hébert 2014). Queer arguments may centre broad-based organising within a broader critique of neo-liberal capitalist heteronormativity which seeks to "manage diversity" (Ahonen, et al. 2014, 4-8). Instead of investing in broad-based approaches, queers should invest in alternative communities or *counter-publics* (Berlant and Warner 1998, 558) rather than conform to space defined by heteronormative power (Vitry 2020). When broad-

[4] This history of separate organising also occurs within the LGBTIQ community. Lesbian spaces for example, do not just separate from heterosexual patriarchy, but also separate from gay male patriarchy (Nardi 1998, 581).

based organisations bring together diversity, they in fact dilute the *distinct* difference of the queer community and by inference, co-opt queer leaders into the dominant structure.

The dilution argument is not unique to a radical queer perspective. Vincent Lloyd (2014) critiques the IAF model through an African American theological lens, arguing that community organising dilutes the distinct identity that gives communities their power. Further, by only working on "piecemeal reforms" (654), broad-based organisations commit two mistakes. Namely, holding up and creating a false optimism in democratic institutions as redeemable and worse, accommodating neoliberal capitalism where difference is flattened into "neo-liberal multiculturalism" (647). In other words, a "colourblind politics of racial denial" (Crenshaw 2017, 55). This argument tends to favour non-participation with institutions that are perceived as reinforcing patriarchal and heteronormative values.

How might an LGBTIQ lens on IAF theory and the experience of LGBTIQ leaders participating in broad-based organisations provide nuance in response to LGBTIQ apprehension and critique?

An LGBTIQ Lens on the IAF Approach: Dialectics

The IAF teaches its organisers and leaders to embrace dialectical thinking; to sit in the tension between polarities, to examine and reconcile seemingly opposing perspectives and to eschew rigid thinking in any one direction (Chambers 2005, 25). These lessons are taught at national training, and the dialectic between unity and difference is sometimes taught as faction vs community.

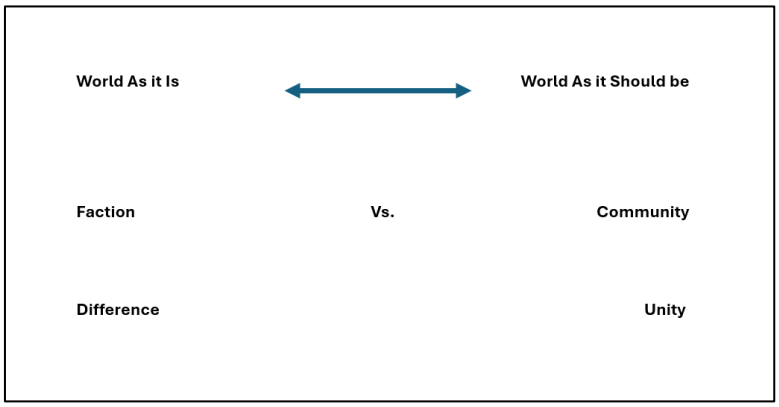

Figure 1

As seen in Figure 1, At one end of the polarity is the 'World As It Is', 'difference' and 'faction'; where there is diversity and counterposed differences, appetites, and interests. Gecan (1999) explains that existing only at this end leaves us cynical that our own interests constitute the only reality, with no ability to find common values with others. At the other end of the polarity is the 'World as it Should Be', 'unity' and 'community', "where we act as a single whole" (Gecan 1999, 38).

For members of the LGBTIQ community for whom conformity (a single whole) has been experienced as oppression (Nagle 2023, 83; Nardi 1998, 580), unity is far from the ideal 'World as it should be.' My own hackles raised as I heard this concept for the first time. Put succinctly, "sameness without difference makes us invisible" (Tattersall, Interview, 2023)5. However, Gecan's argument and the logic of the training continue on; acting as if all the community shares a common view is not only counterproductive, as it does not recognise the different interests of

[5] For more see Tattersall (Tattersall, Organising Together Across Difference: Relational Experiments in Community Organising, 2024)

diverse players, but it also is harmful. Such a view glosses over differences and their power imbalances, or worse – seeks to purge the impure. The tendency to see all as the same relies on 'wishful thinking'" (Gecan 1999, 38) rather than a clear view of reality.

Dialectically, as organisers we say, stand in the world as it is (where faction is the reality) and strive for the world as it should be (seek unity where possible); accept the realities and differences and negotiate them in public where we can identify a greater whole. In practice, this approach was experienced positively by interviewees. El-helou said "The Alliance brings people together and embraces those differences". Xavier Walsh said, "The Alliance recognises that together we are incredibly vast and inherently diverse". Barbel Winter reflected on the importance of the mix "it's really important for these coalitions to be mature enough to hold a bit of diversity and difference, a bit of crunch; imperfect speakers, people who don't fit into neat boxes!". In contrast to online politics which seeks only those with the same views, interviewee Stevie Lang Howson argues "it's only a consensus because we started off disagreeing", compromise mediates differences and builds collective power.

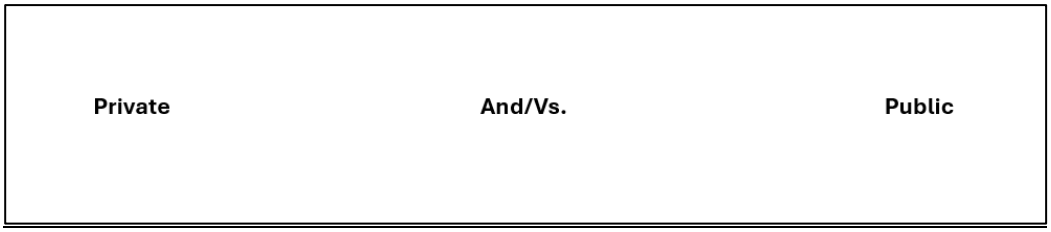

Figure 2

The second dialectic concerns public vs/and private (see Figure 2). The IAF approach reconstitutes and draws from Hannah Arendt's concepts of public and private. The public as envisaged by Arendt is the place of cool detachment, difference, and negotiation. "Inside public collectives, people can insist upon and can hold multiple loyalties, some in conflict with one another," (Chambers 2005, 76). This stands in contrast to the closeness and familiarity of the private space that "obliterates all distinctions" (May 2018, II para 7). Within the private sphere we have personal fraternal [*sic*] familial bonds (May 2018, II para 6) where relationships are warm, unique, intimate, involuntary, and many times secret. Versus the public realm, described by Arendt as the place of citizenship and 'the political,' at work and education. There are terms, rules and boundaries, transparency, roles, rituals, where self-interest with clear terms and accountability can be expected, where discord and disagreement are the norm, with factions in tension most of the time (Chambers 2005, 73-74).

The training, after laying out such categories, then explores the many places where there is confusion, blurring and expectations – including the gendered nature of this separation whereby "women were told the private sphere was theirs" and "the public arena the man's place. Men were told the opposite. This, when believed and obeyed, damaged both groups" (Chambers 2005, 76).

The relationships sought in public 'rely on plurality, that is wary of any philosophy or ideology that collapses difference in the name of truth, history, or even compassion" (May 2018, II). Put more caustically, "if you can celebrate only your own ethnic and religious heritage, you'll mix poorly in public relationships or not at all," in public we embrace plurality (Chambers 2005, 76).

Dialectical thinking is built into every component of the Alliance, taught explicitly in training, read out at the beginning of meetings, and written into the code of conduct:

> *We accept that diverse member organisations won't always agree but we focus on the values that we share. We work in good faith and consult, negotiate and compromise wherever possible to find and preserve common ground. We try as far as possible to reach decisions by consensus. We treat each other with mutual respect at all times. We do not allow religious, political, or other differences to cause divisiveness in the Alliance. (Sydney Alliance 2023).*

Through an LGBTIQ lens the embrace of negotiated diversity and guardrails around our public selves protects LGBTIQ people from being subsumed in an ideology of heteronormative sameness that blurs the distinctiveness of our LGBTIQ identities. Likewise, it protects social conservatives from being subsumed in an ideology of secular liberal sameness. Jasmine felt powerful standing in her difference at the Alliance "I'm here as a gay woman. I'm at the table. Respect me". Interviewee Mary Waterford recognised that in her relationships with Muslim leaders who knew of her sexuality "there was always a recognition this is a relationship with respect". The framework released participants from the assumption that everyone must agree in order to work together in public. Reverend Adam said "it was a stepping stone for me to be able to participate. Instead of feeling shy, that I might offend anyone… to practise that particular inclusivity without being guarded with your own belief nor needing to defend your own belief as well". Barbel recognised that dealing with difference as part of participating in democratic public life "my approach was shaped by my European upbringing around democracy versus fascism. As long as you're on the democratic spectrum, I talk to you."

Practically, this approach takes place during the contestation and deliberation of difference, which occurs when identifying and agreeing on which issues and campaigns to tackle as a collective. This takes place during the research-discernment and planning phases.[6] Waterford articulates how divisive elements of the LGBTIQ issues were in effect taken off the table. "I see the Alliance, like many social movements, you have to be prepared to give, to put aside some stuff to get for the collective good, not the issues that divide us so". Kylie expressed the tension here: "I heard the phrase we don't organize around LGBTIQ issues because of the divisiveness and it being so broad… That was kind of a blanket statement that meant there was an automatic barrier there… it kind of locks out that conversation (that might divide us), because that's already a shared understanding that we don't, kind of, go there".

Every interviewee identified housing as an LGBTIQ issue that was part of the Alliance's consensus. Stacey Miers articulated that her initial question about the Alliance had little to do with sexuality. "Instead my first thought. Okay if we're going to run this campaign. What are the deliverables? How much time? If you are going to put a lot of time and energy into something. Can you deliver on it?" but then "I also think most of us come with a passion about housing. Finding housing and being part of our [inner city LBGTIQ] communities become harder as you get older, especially if you are on lower incomes". Kylie said, "Where I see that negotiation happening is framing it [housing] in an intersectional way… here are the issues around housing that queer people experience. It's relatable enough that those other organizations that may not agree with the identities or the community itself, could not possibly argue with, I would say, because homelessness is a fact.".

Queer identifying interviewees, often drew on class analysis or other radical frameworks to see the Alliance as a vehicle for action – countering a narrow lens that sees LGBTIQ-specific issues as the only goal; Tenemas Jover said "Gay rights don't end with marriage equality, gay rights

[6] See (Tattersall 2015) for a fulsome explanation of the Alliance organising cycle.

are housing. Gay rights are asylum". For the purpose of achieving much wider economic reforms, McCloud argued "I can put my sexuality in the back seat"

Another practice that embodies the dialectical approach is the roll call at public assemblies, where the Alliance engages in negotiations with decision makers. During the roll call of member organisations, a representative shares a sentence about why they are part of the Alliance, while their members stand, one after the other. Each organisation stands in their own right, understanding and perspective while being part of a greater plurality. A challenge the Alliance encountered was that none of the city's named LGBTIQ organisations were members, and so the community was not represented in the roll call, despite the fact that many LGBTIQ people participated as members of broader institutions. As such, individual leaders occasionally wore outward symbols of their sexual and gender diversity (such as pride-rainbow earrings).

Figure 3 Jasmine Tenemas Jover is a member of Shelter NSW a housing peak, wearing parts of her Peruvian and Queer identities

In line with the IAF approach in avoiding extreme polarities, the Alliance never argued at training that broad-based organising is the *only* form of democratic participation. There is stated recognition that there are a range of ways people participate in strengthening democracy, "various practices of democratic politics need not each be comprehensive or conclusive nor even obviously mutually supportive" (May 2018, I para 8). LGBTIQ leaders, including myself, could prosecute non-consensus LGBTIQ issues, through other means such as digital mobilisation, autonomous queer collectives, street protest, party involvement, and electoral politics.

Transformative Relationships

One on one relational meetings and the broader relationality of the IAF approach are harder to study than broad-based organisations themselves, since one on one meetings are mostly invisible to scholars (May 2018, II; Stall and Stoecker 1998, 738). The ability to hold differences in tension in a broad-based organisation is built on the strength of the relationships between leaders through the relational meeting practice[7].

Relational meetings are an organising practice involving sharing of stories that deepen as trust is built up between each member of the pair. Through an LBGTIQ lens, relationality has a particular resonance for LGBTIQ individuals' own experiences and in the context of collective moves forward for LGBTIQ rights. From my own experience growing up, building strong relationships with other LGBTIQ people was not only a matter of flourishing, but also self-recognition. This may resonate with LGBTIQ people's experiences of storytelling, particularly in the context of coming out; a process that also encompasses significant identity formation, is built on trust, is often iterative and non-linear (Klein 2014). Likewise, telling stories of coming out and other disclosures of LGBTIQ experience, can take on a quasi-ritual element and be an important milestone in trust-building between LGBTIQ people (Garrick 1997).

Interviewees shared the sense of solidarity they had with other LGBTIQ people within the Alliance. Winter said, "It's always the benefit of being a dyke, right? Like, you know. Well, it's so full of women like me. While that's not explicit, it's implicit. There's a dance we do around some of the conservative people that gets done without much talking about it". Tenemas Jover and Kylie reiterated that knowing I was a member of the community through a relational meeting meant they felt more comfortable in the organisation. Waterford said "There's a sense that we were a part of the same gang without having to make a big deal about being part of the same gang". Within the Alliance, having strong relationships with other LGBTIQ people was important for me as a staff member, especially having at least one queer leader on the board. Despite there not being any explicitly LGBTIQ organisations, I built relationships with many LGBTIQ people through the Alliance who participated via their other organisations. Andrew remarked not only that he has met more people through relational meetings, but he has met more *LGBTIQ* people who aren't gay men. McCloud said "Not only did I meet more queer women, but I also met more women full stop". It was through the Alliances that many interviewees had built public relationships with leaders of other *queer* identities, ethnicities and ages.

Lived experiences of discrimination, prejudice and violence are widespread among LGBTIQ people, since building relationships intentionally in public settings, such as the schoolyard and workplace can be an intentional strategy for support, safety and or survival This tends to mean that LGBTIQ people understand the importance of strong relationships based on mutual understanding. This tends to be replicated across both with private friendships and public relationships. Our difference requires effort and understanding from those who do not share our experience. Kylie said, "through relationships people tend to empathize more about queer issues".

Collectively, existing scholarship points to the proliferation of personal and public relationships between LGBTIQ people with the straight majority as critical for moves forward for LGBTIQ rights, (Sedgwick 2008, 71). One particular Arab-Australian leader shared with me years after the fact, that she was the tie-breaker vote that meant their ethnic association would publicly support marriage equality (one of the only Arab-Australian organisations to do so). She reflected that it was through her decade-long Alliance relationship with me "that I learnt to see things from another perspective" (personal communication, 2020).

[7] For a full description of relational meetings see (Chambers 2005, 44-55).

Coming into the Alliance, while some LGBTIQ interviewees were nervous about building relationships with social conservatives, almost all appreciated the relational practice as fundamental to building trust for *public* action. Some found themselves sharing their experience with others who have little exposure to openly LGBTIQ people. McCloud said "as much as there's a huge vulnerability being an out queer person in Alliance spaces, it's also an opportunity for them to relate to me as a person, and not as a threat. We can find common ground, but it doesn't mean that we have to walk out of a room best friends". Reverend Adam shared:

> *One time I was talking to a Muslim sheikh, and he wanted to understand how I behave as an inclusive minister, a non-Western person who comes out from a country where LGBTIQ as illegal, how do I actually interact between the two? He was trying to understand the theology behind things, understanding the pastoral side of things. And you know, I got to open their perspective. We can't tell them that you need to accept me. I think it just has to come up from their own curiosity.*

McCloud shared that in the context of a relational meeting, he found people exploring their sexual and gender identity who had expressed that they had not had the space, time or logistical access to talk to someone about those parts of themselves. Likewise Reverend Adam found that during relational meetings with younger LGBTIQ people of colour, they would find themselves articulating for the first time how they experienced living between a white-dominant LGBTIQ culture in Australia, and the heteronormative culture of their home country. Relational meetings were forming their holistic identity and leadership. El-helou said, "I understood myself better through relational meetings. The questions I would choose to ask would tell me a lot about myself and what I am curious about in the world, the other person, my beliefs".

Relational meetings also involve agitation (Stauffer 2021). "They are there to challenge someone to act differently. And to be challenged in return" (May 2018, II para 5). May argues that conditions of plurality sit "in-between"; each "discloses themselves as unique, that the world is created and recreated, together" (May 2018, II para 3). Relational meetings draw on our personal experiences but are part of the public sphere. We do not know ourselves, until we see our experience through the eyes of another from a different walk of life. Pitkin (1981) suggests that "Participation in political action, deliberation, and conflict may make us aware of our more remote and indirect connections with others" (347).

What could be more challenging than the empathy required for a person who is socially conservative to encounter the lived experience of a member of the LGBTIQ community? Or, *and here is the rub*, vice versa; for a member of the LGBTIQ community to appreciate the depth of meaning of the religious or cultural perspective of someone who is socially conservative?

Reverend Adam remarked that the Alliance was one of the few places where he saw conservative people taken seriously because of the relational culture. In contrast, he said "I think sometimes we forget as well that when we fly our inclusivity flag, we can be quite exclusive. We love the world, everyone is welcome. But then… say a different belief, person, say Sydney Anglican or Pentecostal belief. Oh, no, we don't want to have those conversations because we can't stand in their shoes". Instead, the Alliance invites a more nuanced approach of listening and curiosity, as Winter said, "communities that are mature in themselves can then organize collectively with different people".

Relationships Across Space

For the Alliance, being able to physically bring together leaders from different parts of the city had an impact on interviewees, given that Sydney has an imagined "gay & lesbian geography" (Wotherspoon 2016) (see Figure 4) where a porous queer-inner city and inner-west queer zone is contrasted to straight suburbia (Gorman-Murray 2006; Nash 2015, 184-186).

The size and breadth of Sydney, not to mention Sydney traffic, meant that LGBTIQ people are unlikely to be physical neighbours with conservative migrant communities. Reflecting on this, Waterford said, "I heard the other day 'we are who we eat with', the Alliance gives me a place to eat with a real range of people. I don't get that in my life, and my friends don't have it. How do we interest more [LGBTIQ] people in coming out of their comfort zone?". The Alliance brought people together, transgressing imagined lines drawn by the results of the plebiscite results (see Figure 5).

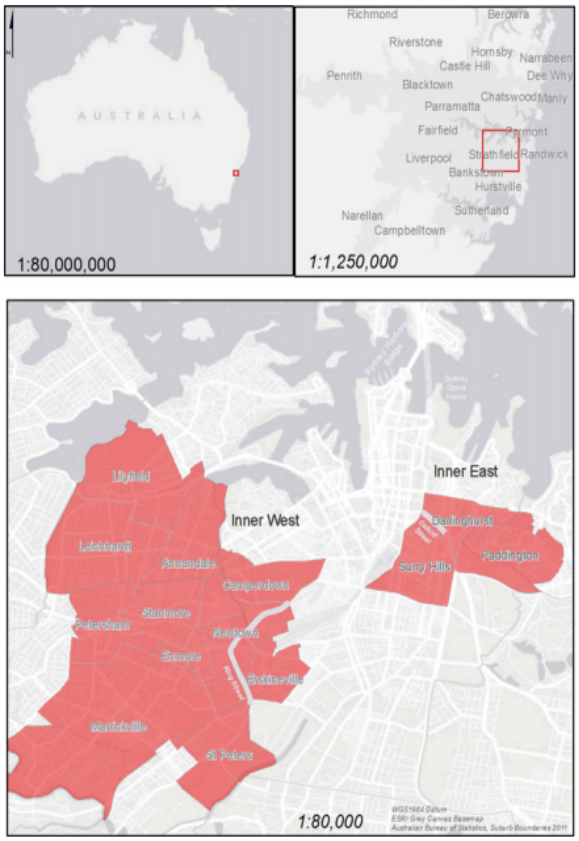

Figure 4 An example of imagined historical "gay and lesbian geography" (Gorman-Murray and Nash 2021)

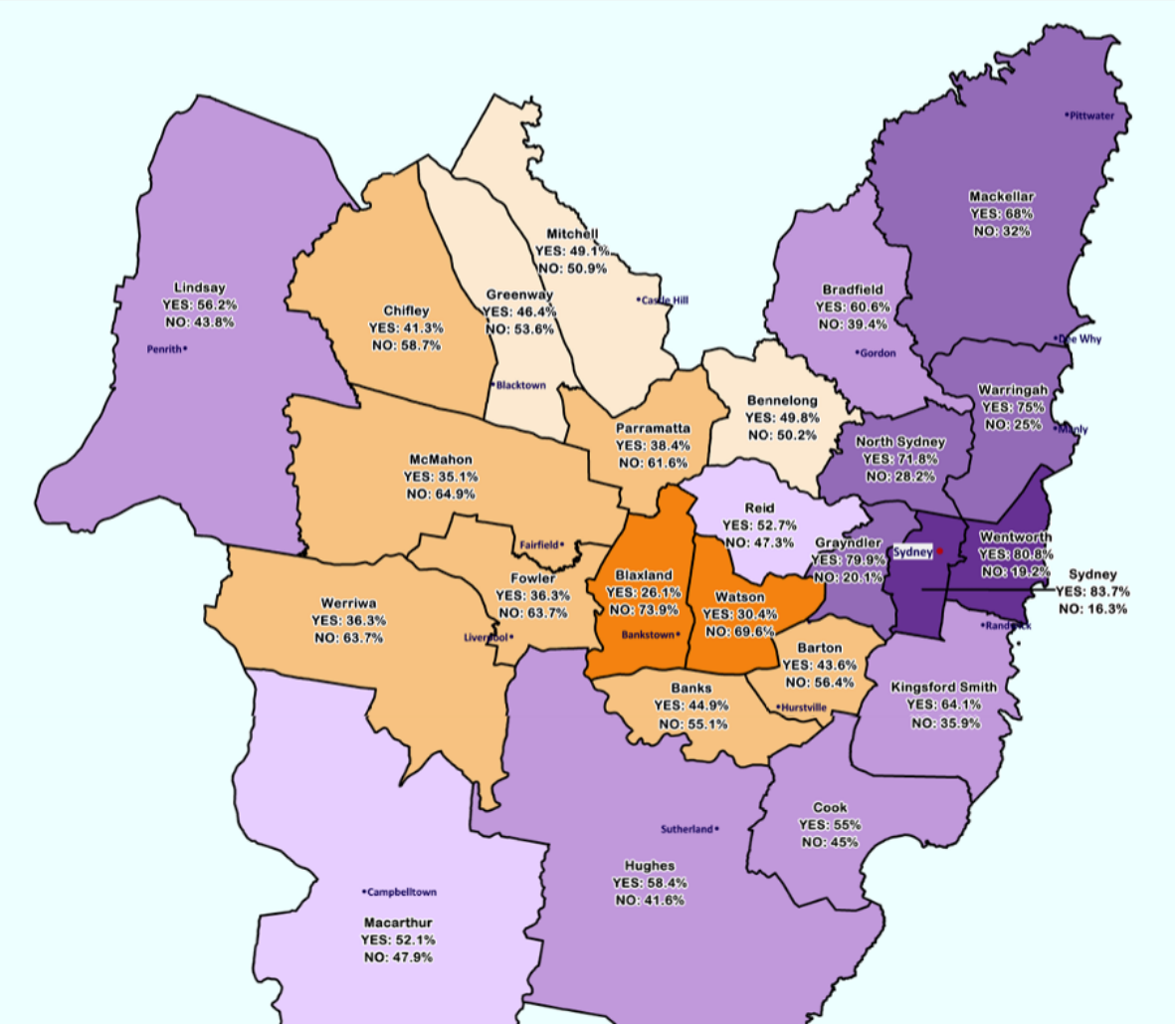

Figure 5 Same-sex Marriage Plebiscite results, where YES (purple) is in favour of legalising same sex marriage. (Parliament of Australia 2017)

Public, Private and LGBTIQ Visibility

The IAF approach teaches the difference between public and private roles. Well understood, an individual has agency about when and where they reveal and integrate private parts of themselves in public. However, this is a sensitive area for LGBTIQ people. Ed Chambers touches on sexuality, writing in 2005 about the importance of not getting public and private concepts confused:

> *"Sexuality is at the core of our being and relationships. It is the innate, wired-in instinct to be related to others in bonds of affinity. Our sexuality is part and parcel of all that we do and all that we are, but intimate sexual self-expression is only appropriate in the private realm of relationship. Cultures differ in the kinds and degree of sexual expression considered appropriate in public, but too much publicness in the expression of sexuality universally signals a problem of some kind" (72)*

Across the English-speaking Global North[8], LGBTIQ activism has been shaped by contesting the degree to which sexual (and gender) expression is considered *appropriate* in public. We cannot

[8] As an example of how the experience of coming out is different outside of Australia, Canada, US, UK, Ireland, New Zealand, see Nardi 1998 on how public is understood differently in Italy, Nagle 2023 on ambiguous visibility in Queer Lebanese politics and Pallotta-Chiarolli & Rajkhowa 2017 for the experience of culturally and linguistically diverse minority communities *within* Global-North countries

talk about the core of our being in public if the *core of our being* is reduced to sex, and sex is private (Berlant and Warner 1998, 553). The politics of visibility has accompanied this contestation. Sexuality itself must be visible, a matter of public, not just private, concern (Nagle 2023, 83).

Questions of disclosure of one's identity within the Alliance therefore may take on a heavy significance for LGBTIQ people. The experience of 'coming out' for a member of the LGBTIQ community is an experience of self-recognition of identity and reasserting one's right to participate as a member of the LGBTIQ community *in public*. Silence about our identity may be "rendered as pointed" (Sedgwick 2008, 4). Disclosure of our identity is subject to daily negotiation; even those proudly out at all times to all people, are profoundly shaped by the experience of the closet (68).

Interviewees took a range of perspectives on the question of disclosure within the Alliance. Some like Walsh and Miers said they had not experienced any tensions. McCloud said, "Oh my god, I worry I have 'gay' pasted on my forehead, there was always a level to which I was probably doing some kind of like code-switching or like straight passing something". Winter said, "For me there is no closet. But I've worked cross-culturally many years in disability, and I would be a little bit more cautious because of the different setting, sitting in a room with an imam. I wouldn't be as out as I would be if it was in a more secular space". Waterford said, "There's been a couple of times when I've had relational meetings with religious leaders where I have either omitted to talking about who I am, as being a lesbian, or I've said it and felt, that while I've not had any bad reaction, I've felt for myself I'm on shaky water here". Kylie said, "In terms of the power of sharing stories in terms of my homelessness and housing story, my very first housing experience was actually because I was kicked out of home for being queer. But that's not something I share because I was well aware of that cultural and shared understanding that we don't organise around queer issues". Reverend Adam said:

> *"No, I'm not hidden. I've marched in Mardi Gras[9] three times, so it's too late to be hiding if you're already on the news! but at the same time I don't flag around telling all [the people from my cultural community] that I'm a bisexual. Otherwise, it will just be a shouting debate. It goes nowhere. So, it's important to disclose at times, but it doesn't have to be disclosed all the time" (2023)[10]".*

Whereas for Tenemas Jover visibility was critical:

> *"Being visible? I just want people to know that like, Hey. There's someone like me in the room. I remember, during my first big Alliance meeting where we did our intro where I introduced myself as queer and Peruvian-Filipino. I was just kind of replaying it in my head and just to make sure I've got it right and that I don't offend any religious people in the room. Afterwards, I remember, like a lot of people like coming up to me and be like, 'Oh, my God! I really admire like what you said'. The intro was like bridging the gap between these communities. And people within partner orgs were saying that they wanted to work towards more inclusion of queer people, and even like queer people within the Alliance itself, like coming up to me saying, I'm a queer person as well".*

In all of these examples each leader made a calculation about the disclosure of their identity. There was recognition that in order to participate some compromise might need to be made.

[9] Sydney Mardi Gras is the equivalent of a Pride Festival & Parade in other cities, held annually in February-March.
[10] Reverend Adam (2023) argued that the politics of visibility and duality of "out or in" the closet was in part a Western expression of public and private and coming out, in a way that parallels Nagle's study of 'ambiguous visibility' in Lebanon (2023) (Darwich 2010).

Some interviewees shared they would not see the Alliance as a safe place for *others* in their organisation who did not yet have a strong sense of identity. Winter considered the situation for a person she knew who was experiencing vulnerability in their trans identity as they were midst transition "if I put this person in a room with the imam. There is just going to be freaking out right? Both-ways. There is just this is too much. This is too much for the conservative Catholic. I have a sense it wouldn't be a safe space". Reverend Adam confirmed he would not send any LGBTIQ person from his congregation to an Alliance meeting unless they fully knew themselves.

From my own experience, before the outcome of the plebiscite I did not make it a habit of coming out at the beginning of a new organising relationship. I chose to disclose on a case-by-case basis, but I decided that I would not be closeted to any leader who participated in the six-day residential training of the Sydney Alliance. My rationale being that by the time a socially conservative leader would attend national training, my identity as a gay man would not discourage their participation through a misperception that the Alliance was a secular-liberal organisation rather than a pluralist one. As the lead organiser, I saw that it was both philosophically good and politically judicious that conservative Catholics, Muslims, and the significant Pasifika community within the Uniting Church, chose to participate in the Alliance. I was also judicious in my disclosure, as my coming out story included a personally distressing experience of rejection by a religious institution. According to the teaching, I knew my boundaries of public and private.

The experience of LGBTIQ organising staff will be different to that of leaders. While leaders bring their own tradition and experience into any Alliance space on equal footing with other organisations; staff (particularly the lead organiser) are often holding the 'centre' of a broad-based organisation; upholding the culture, raising funds, identifying consensus issues and they are often the relational meeting or touchpoint for many new leaders in the Alliance. For example, I found myself in this early period second guessing how participation in the journey of my own liberation may be interpreted by sceptics of the Alliance within socially conservative institutions who may be looking for reasons to withdraw support if there was not clear delineation between my private beliefs and public role. This was particularly so in forums that blended public and private such as social media, attending rallies, and appearing in photos at events.

Marriage Equality and 'The Public'

Many LGBTIQ people have divergent views on the question of marriage for themselves: Winter said, "It's patriarchal crap", whereas Reverend Adam said "I've presided over five, each very important to me". For some, including myself, the outcome of the plebiscite was a turning point because it redefined what parts of sexuality were "contested" in public and who and what defined "appropriate." Waterford adds, "because now, if anyone has a problem, it's their problem, because the majority of Australians and the Australian Government support us. It's not about marriage, I mean, you could choose to or not. It's about whether we have the same rights as anyone else". Kylie said "Before the legislation passed, I needed to explain. Now there's an understanding that the person with a problem with it has to adjust themselves… there's actually a breathing space". Having said that, Kylie also remarked that early in her time at the Alliance she felt "I had stepped back to before the plebiscite had passed, where we didn't bring those things up" (*ibid*). For Tenemas Jover, who said she was at high school at the time, she was not sure how it had changed things, but that if it had *not* passed, she "would have been ten times more obnoxious about it [in Alliance spaces]. I am gay, and you better deal with it!".

From my own experience, despite waiting many years to be married to my now husband, I was doubtful the result would change my practice. After the plebiscite though, I felt I could identify as a member of the LGBTIQ community as part of my public introduction. I was in the majority and legally supported. I became more able to share my LGBTIQ story in public, and coupled with my introduction, found more leaders coming into the organisation comfortable to share their identity.

Testing the Framework – A Story

In 2021, after many years of having no representation of LGBTIQ organisations, the NSW Gay and Lesbians Rights Lobby (GLRL) wanted to become a 'Friend' of the Sydney Alliance (paying a nominal fee and associate membership). At the Alliance board, I spoke with Mary Waterford, the chair of the Alliance, about the challenge. We recognised that a hasty decision could lead to losing a number of socially conservative religious organisations who were full fee-paying members and had organised with the Alliance since the founding in 2011. Instead, we reached out to the religious partners of the Alliance with a very honest request outlining that the Alliance had built a long-term relationship with their institution, and as one of the only places that brings together such diversity, we recognised that the inclusion of an organisation such as the GLRL might be interpreted by those not understanding of the Alliance's culture as a reason to withdraw participation. (Withdrawal could look like not turning up, paying dues, or giving assent to the logo as well as resigning formal membership). Instead, we wanted to pause that decision and give long-standing partners an opportunity to discuss and advise the board.

Following an internal conversation, a conservative protestant denomination called back and thanked us for the heads-up and said that as long as the GLRL would not try and impose their views on schools' hiring practices (which was a non-negotiable for them), then they could live together within the Alliance. They recognised that the Board's decision to pause and consult and not assume it would not be a problem had indeed made a difference to their conservative leader. For the four Muslim institutions, it precipitated a meeting. It was the first time they had ever gathered together. A formal letter was returned to the board outlining very clearly that while the Muslim organisations did not wish any ill will, if the GLRL was to promote their views at Alliance actions on issues that were not of consensus (such as housing), that Muslim leaders would not be *able* to participate. Given the Alliance's frameworks and structures, they had confidence that this scenario was unlikely to occur, and they were thankful to have been asked.

Verbally, the Muslim leaders restated the importance of the Alliance in standing with them on issues of Islamophobia and recognised the many years of solidarity work of Mary and me: "They have been supporting us for over a decade never imposing a view on them that was counter to their beliefs" (personal communication, 2021). Furthermore, we had supported the recruitment and cultural safety of a Muslim organiser who was also an imam. Taken only from a narrow lens of LGBTIQ inclusion, the decision to progress cautiously and relationally might be perceived as regressive. However, thanks to a number of factors, the Alliance was able to find a way forward. Those factors included an existing collective agreement about the boundaries and culture of the Alliance; the depth of relationships cultivated between all parties, and the grounded and public nature of the LGBTIQ identity of Mary Waterford and me.

Broad-Based Organising through Some Queer and Intersectional Lenses

So far, we have examined LGBTIQ engagement *within* the IAF approach and Alliance practice. Some interviewees saw their participation through overtly *progressive* or *radical* frameworks. Waterford, Tenemas Jover, McCloud, El-helou, Walsh, and Kylie considered how the Alliance related to *intersectionality*.

Given the rejection of ideological frameworks by the IAF in practice and theory (Wood 2002, 277; Raphael and Matsuoka 2023), it would be a stretch to consider the Alliance itself theoretically intersectional (Garza 2020, 145-150). While some Alliance member organisations may be anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist (Friedman, Harrison and Rice 2019), the Alliance did not characterise itself as such. Considering the Alliance's prioritisation of housing, welfare of temporary migrants and low-income access to energy and services, the Alliance could be described as *pan-equity* if not intersectional*;* addressing issues that affect all/most marginalised equality groups (Christoffersen 2021, 8, 14-15). However, within the Alliance, expressing the complexity of intersecting identities and voicing multiple oppressions occurred through naming multiple and sometimes seemingly opposed identities during self-introductions, evocatively through public testimony at actions, and in the 'public intimacy' of relational meetings. Tenemas Jover, El-helou, and Reverend Adam shared that within the Alliance they experienced a *wholeness* as queer people of colour. This is important given the loss of agency and self-determination many experience caught between a white-dominant LGBTIQ identity and a (heteronormative) ethnic cultural identity (Pallotta-Chiarolli and Arjun Rajkhowa 2017, 431-432)[11].

Waterford, McCloud, Kylie, Tenemas Jover, El-helou and Walsh saw their participation in the Alliance as radical and queer, in contrast to depoliticised LGBTIQ spaces characterised variously as Kylie said "more social, not part of civil society" or as Tenemas Jover said "who use their visibility in a way that conforms with society and cozies up with our oppressors" or as Walsh said "full of corporate rainbow washing" or as McCloud said "all about identity but not in economic solidarity" or as Lang-Howson argued that organising *separately* is the "identitarian wing of neo-liberalist politics rather than a collective approach taken in unions or the Alliance".

So What?

For practitioners of broad-based organising the experience of the NSW Community Alliance provides some useful perspectives. Maintaining an alliance that includes passionate, dynamic leaders from both LGBTIQ and socially conservative communities is not only possible, but also valuable to the broader project of practising pluralism. Success requires a culture of *public life (properly understood)* freed from the assumption that we will all agree. That culture is built through implicit practices like accepting and valuing difference during issue selection, roll call at assembly and relational meetings across difference; and explicit teaching on relationality, dialectics, faction-unity and public-private as well as explicit practices such as spoken guidelines that articulate the difference between issues and people. Given the importance of visibility to the LGBTIQ experience, explicitly articulating that while the broad-based organisation only works on issues of common agreement, the organisation values LGBTIQ experiences and understanding of common pressures. That road goes both ways. Recognise that explicit and nuanced teaching on public and private will help LGBTIQ feel a sense of agency about if, where, when, and how they may choose to share their identity. Act to have LGBTIQ leaders and staff identify themselves publicly or directly to others in the community; and provide formal or informal space for reflection and solidarity amongst LGBTIQ people; as McCloud said "don't forget queers have organising superpowers; bring us together and just watch what we can bring to campaign or assembly".

[11] For a more comprehensive study of LGBTIQ intersectionality see (Caraves 2019) (Collins 2015) (Seidman 1994) In a similar vein to intersectional arguments, Lloyd, though a critic of the IAF argues that within broad based organisations, minorities within organisations can be heard, "black atheists' or Latina lesbians' (Lloyd 2014, 657).

For leaders arguing in favour of participation in broad-based alliances within their own LGBTIQ communities, consider drawing on people's experience of the importance of transformative relationships. Particularly, the experience of relational meetings with social conservatives that have opened up curiosity, respect, empathy, and self-knowledge in *both* parties. Draw on frameworks and issues that touch on the broader class and economic issues that the community faces. Recognise that broad-based organising is one tool of many and share experiences of concrete wins for the community delivered by working together with socially conservative institutions. Likewise, practitioners might reflect on what can keep socially conservative institutions and leaders in relationship with secular and/or LGBTIQ leaders and organisations. I will leave that to other writers. If broad-based organisations can succeed in bringing these communities together, they likely provide real-world examples of practical pluralism very much needed for our democracies.

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Supplemental Table 1: Interview Participants

Interviewee	Self-Identification during interview	Involvement in the Alliance
Reverend Adam	Bi, Christian Minister, person-of-colour, male	6+ years, participated in Alliance via Christian religious partner organisation.
Andrew McCloud	Gay or queer, male	7+ years, participated in the Alliance via NSW Synod of the Uniting Church, co-chaired a team.
Barbel Winter	Woman, dyke	2-3 years early on, then 1 year (2023). Participated in Alliance via community sector organisation Shelter NSW, co-chaired a team.
Jasmine Tenemas Jover	Cis-gendered bisexual woman of colour	4 years, entered via social work placement then as volunteer in the Parramatta local Alliance team, co-chaired assembly, shared testimony, and other key roles.
Kylie	Queer woman, pronouns are she they	2 years, participated in the Alliance via disability organisation, volunteer, and social work placement. Key roles.
Mary Waterford AM	Woman born lesbian, older woman	17 years, chair of the Alliance Board, participated via the Sydney Community Forum, previously a CEO of a member organisation, Western Sydney Community Forum. Many key roles.
Shayma El-helou	Queer woman of colour	1 year, participated via social work placement directly with the Alliance.
Stacey Miers	Lesbian	3-4 years, participated via Shelter NSW, member of the Alliance board.
Stevie Lang-Howson	Transgender man, queer, bisexual, disabled. I am racialized often. Culturally and linguistically diverse.	Assistant Secretary for the National Tertiary Education Union New South Wales division, an Alliance partner organisation but with no direct involvement.
Xavier Walsh	Queer non-binary, trade unionist, half-Sri Lankan and half- Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent)	1 month in Australia, 3-5 years in New Zealand-Aotearoa visiting leader participating in the Alliance, via trade union membership, co-chair of an IAF sister organisation to the Alliance in Auckland, Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga Tāmaki Makaurau.