

# Deconstructed and Constructive Logics: Explaining Inclusive Language Change in Queer Nonprofits, 1998–2016<sup>1</sup>

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The United States is currently in the midst of a long, historic cultural transformation—redefining our collective representation to be inclusive of diverse sexual and gender identities. A core logic advancing this inclusion is to discursively recognize an expanded set of discrete, deconstructed identities—gay and lesbian expands to LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA+, and so on. But a newer logic stipulates that inclusion arises through using constructive identities that encompass many fluid experiences under a single term (e.g., “queer”). To understand inclusive change, the authors leverage a unique mesolevel site of cultural (re)production: service and advocacy nonprofit organizations. Using event history models, the authors investigate inclusive language change by 735 organizations from 1998 to 2016. They supplement analyses of administrative data with semistructured interviews with 13 nonprofit leaders, providing converging evidence. Findings showcase how bottom-up, horizontal, and top-down pressures explain both the inclusion of discrete identity labels and the shift to constructive logics.

The expansion of rights and public inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities is one of the most profound cultural transformations occurring in the United States. Americans are, at least rhetorically,

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trying to be more inclusive toward those of diverse sexual and gender identities. The movement itself is also grappling with its own history and struggles toward welcoming internally marginalized groups. Gay men, particularly white, middle-class gay men, have historically been most prominent within this movement and broader American discourse (Valocchi 1999). Over time, though, other categorized identities like lesbians, oft invisibilized bisexuals, and transgender people fought for recognition as well—creating the widely recognized LGBT acronym that is also expanded to be inclusive toward additional groups like those identifying as queer, intersex, or asexual (i.e., LGBTQIA).<sup>2</sup>

But the incorporation of and expansion to additional categories occurred at different times and in different places, even within core organizations. Human Rights Campaign, for example, first incorporated bisexual and transgender people into their mission in 2003, stating they: “Promote public education and welfare by providing educational materials and information about the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) community.”<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, another leading organization, PFLAG (formerly Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) already incorporated such language in the 1990s: “The organization promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons, their families, and friends through: support, education, and advocacy.”<sup>4</sup> A key aspect of this research project is to answer why some organizations adapted to this call for inclusivity earlier than others.

Further, what happens when a logic of inclusion reaches its limit? Some question whether the increasing addition of deconstructed identities like LGBTQIA is sustainable or even desirable (Stone 2009; Ghaziani 2011). Indeed, one of the consequences and successes of this cultural change is that many increasingly recognize the fluidity of sexuality and gender and question the usefulness of fixed, category-based identities like “gay” and “lesbian” (Diamond 2008; Rupp, Taylor, and Miller 2016). Activists and academics increasingly turn to other types of inclusive language to encapsulate the diversity of people’s experiences by using more encompassing and fluid language

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<sup>2</sup> To reflect current variation in usage, we have chosen to use a range of language in this article, both acronyms and constructive terms like “queer.” Where communities of scholars or particular time periods have a preferred terminology, we try to reflect that language. We use “>LGBT” throughout to encompass acronyms and language that extend beyond the common “LGBT” label (e.g., LGBTQ, LGBTI, LGBTQIA). “>LGBT” simply means the acronym used includes more than “LGBT.”

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Campaign, Form 990, 2003. Retrieved March 15, 2019. <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/521243457>.

<sup>4</sup> PFLAG, Form 990. Retrieved March 15, 2019. <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/953750694>.

like “queer,” or “SOGI,” which stands for sexual orientation and gender identity (Gamson 1997). Take GLSEN’s (formerly Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) mission statement, which now abandons any mention of categorized identities: “Our mission is to ensure that every member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.”<sup>5</sup> What, then, explains this newest cultural shift in inclusive language: the shift from fixed, deconstructed categories toward more constructive, encompassing terminology?

We approach this question by first introducing the different logics behind, what we term, deconstructed versus constructive approaches to inclusion. We then draw on theories of social movements, organizations, and cultural and institutional change to theorize how different sources of pressure, emanating from an organization’s own constituencies, the institutional environment, and broader sociopolitical contexts, influence both inclusive movement within the deconstructive logic as well as wholesale jumps from deconstructed identities to constructive ones.

Although interested in changing cultural discourse more broadly, we target a mesolevel site of cultural (re)production: nonprofit service and advocacy organizations. Several studies investigate microlevel determinants of cultural change, by examining why heterosexual or cisgender people become more inclusive of others, the struggles of gay and lesbian activists to incorporate bisexual and transgender issues into their campaigns, or how categories like “gay” and “transgender” do not adequately capture people’s subjective experiences (e.g., Seidman, Meeks, and Traschen 1999; Diamond 2008; Powell, Quadlin, and Pizmony-Levy 2015; Rupp et al. 2016; Mathers, Sumerau, and Cragun 2018). At the other end are macrolevel assessments of this cultural shift: investigating changes to political structures and policy or how the content within mass media and news coverage shifts (e.g., Haider-Markel 2001; Soule 2004). Recently, however, sociologists of culture, and of social change more broadly, have called for assessments at the mesolevel to understand the interplay between individual subjectivities and macro, structural transformations (Ghaziani 2008; Bail 2014a). Nonprofit service and advocacy organizations are an environment well suited to assess the micro-macro link through organizational adaptation (Hrebiniak and Joyce 1985; Ghaziani 2008; Bail 2014a).

Using administrative data from nonprofits’ Form 990 filings, we investigate the changing use of language within the names and mission statements of 735 LGBT-related nonprofits from 1998 to 2016—a period of intense cultural change. We use event history models to assess why nonprofits expand their mission statements or name to be inclusive of fixed categories, for example, going from mentioning “gay and lesbian” to mentioning “LGBT” or “LGBTQ” to describe the populations they work with and for. We also

<sup>5</sup> GLSEN, “About Us.” Retrieved January 5, 2022. <https://www.glsen.org/about-us>.

assess why nonprofits abandon these deconstructed identity categories altogether for more constructive, encompassing language like “SOGI,” “queer,” or postgay language. We supplement our main analyses with semistructured interviews with 13 nonprofit leaders. These interviews assess process and intentionality and provide converging evidence for the bottom-up, horizontal, and top-down pressures on organizations found in the administrative data.

Findings from this study give insights into some of the largest questions within sociology: How are more inclusive societies built? How do organizations adapt to changing social conditions? And, what are the limits and potentials of categorization, especially in a country where rights and recognition are built on fixed categories? Given that Melucci (1989) refers to the gay and lesbian movement as the quintessential identity movement, this is a particularly useful site to explore such questions. Our findings reveal a persistent use of deconstructed identities—categorical acronyms dominate and persist. Despite recent efforts to push past categorization in discussion of sexuality, encompassing language like “queer” is used minimally. We do find youth-oriented organizations at the leading edge of inclusive discourse, suggesting that as new generations emerge in a world with multiple sexual and gender identities available to them, they push the boundaries of organizations. Queer youth, as they age, may therefore challenge traditional forms of categorization and test possibilities of fluidity. Horizontal, isomorphic pressures from peer organizations also contribute to the proliferation of increased recognition of various sexual and gender identities. Moreover, unlike some predictions within organizational ecology, we do not find a splintering of organizations into single group foci. Instead, high levels of threat against these communities have held them together (despite their sometimes quite different needs and experiences). But, the ever-present specter of political or legal threats has been instrumental to preventing the jump to constructive language. This result underscores the utility of deconstructed identities for political and legal fights by the larger social movement as they match how rights are conferred in the United States (Valocchi 1999; Tarrow 2013). Finally, we find that as society becomes more cognizant of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, this strongly influences the abandoning of deconstructed language in lieu of constructive terminologies able to recognize that sexual and gender identities exist beyond category.

#### (DE)CONSTRUCTING A CATEGORY: CHANGING CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITIES

In 2000, Bill Clinton became the first U.S. president to mention the word “gay” in the annual State of the Union address. Fifteen years later, President Barack Obama added to history by stating: “As Americans . . . we defend . . . people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender”—the first time the words

“lesbian,” “bisexual,” and “transgender” were said in a State of the Union. In 2016, then-candidate Donald Trump stated in his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention that he would “do in everything in [his] power to protect our LGBTQ citizens”—one of the first times “Q” and the acronym “LGBTQ” was included on the national political stage. These three events help illuminate the cultural transformation occurring in the United States as the inclusion of diverse sexual and gender identities is increasingly normalized—at least discursively. Furthermore, these three examples showcase one core logic of how inclusion operates: expanding recognition through discrete categorized identities, moving from gay to gay and lesbian to GLB to LGBT to LGBTQ to the continued recognition of more identities.

Concurrently, however, many challenge the fixedness of discrete categories like “gay” and “bisexual” as inadequate to reflect the fluidity embedded within these experiences (Diamond 2008; Carrera, DePalma, and Lameiras 2012; Rupp et al. 2016). Therefore, just as more deconstructed identities enter the public lexicon, their usefulness is simultaneously questioned (Gamson 1995; Ghaziani 2011, p. 112). Instead of recognizing discrete categories, a new core logic of inclusion instead names a fully constructive identity that allows for a multitude of experiences to simultaneously exist under a single term or phrase. This is exemplified by Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon, who used the term “sexual orientation and gender identity [SOGI]” in 2011.

Through reflecting on these differing deconstructed and constructive logics, we are led to our key research questions: What explains inclusion through the addition of deconstructed categories? And, what explains the jump to adoption of more constructive and encompassing identity terms as the means to convey inclusion? Do these processes differ?

We conceptualize cultural change following Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003, p. 735), who define culture as “a set of publicly shared codes or repertoires, building blocks that structure people’s ability to think and to share ideas. A society’s collectively held symbolic system is as binding and real as a language.” For many social movements, including the one for LGBT+ equality, cultural change is a goal and can produce a range of cultural outcomes (Earl 2004; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Amenta and Polletta 2019; Van Dyke and Taylor 2019). In our specific case, cultural change is reflected in the changing discourses used to give recognition of and inclusion to different sexual and gender identities, to inject language and vocabularies into the everyday that articulate and broaden our collective representations (Ghaziani and Ventresca 2005)

### Deconstructed Identities and Their Logic of Inclusion

Same-sex practices and diverse gender expressions are common throughout human history. The discursive construction of these practices into distinct categorical identities, however, is the result of modern cultural transformations.

As explained by Foucault (1978, p. 43): “As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology. . . . The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.”

In the United States, there is a long, detailed history of how sexual and gender categories came to be. Most relevant for the current study, however, is role of the “minority rights” model of gay organizing that took hold following the sexual revolutions of the 1960s and ’70s (Valocchi 1999). To achieve rights and recognition within the U.S. legal framework and build sympathy from wider audiences, those of various sexual identities needed to discursively become a quasi-ethnic group—a distinct, biologically grounded social category on the basis of which inalienable rights can be transferred (Van Dyke and Taylor 2019). As Gamson (1995, p. 391) summarizes: “Lesbians and gay men made themselves an effective force in this country over the past several decades by largely giving themselves what civil rights movements had: a public collective identity. Gay and lesbian social movements have built a quasi-ethnicity, complete with its own political and cultural institutions, festivals, neighborhoods, and even its own flag. Underlying that ethnicity . . . is the same fixed, natural essence, a self with same-sex desires.”

Given the legal institutions in the United States, the language of categorical identities was necessary as it meant new public collectives that could be fought for (Gamson 1995, 1997; Polletta and Jasper 2001). Because discourse is a powerful medium through which populations are constructed, made visible, and conferred rights and social acceptance, there is an internal push within the gay and lesbian movement to be more inclusive through explicit recognition (Ghaziani 2008; Stone 2009; Nownes 2010; Mathers et al. 2018). And, like other social movements, the movement worked to construct a collective identity (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Whittier 2010). Over time, this meant that gay and lesbian groups expanded discursive inclusion to bisexual and transgender people (Gamson 1995; Melucci 1995; Broad 2002; Monro, Hines, and Osborne 2017). By naming explicit groups, this act demonstrated that while other identities within the broader umbrella shared some struggles, their needs and presence were distinct (Seidman et al. 1999; Armstrong 2002). Therefore, what started off as a movement for gay rights subsequently evolved into a movement encompassing of gays and lesbians, then gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, and then an “LGBT” or “GLBT” movement as activists sought to create a more inclusive collective identity and improve cultural tolerance for these communities as well (Gamson 1997).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that this logic is not without contention, which it is (Gamson 1997), or that this discourse necessarily translates to social inclusion in everyday life (Bell and Hartmann 2007). For historical analyses of the expansion of this movement, particularly

Thus, the logic of inclusion for deconstructed identities is to recognize and explicitly name more fixed identity categories over time: L, B, G, T, Q, I, A, 2S (two spirit). Public, collective, coherent, bounded, and delimited identities allow self-definition by distinct groups (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Gamson 1997; Seidman 1997; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Armstrong 2002). Including new identities acknowledges that they are jointly linked through shared fate and advances the long-standing tradition of “unity through diversity” within the movement (Armstrong 2002; Carrera et al. 2012). Because the logic of explicit recognition is popularized and shared within cultural schemas, this “repertoire” or tool for inclusion is now embedded within our cultural zeitgeist and perpetuates itself (e.g., LGBT to LGBTQ to LGBTQIA; Swidler 1986). The result is a collective identity that allows specialization while maintaining interdependence and cohesion (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Levitsky 2007). This logic of inclusion operates within a cultural schema that assumes or requires fixed categorization in order to achieve recognition, citizenship, and support.

### Constructive Identities and Their Logic of Inclusion

Just as movements were expanding and integrating through the inclusion of additional deconstructed identities, a new type of discourse emerged, one that emphasized the fluidity and multiplicity of gender and sexual identities by moving past deconstructed logics (Seidman et al. 1999; Diamond 2008; Carrera et al. 2012; Rupp et al. 2016). As explained by Gamson (1995, p. 391): “Yet this impulse to build a collective identity with distinct group boundaries has been met by a directly opposing logic, often contained in queer activism (and the newly anointed ‘queer theory’): to take apart the identity categories and blur group boundaries.”

There are several limits of deconstructed identities and the logic of inclusion they invite. First, a straightforward limitation is that explicitly naming any group necessarily excludes others. An additive approach requires an ever-expanding set of letters to attempt to describe the whole of the collective by ensuring each particular identity receives recognition—an unwieldy process recognized by both members of the community and those outside of it. Ghaziani (2011, p. 112) reports how one organizational leader approached this challenge: “Rather than turn our name into an alphabet soup, we decided to pick a name that would encompass everyone.” Another advocacy group leader conveyed similar sentiments, quoted in Stone (2009, p. 347): “There comes a point where you have to say, ‘How many letters do you need to describe the community?’ GLBTQRST. It’s silly.”

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before the 1990s, as well as the contentious fights that came with it, like whether gender identity should be included in a movement originating with sexual orientation, see Ghaziani (2008) and Cruikshank (2014).

Second, since language shapes our perception of reality (e.g., Foucault 1978), framing the collective through distinct categories creates normative assumptions on how individuals should operate and perform their identities (e.g., homonormativity; Duggan 2002; Tarrow 2013; Mathers et al. 2018). Because categories like “gay” were developed by white, middle-class men, people of color and those of lower incomes, especially, feel constrained by the normative assumptions that come with a label that was not initially built for them (Ayoub 2019). When this happens, those who are not included within dominant collective identities push for alternatives that are reflective of their own self-expressions, helping to explain, for example, the increased use of the term “queer” or “same gender loving,” a term more prevalent in Black communities (Wilson 2009).

Third, and related to the aforementioned point, simply adding “transgender,” “bisexual,” and so on, to previously recognized identities is insufficient to recognize the fluid and interstitial nature of gender or sexual identity—excluding individuals who sense connection with the overall collective but cannot place themselves within the set of letters on offer (Armstrong 2002; Diamond 2008). As people are introduced to new identity labels and allowed to express themselves in more ways, these interstitial and fluid experiences only increasingly challenge the rigidity of discrete categorization.

Fourth, “sexual identity is connected to the cultural and historical context” (Russell, Clarke, and Clary 2009, p. 885); over the last several decades, conditions that produced the deconstructed identities and their logics have certainly changed. The need to strategically play up categorical difference to display disadvantage and fight for equal rights may have diminished as political and legal battles were won (Polletta and Jasper 2001), particularly after the 2013 ruling overturning the Defense of Marriage Act and the 2015 sweeping Supreme Court decision on marriage equality. In an assessment of next steps “after marriage,” Ball (2019, pp. 157–58) suggests: “The attainment of the marriage-equality goal offers movement leaders and constituents an opportunity to consider new priorities. One of those priorities should be encouraging the state to adopt laws and policies that recognize and protect gender and sexual fluidity and multiplicities.”

In moving away from deconstructed identities and their logic of inclusion, a new logic and identity system is emerging. This new system, which we refer to as constructive identities, has a core logic of inclusion to recognize community beyond category. Inclusion is achieved by using language that recognizes both range and interstitial placement and no longer requires periodic updates. Instead, constructive identities work to encompass the whole of lived experiences with one phrase and allow individuals to construct their own inclusion into the community. Attention to SOGI or sexual and gender identity (SIGI), reclaiming negative labels like “queer” (Van Dyke and Taylor 2019), or using postgay language such as “pride” or “equality” (Ghaziani 2011) signals an

identity collective that is expansive without distinction. If the deconstructed logic is to name each individual color, constructive logic is to find language to articulate the color spectrum itself. The constructive logic of inclusion operates within a cultural schema that denies fixed categorization in favor of multiplicity, fluidity, and change.

#### EXPLAINING CHANGES TOWARD MORE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

To investigate this cultural change, we focus on organizations as a preeminent institution in modern life (Zucker 1987). Organizations adapt to their political, economic, and cultural environments (Hrebiniak and Joyce 1985). Organizations also construct meaning and create knowledge of “the way things are.” Therefore, because organizations collectively coordinate and influence vast parts of the population, tracking the changing discourses of social inclusion via organizations can illuminate large-scale cultural changes.

To explain change in language then, we combine theories of organizational adaptation, institutions, and social movements to focus on three sources of pressure to become more inclusive: bottom-up pressure based on an organization’s constituencies and resource needs, horizontal pressure from peers in the larger organizational ecology, and top-down pressure based on the broader social and political context at a given time. Below, we outline how each of these sources of pressure may be driving changes to more inclusive language for each logic.

#### Bottom-Up Pressures: Organizational Constituencies and Resource Acquisition

One line of research suggests that the language used by organizations is a reflection of internal organizational dynamics like the constituencies the organization is trying to appeal to, the collective identity it is trying to establish, and its work attracting or retaining resources (Gamson 1996, 1997; Ghaziani 2011). From this perspective, to understand change toward more inclusive language, or shifts from deconstructed to constructive logics, it is important to consider the organization’s constituents, other stakeholders, and the internal or external resource pressures on the organization (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Freeman [1984] 2010; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994; DiMaggio 1997; Edwards and McCarthy 2004).

Certainly, all organizations need to engage with internal and external stakeholders: entities that provide resources to the organization, that can make a claim to an organization’s attention, or that are affected by the organization (Jawahar and McLaughlin 2001; Lewis et al. 2001, p. 202; Freeman 2010). Constituents, adherents, and clients are all critical stakeholders worthy of organizational time and attention (Edwards and McCarthy 2004; LeRoux 2009). So too are funding agents who provide organizations with

resources. Organizations must interact with and integrate the needs of these multiple constituencies to determine future direction (and even survive; Ansoff 1965), especially during times of rapid change (Lewis et al. 2001).

Taking such a constituency perspective, we would expect organizations working with youth to be likely to adopt more inclusive language. While the broader U.S. population is still grappling with updating previously conceived notions of gender and sexuality with current understandings, many youths are already experiencing a reality where gay, transgender, or other identities are commonplace. Consequently, “changes in the visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people and issues may allow youth to understand and self-label same-sex sexual identities at younger ages than previous cohorts” (Russell et al. 2009, p. 885). Youth-oriented organizations may be aware of changing language earlier than others and want to expand the inclusivity of their language to signal recognition to potential constituents.

Also, there are debates about the extent to which today’s youth find deconstructed identity category labels meaningful and, instead, seek out constructive labels that emphasize fluidity (Savin-Williams 2009; Rupp et al. 2016). Young people are historically the vanguard in exploring an interstitial space between categories, comfortable with the notion of gender or sexuality as fluid, personal, and malleable (Diamond 2008; Russell et al. 2009; Rupp et al. 2016). For example, Diamond (2008) finds that the young women she followed grappled with the limits of existing identity labels, as articulated by one of her respondents, “I hate boxes. Hate them, hate them. And I hate this whole dichotomy paradigm that our society tends to revolve around.” When asked, many of these young women understand themselves as sexually fluid, without a fixed sexual self, and chose no label for their sexuality. Rupp et al. (2016, p. 195) find the same—that many nonheterosexual college women “are embracing identities as ‘pansexual,’ ‘queer,’ or ‘fluid,’ or refusing to adopt any label at all.” Therefore, youth-oriented organizations may be more likely to abandon deconstructed labels altogether to embrace their constituents’ fluidity.

Similarly, organizations explicitly focused on advocacy would be expected to use more deconstructed-inclusive language compared to service or other organizations. Advocacy organizations must pay particularly close attention to their constituents and stakeholders since they are asked to mobilize not only in terms of money but also in terms of time and effort (Edwards and McCarthy 2004). If movements act as “cultural laboratories”—creating new forms of concepts, identities, and knowledge (Eyerman and Jamison 1991)—then it is activists within the movement who carry those concepts into the larger political and social arena and push for inclusive language (Rochon 1998). Advocacy organizations are likely to include more deconstructed identities to resonate with the movement’s target audience and build broader coalitions in their lobbying and advocacy efforts (Snow and Benford 1988; Hunt et al. 1994;

Nownes 2010; Tarrow 2013). For the same reason, advocacy organizations may be reluctant to pursue constructive discourses that may be unfamiliar to political elites.

Given the U.S.-focused nature of deconstructed categories, processes of inclusion may be different for organizations with a global or international focus (Altman 1996). One consequence of the minority-rights model in the United States is it conflates sexual behaviors with categorical identities. However, the fusion of the two is not globally universal (Massad 2002). Within international spaces, there is a stronger tendency to use more constructive labels that are less culturally specific to Western contexts (Voss 2018). The principal term used by the United Nations is “SOGI.” Therefore, organizations that have constituents beyond the United States may be no more likely to adopt deconstructed identities but instead gravitate toward constructive-inclusive language so as not to export the “Gay International” (Massad 2002).

Organizations incur costs, and stakeholders who can help pay the bills will certainly receive organization attention (Jawahar and McLaughlin 2001; LeRoux 2009; Walker and McCarthy 2010). Both resource dependency theory and resource mobilization theory acknowledge that obtaining and maintaining resources is key to organizational success (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Thus, if it helps them to acquire resources, organizations may adapt their language toward inclusivity. For nonprofit organizations, large donors and funders like philanthropic foundations are an important source of revenue and thus particularly important constituencies. Providing resources affords these funders the power to set expectations and influence organization goals (Jenkins and Eckert 1986). Even if not viewed as direct patronage, organizations are likely to work to comply with the formal or informal expectations of funders, like foundations, as they appeal to these resource-rich partners (Walker and McCarthy 2010). Thus, if sources of revenue begin to use more inclusive language or target particular deconstructed categories for attention, we would expect organizations to follow with more inclusive language in turn.

In sum, we hypothesize that bottom-up pressures—from organizational constituencies like youth, activists, and global audiences or from sources of resources like foundations—will induce organizational adaptation toward more inclusive language and, in some cases, shifts from deconstructive to constructive language.

#### Horizontal Pressures: Institutional Processes and the Social Movement

Other organizations matter. The broader ecological context in which an organization is embedded is an important source of pressure for organizational change. An extensive body of research highlights the isomorphic and institutional processes that shape organizational behaviors (Meyer and

Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Zucker 1987; Clemens and Cook 1999) and lead to the “inexorable push toward homogenization” within the LGBT organizational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p. 148). Consequently, it is not fully possible to assess why organizations change their language without assessing their peer organizations. So too we must recognize that organizations are embedded within the larger social movement for equality that influences them as well as other aspects of society. Certainly social movement organizations are a source of agentic change and infuse institutional processes with new ideas and linguistic terms (Clemens 1993; Rochon 1998; Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2008).

A unique feature of U.S. LGBT organizations is the long history of coalescing around the principle of “unity through diversity” (Armstrong 2002). This logic manifests as a strong isomorphic pressure for organizations to adopt discourses reflecting increasing diversity and inclusion (Gamson 1997; Armstrong 2002; Levitsky 2007). Thus, as a higher percentage of peer institutions move to more inclusive language (e.g., add letters), an organization is likely to follow the process of homogenization because organizations do not want to have their legitimacy challenged (Meyer and Rowan 1977).<sup>7</sup>

A critical force for change in this space is the social movement devoted to LGBT+ equality. Cultural change is a goal of this movement among others (Amenta and Polletta 2019; Van Dyke and Taylor 2019). Further, social movement scholars stress that movement activism goes beyond targeting the state to also pressure businesses, universities, and other organizations (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Walker, Martin, and McCarthy 2008; Soule 2009). A movement’s framing of the problem, audience, and so on, should diffuse into organization language (Benford and Snow 2000). We would therefore expect a general trend toward more inclusive language among nonprofit organizations as the social movement grows and seeks out individual and collective representation (Ghaziani 2008, 2011; Stone 2009). Of course, pressure from the growing movement could particularly produce change to constructive language since generating new language, especially language to suggest collective identity, is central to the movement (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Tarrow 2013). The LGBT movement invests embracing a fluid identity with political meaning, where “queer” can be a political commitment (Rupp et al. 2016).

In sum, horizontal pressures from peer organizations and the social movement for LGBT+ equality will produce both general movement to

<sup>7</sup> An alternative strategy to the institutional logic of expanding inclusion is to specialize on one particular population. Specialization does occur, such as the American Institute of Bisexuality, which focuses just on bisexual communities. Organizations committed to specialization, therefore, may be less susceptible to pressures toward more inclusive language. However, truly specialized nonprofits are rare. Of the 735 organizations in our analysis, only 8% fall within a specialized category and do not change.

more inclusive language by organizations as well as shifts from deconstructive to constructive language.

### Top-Down Pressures: Social Context

The macrolevel factors superseding the organizational space represent a final source of pressure driving change within organizations. Organizations are embedded within and influenced by their environment—cultural, social, political, and so forth—both in the present and at their time of founding (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Johnson 2007).

An important feature of the social and political landscape during the time we study is the ever-present threat faced by LGBT communities. Indeed, the constant presence of threat is one factor that drove the creation of a broader collective identity across communities (Van Dyke and Soule 2002). Despite recent gains like the Supreme Court decisions approving marriage equality and banning employment discrimination, threats against those of diverse sexual and gender identities abound. High profile threats of the last few decades include, but are certainly not limited to, the HIV/AIDS crisis and the lack of support from the federal government, the U.S. Supreme Court in 1986 upholding the criminalization of sodomy, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), anti-LGBT activism from evangelicals and the Moral Majority, a slew of state constitutional bans on same-sex marriages, and, of course, high profile cases of violence like Matthew Shepard and, more recently, murders of Black trans women (Fetner 2008). Consequently, even though progress was certainly advanced in some contexts (Bernstein 2003), the pressure of threat remained and helped bind this community together even as it became more rhetorically diverse. Importantly, though, the political context and the nature of these threats varied across states, leading to variation in political opportunity structures (Staggenborg 1986; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). As Diamond (2008) articulates, when facing antigay activism, the safest course of action is to keep fixed, apparently deterministic categories that evoke civil rights. We would thus expect organizations operating in states with the most institutionalized repression, hostility, and activity to use more inclusive, especially deconstructed-inclusive, language.

Generally, though, some threat has receded over time in the wake of high-profile legal victories and vastly improved public attitudes. For example, during the Obama administration, a number of high-profile advancements were made, including repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell, overturning DOMA, and the banner policy achievement of marriage equality for same-sex couples. More generally, public opinion shows growing generalized awareness of and increasing support for LGBT+ populations, although certainly there is variation across each specific community (Powell et al. 2015). What happens when threat subsides and public support grows? If increasing support

releases a pressure valve, will it spur an uptick in constructive language as we enter a new social era much different from the one under which deconstructed identities were first created?

Relatedly, research from organizational studies highlights that the conditions present at the birth of an organization leave a lasting imprint that subsequently conditions its decisions—creating inertia (Boeker 1989). According to Huber (1991, p. 91), “what an organization knows at its birth will determine what it searches for, what it experiences, and how it interprets what it encounters.” Given the stark changes to social understandings of sexual and gender identities over the last few decades, the historical imprints left on queer organizations founded during different historical eras may be particularly salient (Whittier 1997; Johnson 2007). Organizations founded pre-Stonewall may be imprinted with a deep sense of threat that leaves them reluctant to signify any identity at all, even in the modern period. In contrast, those founded in the 2000s may be more likely to adopt an expanded set of deconstructed identities given the popularity of LGBTQ+ language at the time, while those founded close to the present may be “born” with constructive language from the beginning. That is, being founded in an era of threat may leave an imprint of language inertia, while being founded in an era that uses deconstructed language may produce a tendency to add additional letters as they become more common. Organizations founded closest to the present may display less change, as they are already founded with constructive identities.

Local context matters as well, with the characteristics of the local nonheterosexual and noncisgender population an important influence on language choice. In an in-depth assessment of “sexual identity cultures” within four cities, Brown-Saracino (2015) identifies how the unique characteristics of each city, such as the city’s culture and demographics, influences the language LBQ women use to make sense of their identities. This process would transfer to the organizations within those cities. In responding to local populations, organizations embedded in communities with larger populations that might otherwise identify as lesbian, or bisexual, are likely to use a more inclusive set of letters to reflect their potential constituents. Moreover, this larger population also opens space for individuals to feel safer using other more constructive identity labels.

Finally, it is important to recognize that, as a culture, the United States is increasingly aware of intersectionality as an analytic lens. Indeed, across different axes of inequality—gender, class, race, ability, and the like—there is increased recognition of how power is differentially distributed within categories and the need to nuance how these identities are constructed and operate (Crenshaw 1990). Especially within social movement organizations, there is an appreciation that to be effective at advancing the community of interest, organizations need to consider differing needs based on intersections of different identities (Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013)—to develop an “intersectional consciousness” (Ayoub 2019). A consequence of this consciousness is

that it “makes more visible the serious shortcomings that exist in the mission of LGBTI groups to address the needs of many of their most vulnerable subjects” (Ayoub 2019, p. 3). White, middle-class men initially had the power to define the gay label and to construct what this category means and how to perform it and to demarcate boundaries for who could identify with it (Cruikshank 2014). In response, organizations with an intersectional consciousness are likely to give recognition and thus, power, to those long excluded by original labels. Thus, organizations that recognize that multiple axes of oppression and identity characteristics are in operation simultaneously may be intentional in their language to be more inclusive, generally, but also use more constructive language that simultaneously blurs categories and gives power and recognition to those who operate beyond the discrete.

In sum, we hypothesize that the contextual features of an organization’s environment such as threat, cultural milieu, and local context will produce top-down pressure influencing organizational language choice.

#### NONPROFITS AS SITE OF CULTURAL (RE)PRODUCTION

Previously, we talked briefly above about organizations as an important conduit translating individual subjectivities into broader cultural arrangements. In this article, we focus specifically on nonprofits, arguably the most relevant type of organization for understanding cultural change surrounding LGBT communities for several reasons. First, social movement organizations, which can be a subset of nonprofits, are agents of cultural change. While policy outcomes may be one goal, these organizations also target culture itself through changing norms, values, identities, or categories and by changing the discourse or framing of a particular issue (Earl 2004; Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Amenta and Polletta 2019; Van Dyke and Taylor 2019). Using this argument, Bail (2014a) contends that it is not just nonprofits explicitly focused on advocacy but the totality of nonprofits that represent a unique cultural environment able to affect culture writ large.

Certainly, nonprofits are sites of both cultural production and reproduction. On the one hand, nonprofits are formed through the free association of individuals. Thus, changing discourse in nonprofit service organizations and support groups can influence how queer people understand and make sense of their own experiences (Gould 2009). On the other hand, because of their need to attract resources to survive, nonprofits are also reproducing larger cultural norms around inclusion in an effort to maximize appeal to external audiences (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Edwards and McCarthy 2004).

Moreover, as a mesolevel site of cultural (re)production, nonprofit organizations serve as “mediators of collective identity at the micro level and of sociopolitical trends at the macro level” (Ward 2008, p. 234). For example, Bail (2014b, p. 9) highlights that these organizations “perform cultural messages

before the public in press conferences, television interviews, and newspaper editorial pages.” Over the last 20 years, GLAAD (previously stood for Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation) periodically produces a *Media Reference Guide* aimed at “fair, accurate, and inclusive news media coverage.” GLAAD’s 2016 guide recommends using the “LGBTQ” acronym to describe this community as opposed to the “LGBT” acronym. Such guidelines influence how media organizations represent people of diverse sexual and gender identities. Similarly, Equality Federation published an op-ed in Huffington Post to announce and explain their change from LGBT to LGBTQ—adding to the public understanding of why such deconstructed expansions are important (Isaacs 2016). Nonprofit organization’s view of their own work and the communities they represent can also influence the types of policies they advance when lobbying governments at all levels. And, cultural nonprofits like a gay men’s chorus, pride parades, or an LGBT-oriented newspaper or magazine can help shape how nonqueer people experience and perceive the community. Because nonprofits are so diverse in the areas in which they work, ranging from the arts to education to advocacy to religion-related work, the language they use is truly able to reach all corners of society. Therefore, analyzing nonprofit language can give insights into cultural change.

## DATA AND METHODS

### Data and Sample Construction

To investigate cultural change around sexual and gender identities, as reflected in nonprofit discourse, we compile an original data set of nonprofit organizations in the United States working with queer communities. To develop this data set, we combined data from three sources: the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) from 1998 to 2003, Citizen Audit from 2003 to 2010, and the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) from 2010 to 2016. All three sources contain the same base information: the name and mission as compiled in Form 990, an annual return required by the IRS for most nonprofit organizations. Beginning in 2016, the IRS made available machine-readable Form 990s (both the full form and EZs) for all nonprofits that e-filed (roughly 65% of nonprofits), covering 2010–16. In total, this included more than 1.3 million records.<sup>8</sup>

We use this initial source of nonprofit data to build our sample of nonprofits working in areas related to LGBT communities or sexual and gender identities. To identify such organizations, we created a dictionary of

<sup>8</sup> Although any tax-exempt organization can choose to file a full Form 990, currently, obligated tax-exempt organizations must file a full Form 990 if they have more than \$200,000 in gross receipts. Reporting thresholds have changed over time, increasing roughly in parallel with inflation, suggesting that the changes in reporting are not meaningfully altering the sample of nonprofits we are drawing from over time.

keywords and used computerized text analysis to search for these keywords in either the nonprofit's mission statement or name. The dictionary includes terms like "non-binary," "lesbian," "bisexual," "transgender," "sexual orientation," "gender expression," "queer," "LGBT," "asexual," and so on. Additionally, the IRS uses the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) to classify organizations as "lesbian and gay rights" (code R26). Organizations that did not include one of our key terms but were nonetheless classified as being gay or lesbian related by the IRS were also included. After an initial set of organizations were identified, mission statements were read to search for other words or phrases, such as "alternative sexualities" or "marriage equality," to be added to the dictionary in an interactive process. The final dictionary contained 39 different terms.

The IRS data covered the most recent period, 2010–16. To expand the time period, we use two additional sources of data. Before the IRS's recent data release, NCCS digitized Form 990s from 1998 to 2003. While Form 990s were different during that period, they include similar, and often identical, information on each nonprofit like a statement outlining its primary purpose and the activities of the organization. Using the digitized data, we repeat the process of searching for key terms and NTEE designations. In total, this process resulted in 827 unique organizations. We then removed organizations for which "sexual orientation" was listed as only one of many attributes the organization did not discriminate against like sex, race, creed, ability, national origin, and so on. Organizations explicitly anti-LGBT were also dropped; interestingly, all organizations that used "homosexuality" or "homosexual" in their mission statements carried anti-LGBT animus. These cuts left 735 distinct LGBT-focused organizations.

Finally, Citizen Audit is an organization that collects all Form 990s for all nonprofits beginning in the early 2000s in PDF format. We manually collected key information from Citizen Audit records for each of the 735 nonprofits for all missing years between 2003 and 2010. In total, this process results in 7,797 organization-years from 735 organizations that do work related to LGBT communities and that filed either a Form 990 or 990-EZ. For more information on cleaning and coding decisions, as well as alternative measures, robustness checks, and additional figures, see the online appendix.

### Dependent Variables

To assess change in discourse, we create three variables that capture the first instance of change toward more inclusive language. The three dependent variables are (1) any change toward more inclusive language (Any Inclusion), (2) change toward more inclusive language through adding additional deconstructed categories (Deconstructed Inclusion), and (3) change from deconstructed to constructive language (Constructive Inclusion).

To track changes, we look at the language included within the text of the mission statement or, when not available, the name of the organization. While traditionally limited to small-scale analyses, new advancements in text analysis and data availability allow sociologists to analyze cultural products on a much larger scale and look at culture in new ways (Bail 2014*b*). Here, we are the first to map the changing language of nonprofit organizations working within the queer space over an extended period of time.

We prioritize the language from the nonprofit's mission statement because of the importance of these texts in conveying the identity and purpose of the organization (Minkoff and Powell 2006; Paxton, Velasco, and Ressler 2020). Stated succinctly, "nonprofits only exist to pursue the specific public purposes that are expressed in their missions" (Berlan 2018, p. 413). There is strong correspondence between the mission statement as reported on the Form 990 and as it appears in other places like websites or fund-raising materials (Fairhurst, Jordan, and Neuwirth 1997; Paxton et al. 2020). Consequently, nonprofits craft their mission statements with a high degree of intention.

To create our three change indicators, we first created an index of inclusivity based on the language used by each nonprofit. For each nonprofit-year observation, the mission statement was scanned to find terms that convey various levels of inclusivity. If no such terminology existed within the mission statement, language from the nonprofit's name was used.

Table 1 provides the index along with example mission statements. The least inclusive category, "None," is reserved for organizations where neither mission statement nor name includes a reference to working within this space and is given a rank score of 0. Next is "Other" with a score of 1.<sup>9</sup> This category is for organizations that make some reference to working on issues within the area but do not make explicit reference to key communities or identities, for example, "marriage equality" or "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Next, "Single Group," with a score of 2, includes organizations that only work on behalf of one community such as gay men or bisexuals. Next, "Less than LGBT" ("*<*LGBT") are organizations that mention working with multiple communities but do not adopt what has become a commonly used core set of deconstructed identities (LGBT). Such organizations mention working with "gays and lesbians," "lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women," or any other combination. The next two categories are straightforward. "LGBT" is for organizations that explicitly mention the terms "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender" or the acronym "LGBT" or "GLBT." Organizations that extend the core acronym in any way, like adding "queer," "questioning," "asexual," or "intersex," among others, are labeled "More than LGBT" ("*>*LGBT"). These categories are scored 4 and 5, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> We acknowledge that "Other" is a unique category. Alternative models drop this category from consideration; changes to results are slight and available on request.

TABLE 1  
INDEX OF INCLUSIVITY WITH EXAMPLE MISSION STATEMENTS

Rank/Classification	Mission Statement	Organization	Fiscal Year
0/None	Anti-bias in public and private schools	GLSEN, Inc.	1998
	Provide encouragement and training for running and related activities	Front Runners New York, Inc.	2001
1/Other	Public education of Minnesota laws that discriminate against same-sex couples and their families	Equality Minnesota	2012
	SLDN is a national, non-profit legal services, watchdog and policy organization dedicated to ending discrimination against and harassment of military personnel affected by “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and related forms of intolerance	OutServe-SLDN	2010
2/Single Group	Resource center for gay men suffering from violent relationships	The Gay Men’s Domestic Violence Project, Inc.	2003
	Our primary exempt purpose is to provide education, support and outreach for the transgender community	Southern Comfort Conference, Inc.	2013
3/ <LGBT	To present theatrical productions showcasing gay, lesbian, transgender experiences	Celebration Theatre	2011
	Main activity is the film festival to help educate the public regarding lesbian, bisexual and transgender lifestyles through planning, publicizing and producing an annual film festival	Pikes Peak Lavender Film Festival	2001
4/LGBT	Committed to social justice by creating, sustaining and advocating for programs, policies and services for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth community	Boston Alliance of Gay and Lesbian Youth, Inc.	2014
	To increase our communities’ ability to support the self-determination and safety of bi, trans, lesbian and gay survivors of abuse. We work within a broad liberation movement dedicated to racial, economic and social justice, equality and respect for all people	The Northwest Network of Bisexual Trans Lesbians and Gay Survivors of Abuse	2016
5/ >LGBT	To provide community based services, advocacy and education to end domestic violence in LGBTQ, polyamorous and SM communities	New England Women’s Support, Inc.	2012
	To improve the well being of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) communities, the HIV/AIDS communities and the allies of all of these	Persad Center, Inc.	2011
6/SOGI	YPI is the only safe drop-in space in Rhode Island dedicated exclusively to meeting the needs of young people impacted by their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression	Youth Pride, Inc.	2012
	Purpose is to create a healthy community that celebrates the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity	Kalamazoo Gay Lesbian Resource Center	2002
7/Post-gay Queer Pride . . .	Creates entertaining music that inspires its members and audience by instilling pride in our diversity and common humanity	Sacramento Gay Men’s Chorus	2015
	Uses art to help queer and allied youth be more confident, express themselves and develop as leaders	Dreams of Hope	2014

NOTE.—For items 3 and 5, <LGBT = less than LGBT; >LGBT = more than LGBT, respectively.

The next two categories move away from deconstructed identities and instead switch to more constructive language. The first of these two is "SOGI," ranked 6, which includes organizations that use terms like "sexual orientation(s)," "sexual identity/identities," "gender identity/identities," or "gender expression." The final category, with a rank score of 7, is an amalgamation of organizations that use broad language to demonstrate inclusiveness. These include using "queer," "pride," or other postgay language as described by Ghaziani (2011). While it is possible that some postgay organizations end up using no distinctive language, similar to those categorized as "None," the intention is different. Rather than using no distinctive language to hide their motives, postgay mission statements use language to signify even greater levels of inclusion. To confirm correct placement, all mission statements that had no distinct keywords in them were manually read and hand coded by both authors. See the online appendix for detailed examples distinguishing between "None" and "Post-gay" mission statements. In a few instances, organizations used both deconstructed and constructive language. In these cases, organizations were placed into the more inclusive category.

For every nonprofit-year observation, the change indicators were created. The transition to Any Inclusion captures the year when an organization increases its standing on the inclusivity index, regardless of where the organization starts or where it ends. Deconstructed Inclusion captures adding more deconstructed identities, for example, moving from "None" to "<LGBT" or "LGBT" to ">LGBT." This indicator, then, only captures movements toward more inclusion that fall from 0 to 5 on the scale ("None" to ">LGBT"). Constructive Inclusion indicates the transition from using any type of deconstructed identity language to either of the constructive categories, for example, moving from "LGBT" to "SOGI." This indicator, then, captures organizations that move from a starting score of 0–5 and transition to a score of 6 or 7.

Table 2 gives an example of the changing mission statement for OutRight Vermont and the classification and rank for each mission statement. The transition from 1998 to 1999 represents a Deconstructed Inclusion change, while the transition from 2000 to 2002 is reflective of a Constructive Inclusion change. Table 2 is also instructive as some mission statements do decrease on the inclusivity index, although this is rare.

## Independent Variables

### *Bottom-Up Pressures*

The first set of independent variables capture various dimensions of an organization's targeted constituencies or resource needs.

*Youth.*—To determine whether an organization works with youth, we combine the text of its mission statement/primary exempt purpose and name and

## Deconstructed and Constructive Logics

TABLE 2  
EXAMPLE OF A NONPROFIT'S CHANGING MISSION STATEMENTS: OUTRIGHT VERMONT

Fiscal Year	Mission Statement	Classification	Score
1998 . . . . .	Support lesbian, gay and bisexual youth in Vermont	< LGBT	3
2000 . . . . .	Supporting lesbian, gay, transgendered, and bisexual youth in Vermont	LGBT	4
2002 . . . . .	Support for VT youth re: sexual identity and orientation	SOGI	6
2012 . . . . .	The mission of OutRight Vermont is to build safe, healthy, and supportive environments for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth and to educate the community at large	> LGBT	5

NOTE.—The terms < LGBT = less than LGBT; > LGBT = more than LGBT.

code it 1 if the text includes one of the terms: “youth,” “child(ren),” “kid(s),” “young,” “teen,” and “camp.” Organizations with an NTEE classification of “Youth Development” (code O) are also coded 1. Organizations are only coded 1 for the organization-years in which the criteria are satisfied.

*Advocacy.*—To determine whether an organization has an advocacy focus, we use the NTEE classification for “Civil Rights, Social Change and Advocacy” (code R). Because of some potential errors with the NTEE category system identified during the 1990s (Grønberg 1993), if an organization is coded as advocacy by the IRS at any point in time, it is considered an advocacy organization during the entire observation window.

*Global.*—To determine whether an organization has an international or global focus beyond the United States, a combined mission statement/primary exempt purpose and name were scanned for keywords that conveyed an international audience, including “global,” “international,” “abroad,” “immigrant,” as well as the names of all continents. The NTEE classification for organizations with an international focus (code Q) also qualified a nonprofit as Global. Organizations are only coded 1 for the organization-years in which these criteria are satisfied.

*Foundation funding.*—During the period under observation, the newest addition to the deconstructed acronym is the “T” (Nownes 2010). Consequently, if greater foundation funding is being earmarked for transgender programming, this may spur nonprofits to adopt this language. Funders for LGBTQ Issues is a U.S.-based nonprofit that produces a report after surveying hundreds of nonprofits and collecting U.S. foundation reporting forms to determine amounts of funding and disaggregated funding along several axes. From these data, we create the amount of foundation funding targeting transgender communities as a percentage of total funding.

*Total revenues.*—We also account for the resources of the organization by controlling for total revenues. Given that nonprofits compete for resources,

one strategy to increase revenues is to seek out new constituencies and, therefore, new donor pools (Nownes 2010). To capture new donors, low-resourced organizations may therefore change to more inclusive language, either deconstructed or constructive. However, given the risk of being at the forefront of social change, it may be the most well-resourced organizations that are able to take on the risk-to-payoff trade-off. We use the total revenue for each organization as reported in the Business Master File from the NCCS. This measure is logged because of a skewed distribution.

### *Horizontal Pressures*

We measure two forms of isomorphic pressures stemming from the organizational environment: pressure to adopt deconstructed identities (Deconstructed Pressure) and pressure to switch to constructive labels (Constructive Pressure) as well as pressure from the broader social movement (Movement Pressure).

To create Deconstructed Pressure, we take the percentage of organizations categorized as “LGBT” or “>LGBT” in a given year. To construct Constructive Pressure, we take the percentage of organizations categorized as “SOGI” or “Post-gay” in a given year.

To measure the pressure from social movements (Movement Pressure), we calculate the cumulative total of LGBT nonprofits specifically categorized as advocacy (code R26). To do so, we use NCCS’s Business Master Files, which include NTEE information on all active nonprofits in a given year. While our main data come from organizations that report to the IRS with Form 990 and Form 990-EZ, the Business Master File also includes NTEE codes for nonprofits that use the Form 990-N “postcard,” a limited form used by organizations with less than \$50,000 gross receipts. We take the cumulative total of advocacy organizations founded each year to measure the strength of the social movement.

### *Top-Down Pressures*

Finally, we use a series of variables to account for contextual factors. First, given the saliency of the marriage equality debate, we use data from Pew to measure the percentage of U.S. citizens who support full marriage equality (Public Opinion). Although measured in most years from 1998 to 2016, when missing, we linearly interpolate values.

*Intersectional consciousness.*—We create a binary indicator for whether or not a nonprofit includes one of the following key terms within its mission statement/primary exempt purposes: “sexism,” “racism,” “anti-Semitism,” “Islamophobia,” “xenophobia,” “ableism,” or “ageism.” Organizations are coded 1 for the organization-years in which these criteria are satisfied.

*Political threat.*—We measure threat as an indicator for whether the nonprofit operates in a state in which there is an explicit state constitutional ban

against marriage equality (Soule 2004). These data are collected from the Movement Advancement Project. States are coded 1 the year in which the constitutional ban was approved by either the state legislature or via popular referendum. Following *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. Supreme Court case legalizing same-sex marriage, all states drop to zero in their coding.

*Leading city.*—Leading cities are the 10 cities with the highest percentage of residents identifying as LGBT+. Data are estimated through a 2015 Gallup survey. These cities are San Francisco, Portland, Austin, New Orleans, Boston, Seattle, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, Denver, and Hartford.

*Founding era.*—To account for the historical context in which an organization was founded, we use a series of dummy variables to categorize each nonprofit into a founding era on the basis of the year it received exemption status from the IRS (i.e., its rule date as reported on Form 990). Using a variety of sources documenting the history of LGBT organizing and cultural changes within the United States as a guide (Meeker 2001; Armstrong 2002; Ghaziani, Taylor, and Stone 2016), we develop the following set of distinct founding eras: closet era (pre-1969), coming out era (1969–85), AIDS era (1986–97), mainstreaming era (1998–2011), and equality era (2012–16).

## Methods

### *Discrete Time Logistic Regression*

Given our interest in explaining the adoption of more inclusive language by nonprofits over time, event history analysis is the appropriate method (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004). Because our data are recorded yearly, we use discrete time logistic regression models. In this analysis, time represents historical time (see Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998). That is, a nonprofit’s “risk” of adopting more inclusive language begins at particular historical dates, rather than in relation to a nonprofit’s internal clock. Organizations enter the analysis when they were born, defined as when they were recognized by the IRS or 1998. We are interested in the instance of first change toward more inclusive language, so we do not model changes toward more inclusive language as a repeatable event, although this does occur. Organizations that do not make a transition by 2016 are right censored.

### *Semistructured Interviews*

We supplement our longitudinal analysis of administrative data with a set of semistructured interviews with nonprofit leaders. Doing so allows us to validate an important assumption of the quantitative analyses—that nonprofits are intentional in developing and modifying mission statements. Further we can explore whether and how statistical associations we find in the administrative data play out “on the ground.” We undertook 13 interviews

between November 2020 and March 2021. We identified leaders, with attention to range and a case study logic (Weiss 1995; Small 2009). We were sure to interview leaders (founders, executive directors, and board members) from nonprofits of different sizes (measured by revenue), from different regions of the United States, and whose organizations made different language choices. We undertook semistructured interviews with open-ended questions designed to have nonprofit leaders walk us through the process of mission development and change at their organizations. Interviews ranged from 30 to 75 minutes, and leaders provided their own impressions of nonprofit processes rather than acting as official spokespersons on behalf of the nonprofit. Saturation was obtained quickly, and gathering more interviews would not “reveal new properties of [our] core theoretical categories” (Charmaz 2006, p. 113). To confirm that what we find with current leaders is also historically accurate, we supplement our interviews with a few archival examples.

RESULTS

Figure 1 descriptively graphs the percentage of nonprofits using different terminologies from 1998 through 2016. This figure is a novel contribution to multiple lines of research but especially cultural change because, for the first time, such trends are mapped longitudinally (Bail 2014b).

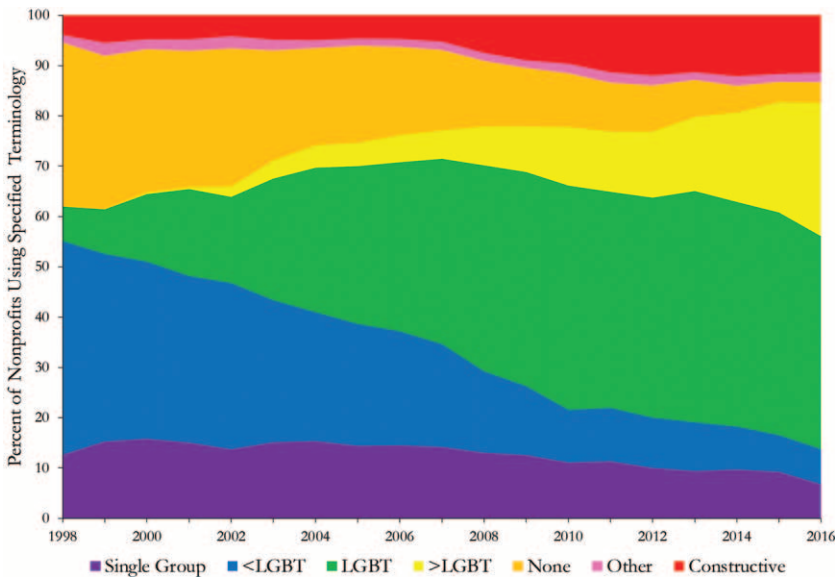


FIG. 1.—Change in deconstructed and constructive terminologies, 1998–2016

## Deconstructed and Constructive Logics

Starting from the bottom category, Single Group is mostly constant throughout the period—suggesting that some organizations dedicated to only serving one population, like bisexuals, do not change to become more inclusive of other groups that exceed their organizational mandate. The next three categories, “<LGBT,” “LGBT,” and “>LGBT,” are best understood in tandem as they represent the core of deconstructed logics. In 1998, roughly 42% of organizations were “<LGBT.” For the vast majority, these are organizations that reference gays, lesbians, and bisexuals while omitting any reference to transgender communities. Only about 7% use “LGBT” language, and no organization uses “>LGBT” language. Over time, however, this changes as “<LGBT” declines every year to only represent about 7% of organizations in 2016. “LGBT” sees dramatic growth every year until 2013. After 2013, this category begins reducing in size. First appearing in 2002, “>LGBT” slowly begins to grow after 2002 and starts to more dramatically expand around 2012—helping to explain the reduction in “LGBT.” In the course of 18 years, “>LGBT” went from no mentions to 26% of the sample.

Two other key categories to highlight are “None” and “Constructive,” which includes SOGI. In a testament to the increasing cultural inclusion and recognition of queer communities, the percentage of nonprofits that make no explicit reference to working on behalf of this community, “None,” went from about 33% in 1998 to 4% in 2016. In 2016, there appear to be few organizations who “hide” the fact they support this population. And despite ample literature promoting constructive language, we only see moderate increases over time. In 1998, 4% of organizations fell into this category, while 11% did in 2016.

Aside from these broad trend lines, figure 2 highlights the total number of first transitions occurring each year; the most occur in 2008, with 37,

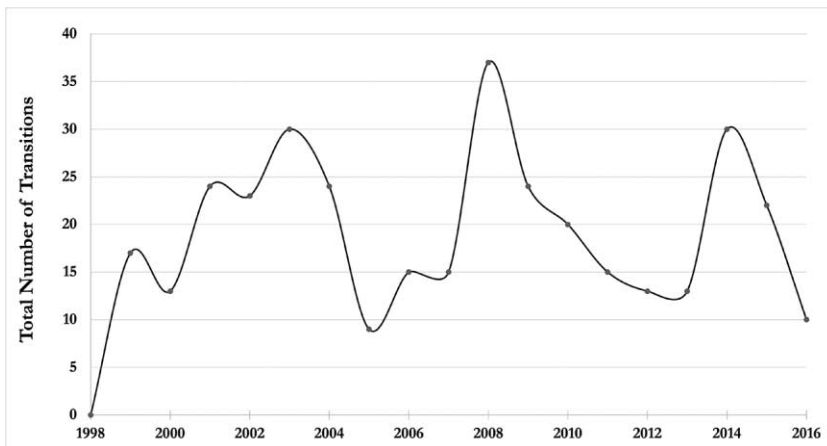


FIG. 2.—Number of transitions by year

followed by 2003 and 2014, both with 30. Of the 735 organizations we examine, 49% experienced at least one transition between 1998 and 2016. Of these, 68% transitioned to LGBT or >LGBT; 16% transitioned from deconstructed to constructive.

Table 3 includes the results from discrete time event history models predicting inclusive transitions. Model 1 predicts any transition toward more inclusive language, our Any Inclusion variable. Reviewing the organizational constituency variables, Youth is significantly associated with increasing the odds of having more inclusive language. Translated into predicted probabilities, youth organizations are 63.4% more likely to transition toward more inclusive language than nonyouth organizations, accounting for other covariates ( $\exp(b)/(1 + \exp(b)) \times 100$ ). Counter to our expectations, none of the other organizational constituency measures reach the threshold of statistical significance. However, the Advocacy results suggest that organizations with an advocacy focus are less likely to transition toward more inclusive language. One potential reason for this is that advocacy organizations are formed with already inclusive language—making the need to adopt such terminology over time less necessary (see the online appendix).

For organizational ecology, Deconstructed Pressure is marginally positively associated with any change. Next, we turn to the contextual factors to understand how broader sociohistoric moments are associated with inclusive language change. First, Public Opinion, Political Threat, and Leading Cities are not significantly associated with any transition toward more inclusive language. Instead the two factors associated with this outcome are Intersectional Consciousness and Founding Era. Indeed, Intersectional Consciousness has the largest effect size. Organizations that explicitly recognize alternative marginalizations within their mission statements have a predicted probability of 71.2% of changing toward any type of more inclusive language, controlling for other factors.

The era in which an organization was founded is associated with a lasting imprint on the types of language these organizations use and, consequently, the extent to which they must update their discourse to conform to present realities. For instance, compared to organizations founded during the mainstreaming era (1998–2011), organizations founded in the coming out era have a 68.1% greater likelihood of transitioning to more inclusive language, while those founded in the AIDS era are 68.9% more likely. Organizations founded in these earlier eras update their language to more inclusive language as times change. The closet era is the exception—nonprofit organizations founded in that era are not more likely to transition to more inclusive language than those founded in the mainstreaming era. Being founded under particularly heightened threat appears to leave a lasting imprint that slows change to overt and demonstrable signs of inclusion. Compared to the coming out and AIDS eras, organizations founded most recently, in the

TABLE 3  
DISCRETE TIME EVENT HISTORIES OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

	MODEL 1 Any Inclusion	MODEL 2 Deconstructed Inclusion	MODEL 3 Constructive Inclusion
Organizational constituencies and resources:			
Youth . . . . .	.541** (.168)	.59** (.182)	.149 (.318)
Advocacy . . . . .	-.208+ (.125)	-.186 (.136)	.327 (.230)
Global . . . . .	.117 (.259)	.219 (.280)	-.565 (.606)
Foundation funding . . . . .	.018 (.051)	-.014 (.055)	.088 (.091)
Total revenue (ln) . . . . .	.041+ (.023)	.044+ (.025)	-.007 (.044)
Institutional and movement pressures:			
Deconstructed pressure . . . . .	.016+ (.008)	.019* (.009)	-.016 (.016)
Constructive pressure . . . . .	.023 (.041)	-.007 (.044)	.256** (.092)
Movement pressure . . . . .	-.003 (.002)	-.003 (.002)	-.001 (.005)
Social context:			
Public opinion . . . . .	-.008 (.021)	.006 (.023)	-.076+ (.043)
Political threat . . . . .	-.180 (.160)	-.099 (.170)	-.758* (.336)
Intersectional consciousness . . . . .	.904*** (.238)	.716** (.270)	1.315*** (.337)
Leading city . . . . .	.119 (.128)	.105 (.138)	.47* (.236)
Founding eras: <sup>a</sup>			
Closet era . . . . .	-.420 (.622)	-.251 (.623)	.065 (1.065)
Coming out era . . . . .	.789*** (.173)	.85*** (.185)	.121 (.332)
AIDS era . . . . .	.756*** (.141)	.733*** (.152)	.270 (.268)
Equality era . . . . .	-.766* (.387)	-.999* (.479)	-.140 (.625)
Constant . . . . .	-3.489*** (.779)	-4.228*** (.842)	-2.824+ (1.495)
Observations . . . . .	5,162	4,900	7,194

NOTE.—Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> Mainstreaming era (1998–2011) serves as reference category.

+  $P < .1$ .

\*  $P < .05$ .

\*\*  $P < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $P < .001$ .

equality era (2012–16), have a lower predicted probability—just 31.7%. These patterns suggest that organizations founded most recently are probably born with mission statements and language that are more inclusive and less in need of updating compared to older organizations.

Models 2 and 3 contrast factors that explain Deconstructed Inclusion and those that explain Constructive Inclusion. Beginning with organizational constituencies and resource needs in models 2 and 3, we notice interesting differences in the direction of coefficients, but only Youth is significantly associated with greater odds of inclusive change in model 2. Despite our hypothesis, there is no evidence to support that Youth organizations have greater odds of making the jump from deconstructed to constructive identity labels.

The two organizational ecology variables reach statistical significance in models 2 and 3. In model 2, Deconstructed Pressure has a positive association with Deconstructed Inclusion as expected. In model 3, Constructive Pressure similarly increases the odds of making the switch to constructive language. In other words, models 2 and 3 provide evidence that nonprofits typically follow peer organizations in adopting similar language. While the coefficient for Constructive Pressure is larger, the overall magnitude of Deconstructed Pressure during this time period results in a larger effect. This stronger pressure may be one reason why we do not see more constructive language in figure 1. Movement Pressure continues to lack statistical significance with either type of language change.

In model 2, the only contextual factors that help explain Deconstructed Inclusion are Intersectional Consciousness and Founding Eras. Organizations with an intersectional consciousness are 67.2% more likely to add deconstructed identities into their mission. It is in model 3, though, where this variable has the largest effect—the largest effect across all variables. Organizations with an Intersectional Consciousness are 79% more likely to switch from deconstructed to constructive language. Models 2 and 3 differ when it comes to Founding Eras. Adding deconstructed identities continues to be influenced by when an organization was founded but not the jump to constructive.

Instead, the other contextual factors are associated with the change to constructive. While only marginally significant, the coefficient on Public Opinion ( $b = -.076$ ,  $P < .10$ ) is notable for its negative direction. While counter to our initial expectation, it does mirror the marketing and advocacy that promoted marriage equality that used deconstructed logics—rights are to be conferred because of the biological innateness of same-sex attraction. As public opinion supporting marriage equality grew, it appears to constrict the switch to constructive approaches. In model 3, Political Threat is significant and negative. Organizations residing in states that have marriage equality constitutionally banned are significantly less likely to adopt constructive language. Again, similar to the public opinion finding, the active

specter of threat and need to engage the political arena produced pressure to keep deconstructed language. Not only is deconstructed language more common in usage, but it is also strategically helpful for advocacy work. Finally, the coefficient for Leading City indicates that organizations residing in a city where LGBT people make up a large percentage of the population are 61.5% more likely to adopt constructive language. To a nonprofit, location in a place with a larger population signals higher comfort with constructive language and appears to allow experimentation with vanguard language.

### Interviews with Nonprofit Leaders: Understanding Process and Intent in Developing Mission Statements

The results reported thus far are novel but based on administrative data, limiting our ability to assess intent and process. Here, we report on 13 semi-structured interviews that demonstrate that the development of, and changes to, a mission statement are deliberate and intentional on the part of nonprofits. Interviews also provide corroborating evidence for the bottom-up, horizontal, and top-down pressures on organizations as found in the administrative data.

To begin, all of the nonprofit leaders we interviewed stressed careful attention to language. For example, Kellie, a leader from Spectrum Center, explains that when creating their mission, the Spectrum Center wished to “weave in language in a really intentional way.”<sup>10</sup> Every single leader could articulate exactly why the nonprofit chose the language it used in its mission. For example, according to Jake, the Brighter Tomorrow Fund wanted to be “forward thinking,” even “edgy,” in the language it chose. Thus, during a change in mission in 2016, the staff and board of directors had many discussions about moving from “LGBT” to “LGBTQ+.” Alex, a leader of an LGBTQ community center, described a listserv for leaders of LGBTQ community centers as actively and repeatedly engaged in discussions of language—it “comes up every couple months.” In sum, it is evident that, as Adam from the Philanthropy Foundation explained, language is “top of mind” for these organizations.

Organization leaders described discussions and debates about the best way to, as Ignacio of EqualityYouth put it, change their mission statement “in [the] spirit of inclusivity.” Some focused on deconstructed logics by adding letters to the traditional “LGBT” acronym. Ignacio, for example, explained that nonprofits add letters to avoid “forgetting I or A or +.” Evan articulated Equality League’s decision to stick with letters as “really want[ing] to center people,” since “SOGI doesn’t sound like it is talking about people.” But other leaders described problems with a deconstructed logic. Leah explained that Rainbow Flag is debating the trade-offs of extending beyond Q because of

<sup>10</sup> All names of leaders and organizations are pseudonyms.

the additional education required for many people. In dealing with the issue of “forgetting” letters, Connor from Room for Everyone described constructive language as a “safety net” that avoids a nonprofit “getting it wrong.” This influenced Room for Everyone’s constructive choice of “sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions” in its mission. Billy reported wanting Amplify Singers to avoid the need for future change and to avoid being “stuck.” Thus, Amplify Singers chose a constructive logic of postgay language with no identifying LGBT+ language in the mission at all.

Because of its perceived importance, nonprofit leaders devote resources to changing their mission. The Brighter Tomorrow Fund undertook focus groups of constituents, while Voyage Youth surveyed theirs. The founding board members of Amplify Singers met weekly over a two-month period when developing their mission and reevaluate it every year. Out State used messaging research from a national LGBT organization, while State of Equality hired trainers to help the staff and board develop the mission statement at a retreat. Adam from Philanthropy Foundation viewed their mission statement’s language as “old” because it had not changed in five years. Overall mission change is seen as part of a broader strategic planning process to be used throughout the organization’s materials.

Given how important language in mission is to nonprofits, contention is possible. Jake from the Brighter Tomorrow Fund explained how, during their discussion of mission in 2016, younger staff members argued that, with a target audience of youth, the organization needed a term that youth used, such as queer. The staff also struggled with the deconstructed nature of LGBT and wished to scrap the acronym entirely in favor of queer as an umbrella term that “wouldn’t need to be modified” in the future. Yet, older board members cautioned against a move to queer, arguing that some donors or outside supporters might be uncomfortable saying the word, that some might not understand what it means today, and that, as a global organization, it would create problems as queer is not translatable internationally. The addition of “Q+” was the compromise everyone was “proud of” as it “added that element of inclusivity.”

Nonprofit leaders mentioned numerous factors in play when developing their mission and how navigating these factors was necessary for a satisfactory conclusion. There were considerations at all three levels we theorized: bottom-up constituencies and resource needs, horizontal peer pressures, and top-down contextual factors, providing corroborating evidence for the statistical associations we find. As mentioned above, attention to youth was common, as was attention to donors. The disparate needs of these two constituencies created a tension for many nonprofits, as it did for the Brighter Tomorrow Fund. Organizations try to reconcile donor experiences, like “queer was used to dehumanize me for 30 years” (Alex), while recognizing that “minority and transgender youth have different experiences than our

donors” (Ignacio). In explaining the choice to use LGBTQ+, Isaac said, “We need to think about the general public, our direct service folks, and our donors. Where do the circles of the Venn diagram intersect?”

Horizontal pressures were significant in our analyses of administrative data and also appeared consistently in our interviews. For all nonprofit leaders we interviewed, other organizations working in this space were front of mind: “For our executive director, peer organizations are a big one. What’s GLAAD doing? What’s Trevor doing?” (Jake). During interviews, leaders always mentioned other organizations as reference points to make sense of their own language use. Jake described a process where “a ripple starts somewhere and then it goes.” These peer pressures speak to neoinstitutional processes of legitimacy and how particular organizational structures, like language, diffuse. To fail to adhere to changing standards is risky. As Jake states, “LGBT is the bare minimum, anything less than that [such as “gay and lesbian”] would cause some frustration. . . . There’d be anger.”

Despite the lack of a relationship in the administrative data, the role of activists from the larger social movement for equality was noted by many leaders. Ignacio remembered activists pushing for the inclusion of “T” and noted that an intersex activist he knows continues to push for “I” in language. Kellie noted that during the eight-week period when the mission was developed, individuals reached out to confirm the inclusion of asexual. Spectrum Center further encountered a push from two-spirit activists to include 2S in their mission language.

Attention to the social context was another factor nearly all leaders mentioned as important to consider for mission statements. Jake, Ignacio, Kellie, and Alex, for example, said that they were very cognizant of the political environment in which they were located. All leaders spoke to how they keep track of the discussions taking place on social media and within cultural spaces more broadly to make sure that they are being reflective of the language “we are all used to using” (Ignacio).

Part of this stated awareness of social context manifested in nonprofits grappling with matching language to an intersectional consciousness. As Katherine explained, State of Equality needed language to “reflect intersecting identities.” Ignacio highlighted that “white gays aren’t as underserved as transgender or other minorities,” so it was important to consider these underserved needs and use language accordingly. Spectrum Center went so far as to directly state its “intersectional” approach in its mission statement. Jake was more emphatic: “You cannot exclude the most marginalized and not get push back, and I think that’s understood for most nonprofits.” As a signal of the importance of this issue to the community, when Equality Federation took to the Huffington Post to announce the change from LGBT to LGBTQ, it stated: “For Equality Federation, adding the Q is about more than a letter. . . . At this turning point, when we are examining and improving upon our

commitments to racial, economic, and social justice, we are also doubling down on our commitment to people who identify as queer so that they will be fully embraced and empowered in our organization. Adding the Q goes hand-in-hand with our deeper understanding of intersectionality.” While our interviews took place after the murder of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in summer 2020, our administrative analyses, concluded in 2016, show that the influence of intersectional consciousness on nonprofit language is hardly a new phenomenon.

### Birth versus Change

Returning to administrative data, another question remains. Figure 3 replicates figure 1 but separates organizations by founding era. Separating the figure by founding era helps distinguish the extent to which the trends we observe are due to organizations changing into a category versus new organizations being “born” into a category. For instance, because the coming out and AIDS eras occur before our 1998 analysis starts, all changes in those charts are due to mission statement changes as opposed to new foundings.<sup>11</sup> The mainstreaming era’s growth pattern shows the relevance of new foundings, with some transitional changes into new categories also possible. The year 2012 starts the new era and highlights changes for those born under mainstreaming because of organizational discourse changing. The equality era pattern is all new foundings. With this orientation to figure 3 in mind, we highlight four key insights.

First, Single Groups persist. Across eras, with the exception of the equality era, there is a consistent number of Single Group organizations with little change. This corroborates our earlier finding that those organizations dedicated to a single community are less likely to change to more inclusive language. While in the earliest eras, the highest percentage of single group organizations express working for the gay community, there is a remarkable rise in single group transgender organizations: moving from 4.8% to 33% across the eras.

Second, “<LGBT” and “None” fade over time because of organizations switching into more inclusive categories (coming out era and AIDS era) and fewer newly born organizations choosing this language compared to others (mainstreaming era). As the dominant “<LGBT” language choice is “gay and lesbian,” figure 3 makes apparent that this approach has fallen out of favor. Additionally, the large number of transitions out of “None” (again, see coming out era and AIDS era) helps to confirm the view that these organizations may have only been uncomfortable expressing their focus on queer communities before wider public support in general.

<sup>11</sup> Changes could also be due to organization deaths, although that is a far smaller number than organization births.

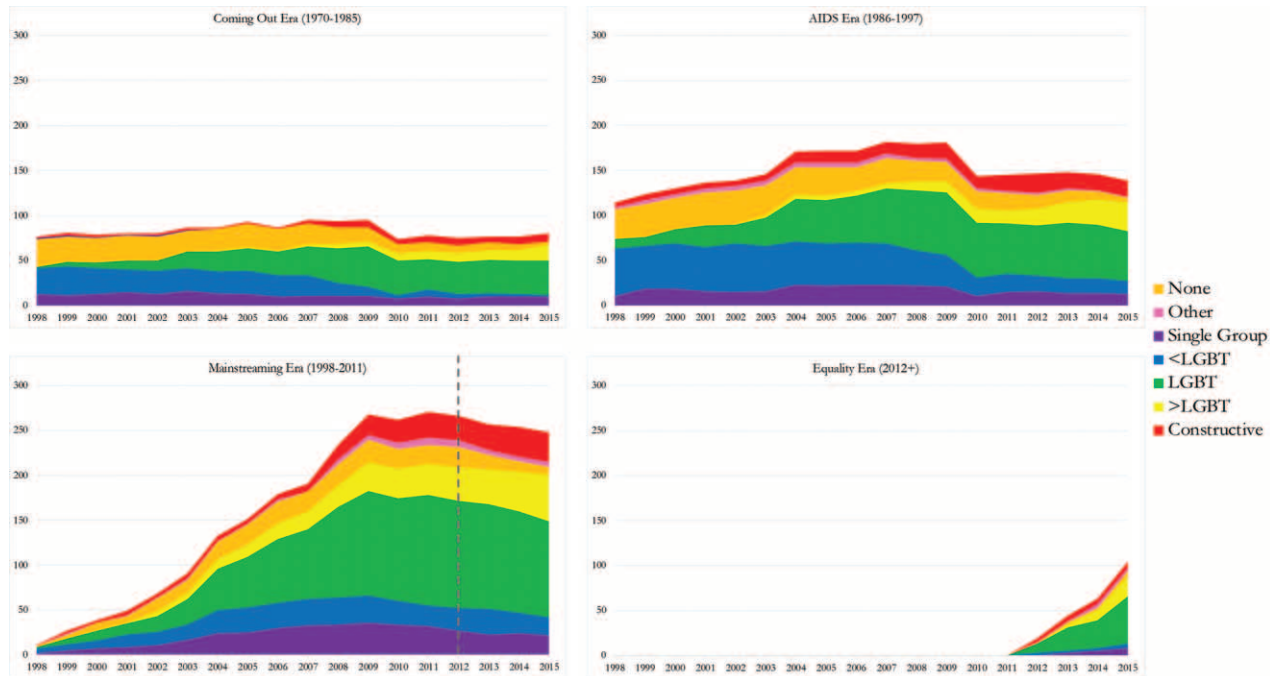


FIG. 3.—Number of organizations using deconstructed and constructive terminologies by founding era (years in parentheses). Terms are ordered vertically as listed in the key. The dashed line in the mainstreaming era chart demarcates the start of the new equality era—meaning that growth before this line can be viewed as largely due to new foundings while changes after are more likely due to existing organizations changing terminology. Because of the small number of observations, we exclude the closet era (pre-1970).

Third, the deconstructed logic of “LGBT” dominates both changes and births, with many organizations both changing into and being born with this language. As reflected in everyday language, this four-letter acronym is the typical way for characterizing queer communities even today.

Fourth, comparing the two most inclusive categories, >LGBT and Constructive, shows an important difference in origin. The rise of the >LGBT category is predominantly due to changes into it, largely from organizations that previously used either “<LGBT” or “LGBT.” In contrast, although constructive discourses are present throughout the observation window and used by organizations of all eras, the greatest growth is due to newly born organizations choosing constructive language during the mainstreaming era. Combined, these trends confirm that once organizations are committed to a deconstructed logic, they tend to stay in that logic rather than making the fundamental shift to a constructive logic. The birth of a new organization, in contrast, affords the opportunity to choose the deconstructed path or a constructive one. Thus, constructive logics are not necessarily the natural next evolution in inclusivity from deconstructed language but, at least in the period we observe, represent a different way of articulating diverse sexual and gender identities. It is notable, however, that those founded in the equality era demonstrate little use of constructive language. We discuss this phenomenon at greater length in the conclusion.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A foundational question within sociology is to understand how cultural change occurs. As new technologies become available, unlocking previously inaccessible data, it opens up the potential to reexamine this question in novel ways (Bail 2014*b*). One rapidly changing aspect of U.S. culture is the discourse around and collective representation of people with diverse sexual and gender identities (Ghaziani et al. 2016). Deconstructed identities are increasingly visible in everyday vocabularies, and previously unmentioned identities are normalized. Further, earlier logics of inclusion stressing the expansion of categorical identities are now challenged as a new logic of inclusion arises pushing recognition of identities and experiences beyond categories (Ball 2019). To better understand the factors contributing to these cultural changes, we take advantage of a previously unexplored site of cultural (re)production: service and advocacy nonprofits. Since “a single theory of cultural change cannot apply to the many potential sites of cultural impact,” we combine institutional and social movement theories and highlight three sources of pressure to explain inclusive change: bottom up through organizational constituencies and resource needs, horizontal through the organizational ecology, and top down from social and political contexts (Amenta and Polletta 2019, p. 280). Below, we outline findings and discuss

their implications for broader research in four areas—culture, sexuality, movements, and organizations.

Why do nonprofits change to more inclusive language? And are the processes associated with deconstructed logics different from those associated with a shift to constructive logics? In the first study to systematically document the shift in identity labels and logics among organizations in the queer community, we find that while all three sources of pressure influence inclusive change, some sources matter more. In looking at bottom-up pressures from organizational constituencies and resources needs, organizations working with youth stand out. As queer youth grow up familiar with and aware of different identities available to them (Russell et al. 2009; Savin-Williams 2009), it does appear that the organizations that work with them respond in kind. For example, after Alex used the term “LGBT” at a rural Pennsylvania high school in 2016, one student said the acronym is “so 10 years ago.” While evidence abounds of youth using more inclusive language, this is one of the first analyses to see how this influences language at the organizational level. But this change is through adding deconstructed identities, despite theory suggesting that modern queer youth are comfortable exploring more fluid identities (Diamond 2008; Rupp et al. 2016). While our statistical analysis does stop in 2016, our interviews confirm that this tension continues.

Horizontal, isomorphic pressures from the institutional environment are associated with inclusive change under both sets of logics—understandable considering that our site of cultural change is situated within organizations. Although we see inclusive discourse spreading, it is possible that this is purely “ceremonial conformity” (Meyer and Rowan 1977). That is, while organizations are adopting more inclusive language within their mission statements, it may not meaningfully change how they engage their work (Armstrong 2002). Ceremonial conformity does not present a major limitation to the current study given that concern is discourse itself. By adopting more inclusive language within their mission statement, nonprofits normalize inclusive collective representations to both external and internal audiences. Still, an important and potentially insightful area of future research is to link language change in mission statements to change in nonprofit programming, advocacy, or services provided.

We find evidence for the importance of sociohistoric moments (Whittier 1997). The era in which an organization was founded changes its likelihood of adding more deconstructed identities. With the exception of the closet era (pre-1969), the likelihood of change decreases as organizations are born closer to the present. This suggests that nonprofits founded more recently are less likely to need to “update” their language to match modern discourse, as they enter the arena with inclusive language. In a demonstration of significant historical imprinting, however, organizations founded during the closet era were most likely to never mention any explicit identity and to

maintain that status through time—demonstrating that the Stonewall divide is symbolically salient.

Organizations with an intersectional consciousness are both more likely to adopt deconstructed identities and to make the shift to constructive logics. Organizations that recognize other types of marginalizations and work with populations beyond the traditional white, middle-class, cisgender male community are more likely to use language that includes communities outside “gay.” It would be unlikely for a queer organization that recognized sexism to not also include “lesbian” in its mission statement (Ayoub 2019). However, the effect on the switch to constructive suggests that an intersectional consciousness pushes organizations to think beyond discrete categorization. This insight highlights the emerging salience of intersectional perspectives—that to truly recognize inclusive collective representations we must not focus on additive logics but acknowledge that the assemblage of identities is complex and fluid, unbounded (Crenshaw 1990). Indeed, many of our interviewees highlighted enacting this intersectional consciousness as the next frontier in discussions of inclusive language.

Our second key question was to understand whether inclusion processes differ between the two logics. Results suggest that there are indeed distinct processes, that deconstructed and constructive logics appear to represent two fundamentally different ways of viewing and articulating the diversity of sexual and gender identities. Above we touch on intersectional consciousness and isomorphic pressure from other organizations, both with strong effects on the switch to constructive language. We also find organizations located in a city with a high percentage of LGBT residents are more likely to adopt constructive language but not more deconstructed identities. In cities where LGBT populations have a greater presence, and likely greater diversity in their sexual and gender identities, organizations may assess that a switch to constructive language would be welcome, possibly necessary.

Even as queer scholars and activists on the vanguard increasingly move toward more constructive language, we see only a small proportion of nonprofits using constructive language. Our quantitative analysis ends in 2016, and at that time, constructive language may simply have been too new for it to appear in mission statements or the logic too unfamiliar for it to have yet gained widespread appeal within this mesolevel of nonprofit organizations. Our interviews with nonprofit leaders suggest that this is no longer the case. Most of the leaders we interviewed indicated that their nonprofits are currently grappling with the tension between deconstructed and constructive language. Thus, we might expect to see more constructive language used by organizations very soon.

Remember too that historical legacies are important. Figure 3 suggests that organizations founded in eras dominated by a deconstructed logic feel most comfortable continuing to express greater inclusiveness through that logic rather than switching to a new logic. These deconstructed categories have inertia and become habitual in use (Zuckerman 1999). Thus, nonprofits

may “be unwilling to abandon existing categories, but organizational actors may be unable to break from such categories in their own thinking” (Saatcioglu and Skrtic 2019, p. 197).

Also, because horizontal pressure from other organizations matters, the small number of nonprofits using constructive language may mean that the institutional environment is currently too weak for mass adoption while the pressures to maintain deconstructed logics remain strong. It may require more time, and more newly founded nonprofits who use the most modern, constructive language, to approach levels of isomorphic pressure that would entice other nonprofits to make the wholesale jump from deconstructed logics. Future research may be able to assess and isolate whether there is a tipping point when one set of pressures yields to another.

Our political threat finding provides another explanation. The ever-present specter of threat against queer communities may be creating a mass suppression effect against the switch. We measured political threat as state bans on same-sex marriage. But threat can cross state lines. While the overturning of DOMA, legalization of same-sex marriage, and banning employment discrimination were all important national legal achievements, new threats continually arise. The recent appointment of conservatives throughout the federal judiciary creates an environment in which queer people fear recent rights will be overturned. As such political threat remains or increases, organizations are less likely to switch to constructive language since this language does not convey biological innateness and may make it more difficult to obtain legal rights. For example, several interviewees highlighted recent policies targeting transgender communities as reinforcing the importance of explicitly recognizing these communities in discourse—thereby reemphasizing the legal power of deconstructed logics.

Altogether, these findings provide some insights into the limits of constructive logics and the persistent usefulness of deconstructed ones. Tarrow (2013) argues that the reason why some language sticks while others fade is due to its symbolic resonance and strategic modularity. Both of these attributes are present for deconstructed logics and may, at least currently, not be for constructive ones. As mentioned above, the modular aspect of deconstructed logics is legally strategic. Further, “diversity through inclusion” is a continuing mantra within LGBTQ+ movements, making visibility for communities through the acronym symbolically powerful. Indeed, the symbolism that accompanies naming specific groups carries relevance beyond queer communities and can be found in terms like “BIPOC,” or Black, Indigenous, people of color.

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This research suggests a number of future directions. To begin, we modeled only first instance of inclusion. But many organizations move through multiple

stages of inclusion. A logical follow-up analysis is to investigate inclusion as repeated events. Sometimes organizations move backward on our inclusion scale, suggesting that sequence analyses could illuminate inclusion as a larger, more complex, and more gradual process. Alternatively, the stability of some Single Group organizations illustrates that not all will expand to more inclusive language, especially if it does not fit with their organizational purpose. And, constructive language appears at present to be a novel choice in language rather than a logical endpoint of a long series of inclusive transitions. Future research could thus take an alternative approach focused less on order and more on choice, for example, with a multinomial model.

We focused on how the United States has redefined our collective representation to be inclusive of diverse sexual and gender identities. Other discourses and processes of inclusion could be similarly investigated. For example, what explains shifts in discourse among environmental advocacy organizations from global warming to climate change to climate crisis or environmental justice? Was it driven by their constituencies, peer organizations, or the sociopolitical context? Similarity, horizontal pressures or local constituencies could pressure organizations to change from conceptualizing individuals as “victims” to “survivors” (Messamore and Paxton 2021). Or consider these questions: Does the rise of white nationalism, an existential threat to racial minorities, women, immigrants, and religious minorities, discursively bind these disparate communities together? Does it help explain the rise of BIPOC? We encourage authors to investigate such questions by tapping the rich data available in the public release of Form 990 data.

This is an analysis of discourse by nonprofits and not of their changing actions. We do not yet know whether organizations are becoming more inclusive in terms of employees and volunteers, organizational leadership, or the types of services, programming, and advocacy they engage in. Considering the historical privileging of white gay men in the movement, as theorized by Saatcioglu and Skrtic (2019), the move to a different categorization scheme, no matter how inclusive it seems on the surface, could perpetuate existing hierarchies or inequalities and, in fact, hide them from view. Future research assessing how an organization enacts these inclusive discourses is important.

Many argue that the movement to recognize diverse sexual and gender identities is unusual in that it has not “self-destructed” or fractured (e.g., Gamson 1995). Certainly, movements like the women’s movement have struggled with negotiating identities and cultures (Whittier 2010). And such struggles can lead to movement failure, as with the Occupy movement. Perhaps the LGBT+ movement is unique because it makes discursive jumps within and between deconstructed and constructive logics to better acknowledge fluidity and interstitial location. Could other movements seek language to better create and negotiate their collective identity—simultaneously indicating shared fate while

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allowing gradation and flexibility? While many herald this movement as a success for its ability to change policy, it is also worth examining and learning from its ability to expand our collective representation and make a lasting imprint on U.S. culture.

### APPENDIX

TABLE A1  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variables:					
Any change . . . . .	5,222	.07	.25	0	1
Deconstructed change . . . . .	4,957	.06	.24	0	1
Constructive change . . . . .	7,256	.01	.11	0	1
Organizational constituencies and resources:					
Youth . . . . .	7,859	.11	.31	0	1
Advocacy . . . . .	7,859	.33	.47	0	1
Global . . . . .	7,859	.04	.21	0	1
Foundation funding: % transgender . . . . .	7,859	4.05	3.25	0	11
Total revenues (logged) . . . . .	7,797	11.94	2.66	0	18.29
Horizontal pressures:					
Deconstructed pressure . . . . .	7,859	45.60	17.51	6.83	68.83
Constructive Pressure . . . . .	7,859	8.21	3.13	3.90	12.13
Movement Pressure . . . . .	7,859	173.15	46.02	0	231
Contextual factors:					
Public opinion . . . . .	7,859	45.78	7.89	32.33	61
Political threat: state marriage bans . . . . .	7,859	.25	.43	0	1
Intersectional consciousness . . . . .	7,859	.04	.21	0	1
Leading city . . . . .	7,859	.26	.44	0	1
Founding eras:					
	Frequency	(%)			
Closet era . . . . .	62	.79			
Coming out era . . . . .	1,558	19.82			
AIDS era . . . . .	2,806	35.70			
Mainstreaming era . . . . .	3,133	39.87			
Equality era . . . . .	300	3.82			

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