

WITH(IN) U.S.: RESISTIVE ACCOMMODATION AND CULTURAL STRANGERS'
DISCOURSES OF NATIONAL BELONGING

by

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Abstract

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With(in) U.S.: Resistive Accommodation and Cultural Strangers' Discourses of National Belonging

Dissertation directed by Professor Lisa A. Flores and Professor Lawrence R. Frey

The influences of inclusion and exclusion shape the landscape of the United States in profound ways, contouring the nation's conditions of belonging to privilege some and to marginalize others. The question of how these instances of belonging and marginalization are discursively constructed served as the foundation of this project. This dissertation engages with the discursivity and materiality of belonging, tracing vernacular contributions to, and experiences with, these constructions.

To address questions about national belonging, I turned to two online social movement groups that had initiated parallel online campaigns to rally for the rights of marginalized individuals. The Center for Community Change initiated the We Are America campaign to collect and showcase voices of migrant individuals, and the Courage Campaign organized and featured the voices of members and/or allies of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/queer (LGBT/Q) community. Both groups solicited, organized, and curated websites where members of their respective communities could upload videos of themselves speaking about challenges that they have faced as marginalized community members and their desire to belong within dominant U.S. culture. Investing the vernacular narratives of their populations with value, the Courage Campaign and the Center for Community Change bring cultural strangers into conversation with other U.S. national community members, constituting discursive moments for examining contributions that each group makes to understanding of belonging.

As this dissertation argues, discourses of national belonging balance and construct a set of tensions in the United States that give rise to hierarchies of inclusion that shape the cultural landscape, as represented in tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability. These tensions necessarily engage with U.S. investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism. By creating and reinforcing a norm for U.S. citizenship that locates the ideal U.S. citizen as being white, reproductively and monogamously heterosexual, and as a valuable laboring body, I argue that neoliberalism works to protect white U.S. Americans and to scapegoat others.

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CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION

When I saw Amina's familiar face flash across the screen, I immediately was taken back to a time in my life before graduate school, before being "out." I knew that it was her, but staring through the computer screen into the expanses of the internet many years later from a very different emotional, mental, and professional place, I was disoriented. Amina was a student in several of my Spanish courses when I taught high school in Greensboro, NC, and although teachers are told to never pick favorites, she certainly was a young person whose bubbly demeanor, genuine care for others, and openness to the world inspired me.

I was doing research for a graduate course when I came across a website called "Testimony: Take a Stand." Upon accessing the site, I was greeted by a map of the United States, punctuated by small pins that spread across the nation, with each pin representing a video testimonial that had been recorded and archived as part of the larger organization's efforts to spread lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/queer (LGBT/Q) equality.¹ I perused the website and Amina's testimonial was among the first that I saw. I watched intently as she talked about her coming-out experience, calmly and clearly discussing ways in which her college years made her feel more confident and comfortable as a "lesbian Christian," and I was struck when she began speaking of the homophobic culture that she encountered in Greensboro and at the high school at which we both spent so many years. That high school was unlike any other place that my white privileged body had ever spent time. My light skin made me immediately suspect, as I stood in front of the classroom of 30-plus darker faces, many speaking in native languages other

than English. For the first time in my life, I felt out of place as a result of my white skin, and my sexuality only confounded the sense of difference that I experienced. Hearing Amina recount her struggles within this community immediately pulled on my subconscious memory.

The video opened by showing Amina's confident, poised demeanor, as she smiled into the camera, her eyes clear and bright. She begins, "Okay, my name is Amina and I am originally from Greensboro, North Carolina" (Amina Testifies, 2011). Prompted by a question from the person filming the video, Amina is asked to detail her coming-out experience. She describes an awkward conversation that she had, first, with a close friend, then with her mother who thought it was a phase, and then, years later, with her grandmother, explaining the unexpected acceptance that she received from some individuals and the frustrations that she experienced with others. As she explains:

Some people couldn't believe me, because they're like, "Amina's a good church girl. She does everything right. Like she can't be gay." But I guess it was more about trying to teach them that gay isn't wrong, so I could still be the good church girl and a lesbian, because I do identify as a lesbian Christian. In college, it's definitely been different because [my] college is in California, so a lot of my friends come from very big cities where there's lots of LGBT/Q community and things like that, so they're more okay with it than I think I am some days. (Amina Testifies, 2011)

Her confidence and clarity were not surprising to see, and I immediately identified with her description of our high school—a place in which I had worked for 4 years but one in which I never quite felt like I belonged. Not identifying with any of the religious communities in the area, immediately coded as different because of my race and ethnicity, and feeling social pressure to keep my sexuality closeted as a public high school teacher in the area, I managed my

self-presentation very carefully. Even though a number of LGBT/Q students congregated in my classroom during lunch or after school, expressing the safety and comfort that they felt there, I never outed myself, even though I provided these students with a place to speak openly.

Continuing to watch Amina's testimonial, she next was prompted by the person filming the video to offer advice for those who might be considering coming out. She recounts her experiences and provides thoughtful suggestions, noting:

Umm, I think my first thing is that I don't think you should feel pressured to come out at any point in time, because even though I can say that I've been out for, what, I'm 20 now, so 4 or 5 years, I think it's an everyday process, because I always come across people who can't tell or don't know, or say things like, "You're too pretty to be gay." So then it's always like, "But hey, wait." (Amina Testifies, 2011)

As she continued, quickly and without warning, her voice choked and her eyes welled.

Apologizing, she takes a brief moment to compose herself before concluding:

Umm, I don't know, I think this conference and other things like it are big steps toward like what we need as a community and coming from a place where, . . . sorry, . . . coming from a place where it's not accepted normally, it's like really empowering for me, even at this age to know that there's so much support.

I saw the rawness of her emotion and how living in the same community from which I recently had moved away had affected her, Amina's story left a resounding impression, as I realized that her isolation also was my experience. Her story struck a chord in me. The power of her narrative had caused me to connect my experience with hers, and doing so suddenly removed me from the theoretical and abstract ways that I had been talking about and conceptualizing race,

ethnicity, and sexuality in my academic writing, and it led me to feel something different—something personal.

Amina's testimonial was one of dozens archived on Testimony: Take a Stand's website, each expressing similar stories of coming out, social and/or cultural marginalization, and/or detailing what it was like to live in a country but not to have one's rights fully recognized. While browsing the internet, I noticed that many organizations and marginalized communities recently had begun similar efforts to solicit and organize narratives of people in their membership, among them, a similar campaign that was coordinated by the migrant rights community, called "We Are America."

Amina's story, as well as the countless others that had been collected and curated on these websites, was compelling, pulling their audience (in this case, me) in more provocative ways than did policy debates or even nightly news stories about gay rights and migrant rights. Indeed, it struck me that it was the very narrative nature of these stories—the ways that they contributed to U.S. public rhetoric about citizenship, identity, and belonging—that gripped me. It has been argued that the United States is a nation in which neoliberal logics reign (see, e.g., Chávez, 2010a; Harvey, 2005; Jones & Mukherjee 2010; Manalansan, 2006), whiteness is the privileged and protected center of the citizenry (see, e.g., Carrillo-Rowe, 2004; Carter, 2007; Luibhéid, 2008; Roediger, 2005, 2007), and that queer and/or nonwhite bodies are marginalized, but how were these discourses of belonging (such as Amina's) being used by other excluded individuals to further make sense of the (limited) belonging that they may experience?

Adding their vernacular voices into the mix of national debate and discussion, these online communities, such as the website that contained Amina's testimonial, were engaging in U.S. public discourses of belonging in ways that I could not yet understand. Did these

individuals' narratives really have an effect on the majority of U.S. Americans' understandings of identity, citizenship, and belonging? In what ways were marginalized communities across the country working together in these efforts? How powerful is the role of story/discourse/rhetoric in shaping these global constructions? In the current social, cultural, and historical landscape of the post-9/11 United States, it seemed that these questions had significant implications for how belonging was understood; specifically, how discourses of identity and inclusion (working on and within academic contributions in critical whiteness studies, neoliberal citizenship studies, queer of color literature, queer migration scholarship, and research on vernacular rhetorics), construct contemporary understandings of belonging.

To embark on this project, below, I first carefully catalogue the contemporary historical moment in which these testimonials have been constructed. Second, I discuss recent advancements in internet technologies and how they have impacted the growth and development of online social movement organizations (netroots groups) before delving more particularly into the nature of the two previously mentioned campaigns. I conclude this chapter with a prelude to some of the larger claims that this project makes regarding discourses of U.S. national belonging, indicating how studying such matters is significant for academic and activist circles.

Background: Exploring U.S. Cultural Margins

Over the course of many centuries, millions of people have migrated away from their homelands or have been marginalized from their native countries. Some people fled as a result of war or famine, crossing borders and continents to ensure their family's safety within the shores of another nation. Others sought refuge from regimes that might have ostracized, imprisoned, or executed them on the basis of their sexuality, and many other identity markers, and still others migrated in search of the economic prosperity that might allow them to secure a

more stable future for themselves and their families—challenges that continue to confront countless people. As examples, the European Union has long struggled with how to address refugees entering its borders and it presently is grappling with how best to handle the influx of migrants into the affiliate countries from Northern Africa, who are fleeing political crisis in Libya (see, e.g., Croucher, 2013; Johnson, 2012); South Africa has eschewed its Apartheid past to enact the one of the most socially progressive constitutions in the world, allowing for same-sex marriage and writing hate crimes legislation to protect this vulnerable population, but, simultaneously, that country has been identified by human rights groups as having some of the most abhorrent statistics on violence perpetrated against the LGBT/Q community (see, e.g., Bonthuys, 2008; Morrissey, 2013b; Thorenson, 2008); and the United States remains embroiled in divisive political posturing over reforming immigration law and legislating gay marriage (see, e.g., Cantú, 2009; Chávez, 2010a; Crowley, 2007; Luibhéid, 2002, 2004).

Although the influences of inclusion and exclusion continue to shape the international landscape in profound ways, it is their legacy within the United States toward to which this study is directed. Although all countries around the world may be able to trace a similar history, some scholars have invested their resources in revealing how the U.S. government has long enacted policies and regulations that are meant to contain and/or regulate the tides of people who have sought inclusion into the nation (see, e.g., Barrett & Roediger, 1997, 2005; Epps, 2005; Jacobson, 1998; Luibhéid 2002, 2008, 2011; Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005; Marciniak, 2006; Roediger 2005, 2007; Sassen, 2005). For instance, laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Johnson–Reed Immigration Act of 1924, and the Defense of Marriage Act of 1996 severely limited the movement of individuals into the symbolic and material borders of the United States.

Alongside the international movements of migrants and their efforts to gain access to a better way of life, the LGBT/Q community has waged an uphill battle to gain political and social footholds within the United States as well (footholds that include such important matters as the right to marry or the right to openly serve in the U.S. military). Accessing such rights has created milestones for the LGBT/Q community, which has long faced marginalization as a result of social stigma and the ways in which sexual behavior is perceived in the United States. As Foucault (1978) explained:

Through various discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized; around the least fantasies, moralists, but especially doctors brandished the whole emphatic vocabulary of abomination. (p. 36)

In spite of the stigma that was attached to same-sex desire, the 1960s emerged as a time of promise for the LGBT/Q community,² before the AIDs epidemic of the 1980s quieted the movement and cast it back into the shadows (Crimp, 2002). This community battled that disease during the 1980s as it decimated its members, and it fought back against social biases that cast its members as figures of death, sickness, and moral depravity (Crimp, 2002; Puar, 2007).

Coded as especially threatening to the United States, nonwhite and nonheterosexual bodies, historically and in the contemporary moment, have been marked as *other*. Speaking about the United Kingdom, but with implications for the United States, Stychin (2000) noted that “there are close connections between the historical desire for social control of homosexuality and control over movement and borders more generally” (p. 609). Much scholarship has detailed

how members of these communities have been ideologically and materially marginalized and it has explained the dominant logics that lead to these exclusions (see, e.g., queer of color scholarship and/or queer migration studies). Instead of developing an analysis that might compare and contrast the marginalizations experienced by either the migrant or LGBT/Q community, I prioritize the always already intersecting ways in which these identities are comprised and conditioned. As Gopinath (2005) highlighted, “Discourses of sexuality are inextricable from prior and continuing histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism, and migration” (p. 3). Indeed, these discursive frameworks situate the material bodies of these individuals beyond the scope of U.S. national belonging, and have benefitted from analyses, such as this project, that expose how inclusion and exclusion hinge on dynamic and intersectional understandings of identity, understandings that already assume the complicity of these identity categories.

Driven by national investments in neoliberal governmentality, influential U.S. institutions have kept or forced out many individuals who are seen as falling beyond the moral and/or material borders of the nation. Many of these marginalized individuals stand at the precipice of belonging, not fully integrated into the nation’s core. Describing these individuals as “strangers” (a framework that I elaborate on in Chapter 2), Stychin (2000) explained that both undocumented migrants and LGBT/Q individuals are produced as outside the bounds of normalcy, and law. He further elaborated that members of these communities are perhaps the most dangerous of all, in that they are *essentially* different, but also able to “pass” undetected in the absence of close surveillance (p. 609). In particular, neoliberal logics of citizenship, economics, and cultural acceptability that prioritize one’s value to the nation (specifically, as monogamous, reproductive members of society and/or as laboring bodies who contribute worth to the nation), call on

discourses of inclusion and exclusion that continue to do the marginalizing work of homophobia and racism under the auspices of patriotism.

Attempting to make sense of the current cultural climate and practices that lead to the marginalization of various groups, some scholars (e.g., Chávez, 2010a; Puar, 2007) have marked the events of 9/11 as a turning point in contemporary concerns over national security and identity. In 2011, the year in which the data collected for this study were produced, 1,538 state bills were introduced that related to immigrants and refugees; by March 31, 2011, 141 of these laws and resolutions had been enacted (Morse, Mbachu, & Hermes, 2012). Demonstrating contemporary concerns for national identity and belonging, the overwhelming number of instances where states have attempted to (re)enforce the nation's borders implies a desire to protect and preserve a particular way of life that might be perceived as being in jeopardy if the tides of immigration are not stymied. At the same time, some national discourses continue to marginalize members of the LGBT/Q community from getting married, engaging in civil unions, and adopting children. Alongside these exclusions, advances in the legal recognition of LGBT/Q individuals have been made. In particular, 2011 marked an end to the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy that banned openly gay and lesbian individuals from serving in the United States military, and New York became the largest state in the nation to legalize same-sex marriage. Even with these advances in gay rights, scores of people who identify as members of the LGBT/Q community remain marginalized, such as transgender and gender queer individuals, marking, once again, the outer limits of U.S. national discourses of belonging—a periphery that is uncomfortable with ambiguity.

As 2011 unfolded, it witnessed forceful rights-based movements, including gays and lesbians fighting for the right to marry and to join the military, immigrants fighting for rights to remain within the United States, and already mainstream U.S. citizens and their lawmakers

fighting to *keep* rights and privileges that they believed were in jeopardy. More than anything, national belonging was at stake, primarily for the LGBT/Q and migrant communities, as they waged concurrent discursive battles for access, belonging, legitimation, and recognition in the United States. Couched within rhetorics of capitalism, colorblindness, Christianity, and conservative family values, U.S. cultural insiders engaged in a rhetoric of U.S. national identity and belonging with which migrant and LGBT/Q individuals also needed to contend, a rhetoric of belonging that led cultural strangers to participate in the nation's investment in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism into the fabric of the testimonial appeals analyzed in this research study.

This shift in contemporary understandings of U.S. national identity and belonging has led to a changing cultural context in which those who are excluded must engage. In many instances, shifting conditions have materialized in the development of social movement organizations that cohere around various (discrete) identity politics. Indeed, influenced by the demands of neoliberalism, many of those social movement groups have embraced the particularity of their identity, with members eschewing their role as workers in the United States and distracting attention away from the United States' exploitation of their labor. Perhaps because these times are marked by tumultuous differences and ferocious arguments about who can and cannot call themselves U.S. Americans, increasingly, many marginalized communities have grown invested in the needs and the politics of their membership. It now is not unusual to identify a marginalized community or a social movement group as having a singular identity or a particular cause. For instance, DREAM activists rally for passage of immigration reform that would stand to benefit a small segment of the migrant population in the United States, and the organization, Freedom to Marry, explicitly fights to expand marriage rights to LGBT/Q community members.

In both instances, issues that benefit smaller segments of each group's membership are prioritized over goals and interests of the larger social movement group. Although both of these efforts take up important causes, they demonstrate the oftentimes narrow scope of social justice and social change that movement organizations adopt.³

Even though many social movement organizations remain committed to particular, independent causes, the capabilities of email, social media, and blogging have allowed these groups much broader reach and, potentially, greater impact than ever before. Cathcart (1972) explained, "Movements are carried forward through language, both verbal and nonverbal, in strategic forms that bring about identification of the individual within the movement" (p. 86). As Cathcart's comments suggest, in the years before internet organizing was possible, smaller social movement groups needed to rely on their membership to spread the message of the movement and to recruit new participants. However with the advent of the internet and social media, discourses of U.S. national identity and belonging have changed, opening up what Howard (2008) has called a "vernacular web of participatory media" in which more people have access to public discourse. The next section explains specific effects that these technological changes have had on the nature of social movement organizing, and, more broadly, how those changes have affected ways in which public discourse about U.S. national identity and belonging are constructed and circulate.

The Impact of the Internet on Social Movement Organizing

The tides of social activism, born out of the antiwar protests of the 1960s, have generated many social movement organizations in the United States, the most enduring of which have leveraged new internet technologies to spread their message and to expand their membership. For instance, organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Human Rights

Campaign promote some LGBT/Q interests, and the National Council of La Raza and The United Farmworkers of America serve similar purposes for the Latino/a immigrant population in the United States. As Warnick (2007) explained, “The affordances of the internet and the World Wide Web have enabled a substantial amount of social activism, issue advocacy, and online protest beginning in the 1990s” (p. 7), leading many social movement groups to shift their activities online (these online social movement groups are known as “netroots groups”). Although many of these organizations continue to orchestrate face-to-face lobbying efforts to influence public officials and to wage street-level protests to call attention to their causes, as Warnick (2007) indicated, a large portion of these groups’ current efforts have grown increasingly mediated to amplify their exposure and to expand their support base.

The ease with which individuals across the United States (and the world) now can participate in these netroots groups provides a unique space for critical rhetorical inquiry, especially because this mediated context opens up the field of possible social movement participants to include a much broader population of vernacular voices than what would be possible to organize through face-to-face communication. Whereas some scholarship, attempting to distinguish between types of communication separated subaltern and vernacular discourses, Howard (2008) critiqued both of these conceptions because they “seek to account for noninstitutional power by imagining a strict division between the vernacular and institutional that has probably never really exist[ed]” (p. 497). Arguing for a broader approach to vernacular rhetoric that accounted for how these communities engage in public discourse, Howard introduced the idea of the *common vernacular*, and was adamant that online technologies and their possibilities for participatory media create new types of rhetoric with which to engage. Online technologies and the democratic potential that they house provide the possibility for

vernacular communities to broadly organize their efforts, craft their identity, and comprise a coherent political force that might contribute to national narratives of inclusion and belonging. Accordingly, variously marginalized communities have turned to these communication outlets as a resource for engaging larger publics.

Social movement organizations, capitalizing on web users' ability to record and post narratives of their experience as members or affiliates of the LGBT/Q or migrant community expand the field of voices that publicly contribute to U.S. discourses of belonging. The increasing ease with which people can upload written posts, videos, and photographs online has resulted in the substantial collection (and use) of narrative testimonials by activist groups and organizations⁴ and is reflective of the vernacular potential embedded within internet technologies (Howard, 2008). Specifically, two netroots groups, Courage Campaign (an organization promoting LGBT/Q rights) and the Center for Community Change (an organization promoting migrant rights), explained below, have launched large-scale testimonial campaigns, gathering narratives of individuals' experiences as members or allies of their respective community from across the United States. Each organization, although oriented toward the interests of discretely identified communities, nevertheless, occupies a similarly liminal social location in relation to the United States.

Motivated by a desire to interrogate and to deconstruct the U.S. cultural narratives that characterize the interests of social movement organizations, as well as efforts undertaken by those groups to affect their conditions, this project develops a theoretical lens that assumes intersections and interrelationships between groups and their efforts, and that prioritizes the spaces in between neatly defined categories. The organizations collecting and curating these personal stories of isolation and the desire to belong within the United States are rich resources

for such exploration, as they capture vernacular understandings of U.S. national belonging, and they reflect the logics that mark cultural strangers' bodies in deviant ways. Taken together, both the discourses of belonging and these logics for inclusion can suggest *some* of the elements that make up *some* U.S. identities, and how such privileged identities is bound up in the intersections of race, sexuality, and neoliberal citizenship.

The Organizations

To explore these discursive logics of U.S. national belonging, this research study examines two netroots organizations with similar social justice interests. In particular, both the Courage Campaign and the Center for Community Change deployed similar campaigns to address their social exclusion and to petition for the belonging for their respective membership. Using the internet, both organizations have utilized video testimonials/narratives as a primary mechanism for advancing their respective agendas. Although the internet, as a vehicle for communication, has many shortcomings, it serves as an influential tool for vernacular communities to use in the development and distribution of their messages. These discourses, as Warnick (2007) indicated, often involve elements of information sharing, aesthetics, and persuasive purpose, and, as such, they may serve as rich sites of rhetorical inquiry.

Representing the interests of variously marginalized groups, the Courage Campaign and the Center for Community Change have organized their efforts to provide a forum in which members of their respective communities can speak. Producing a hybrid discourse, as described by Warnick (2007) and as extended by Howard (2008), these narratives are especially productive sites of analysis, for a study that seeks to learn something about how cultural discourses are constructed and circulate within contemporary U.S. contexts. As Howard explained:

The complex and dynamic conception of the vernacular as a performed aspect of specific communication events helps make sense of the hybrid discourse that is common in participatory media. With coproduced online content, researchers have to consider the complex interdependence of the vernacular and institutional. (p. 497)

The hybridity of these texts opens the possibility for rich, multilayered critiques of U.S national belonging, although a critical rhetorical analysis of such discourses cannot be completed without first examining specific commitments and interests that guide both the Courage Campaign and the Center for Community Change.

The Courage Campaign houses a number of branches that fight for various social issues, such as marriage equality, affordable health insurance, and funding for the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). Based in California, the Courage Campaign's (2011) website described the organization as "an online organizing network that empowers more than 700,000 grassroots and netroots activists to push for progressive change and full equality in California and across the country" (para. 1). To promote full equality for the LGBT/Q community, this organization undertook a yearlong campaign, called *Testimony: Take a Stand*, in which individuals identifying as members or affiliates of the LGBT/Q community could upload to the organization's website a video testimonial of their LGBT/Q experiences to share with other members of the community, or with anyone perusing the website. These video testimonials were gathered into various communities that organize the narratives thematically (e.g., one community is committed to repealing the Defense of Marriage Act, and another is dedicated to petitioning for the right to marry), making it easier for people viewing the website to navigate its content. The purpose of these video testimonials is to increase the wider public's familiarity with LGBT/Q issues in hopes that this will result in greater social and legal inclusion of members of that community into

the nation. In particular, in an interview conducted with one of the Courage Campaign's media specialists, it was emphasized that the original intention of the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign was to serve as a repository of personal stories that could be called on by any LGBT/Q organization that thought its efforts might benefit from the added credibility a personal narrative could lend.

The Center for Community Change (2010) describes its mission as desiring to “build the power and capacity of low-income people, especially low income people of color to change their communities and public policies for the better” (para. 1). Furthermore, the Center for Community Change “strengthens, connects and mobilizes grassroots groups to enhance their leadership, voice and power” (para. 2). Although the organization's larger purview is people with low income and people of color, this organization, currently, is engaged in a similar effort as the Courage Campaign that involves organizing an online media effort, called *We Are America*. Similar to Testimony: Take a Stand, *We Are America* solicits members of the immigrant community to upload videos about their experiences in the United States to increase U.S. Americans' familiarity with, and empathy for, immigrants living in the United States.

Both organizations are committed to sharing the narratives of everyday people. Phone interviews I conducted with media campaign specialists for both organizations proved to be insightful for contextualizing these organizations and their campaigns, illuminating the intentions of each organization, the role and value of narrative, and the perceived effects of their efforts. In particular, both organizations prioritized the role of discourse as a way to affect belonging. Engaging these appeals, LGBT/Q and/or migrant individuals spoke from different subject locations about U.S. national belonging, resistively accommodating U.S. discourses of identity and inclusion, and, in so doing, worked to affect the very narratives that marginalized them.

Both the Center for Community Change and the Courage Campaign solicited and archived a rich collection of narratives that expose often-underrepresented populations' attitudes about U.S. citizenship and belonging. Taking into consideration one's material body, video participants' discourses of belonging and U.S. rhetorics of national identity and inclusion reveal how scholarship that theorizes national identity and its borderlands can be further developed with attention to the construction and circulation of discourses of belonging. In this current social and historical moment, the LGBT/Q community and the migrant rights community have raised their voices, and, consequently, have interjected themselves into U.S. discourses of belonging examined in this research study.

Investing the vernacular narratives of these populations with value, the Courage Campaign and the Center for Community Change bring these communities' voices into conversation with other U.S. national community members. Such discursive moments are places where rhetorical scholars might begin to examine the contributions that each group makes to understandings of belonging. Because I believe that cultural discourses give rise to material oppressions that so many communities experiences, I think it is essential that rhetorical scholarship that aims to better understand systems of power engage varying levels of discourse (that produced by elite, dominant members of a culture, as well as by those whose voices, largely, might be rendered inconsequential).

Grounding this Study

Fundamentally, I understand this project to be oriented toward social justice and I use my critical and rhetorical sensibilities to explore circumstances in which discourse circulates to empower some and to disenfranchise others. In particular, I argue that discourses of national belonging are especially salient in this historical moment and have profound effects on the

conditions in which people live, especially regarding what rights and resources individuals have, and to which communities they can belong. I further situate this study as an example of applied communication research and critical rhetorical analysis. The applied purpose of this study—the impacts that this work can have in the world and how my communication expertise can be employed to address real social conditions—lead me to develop a critical rhetorical analysis that has the potential to contribute to academic understandings of discourses of identity and inclusion, as well as to develop a critical sense of how power and privilege continue to circulate. As Frey (2000) explained about applied communication:

Applied communication scholarship might be defined as “the study of researchers putting their communication knowledge and skills into practice.” Hence, applied communication scholarship involves scholars bringing their communication resources to bear to make a difference in people’s lives. (p. 179)

In mapping the terrain of applied communication scholarship, Frey and SunWolf (2009) articulated distinctions within this subdiscipline to identify types of work that constitute such scholarship. A primary distinction is whether the applied communication scholarship is observational or intervention oriented. An *observational orientation* to applied communication research adopts a third-person perspective (Frey & Carragee, 2007) that does not intervene in, or affect, the phenomena being studied; instead, applied communication scholars who adopt this perspective observe and then propose recommendations for the communities that they are studying. In contrast, *intervention-oriented* research adopts a first-person perspective (Frey & Carragee, 2007), in which researchers intervene to affect problems confronting communities. Moreover, as Frey and SunWolf further explicated, “Significant differences exist not only between observational and intervention applied communication research but also between

intervention research that potentially maintains systems of domination and that which challenges oppression” (p. 41). Hence, applied communication scholarship that is directed toward social justice involves researchers intervening into discourses to demonstrate their “engagement with and advocacy for those . . . who are economically, socially, politically, and/or culturally underresourced” (Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, & Murphy, 1996, p. 110). This study, then, is applied in the sense that it engages with the everyday discourses in which people participate, to critically analyze how those discourses of belonging give rise to the (inequitable) material conditions that inscribe people’s lives.

Although marginalization and boundaries of citizenship have been addressed across disciplines and literatures (something that I focus on in the next chapter), this research seeks to add to that conversation in a different way, by unpacking what *national belonging* means and how it is comprised. More specifically, I argue that U.S. national identity and belonging are constructed in and through of a series of dialectical tensions that are neither completely resisted nor entirely accommodated within cultural strangers’ discourses of belonging. Paying careful attention to the video testimonials collected from the We Are America and Testimony: Take a Stand campaigns, I articulate a framework for understanding U.S. national identity and belonging as a constantly evolving discourse that constructs and manages tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability. Arguing that U.S. national belonging is constructed in discourse, I focus on cultural strangers’ efforts to weave their narrative of belonging into U.S. rhetorics of whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism.

Because the LGBT/Q and migrant populations are both marginalized from the United States as a result of exclusionary laws and social stigmas that mark their bodies as somehow different (see, e.g., Alexander, 1994; Anzaldúa, 1983; Cantú, 2009; Chávez, 2010b; Decena,

2008; De Genova, 2010; La Fountain-Stokes, 2005; Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005; Muñoz, 1999, 2006), working with *both* populations provides a more comprehensive understanding of discourses of national belonging than focusing on only one. Although I discuss each of these groups as separate entities, I stress that this is a product of ways in which each organization has identified itself, although I acknowledge that, undoubtedly, there are members from each community who might see themselves in a number of intersectional ways. With this caveat in mind, I have privileged a queer approach to these texts that problematizes the idea of neatly contained categories. As Manalanasan (2006) explained:

The queer perspective suggests that sexuality is not an all-encompassing reality but one that intersects with and through other social, economic, and cultural practices and identities. At the same time, a queer notion of sexuality enables migration research to go beyond normative and universalized family patterns. (p. 243)

Needing to work within these characterizations (as citizen, stranger, black, white, heterosexual, homosexual, or queer), I draw on a queer orientation, nevertheless, to remain critical of the totalizing work such groupings can do.

Broadly, queer theory is a way to conceptualize the space between categories, to challenge boundaries, and to deconstruct normative cultural assumptions. As a result, queer theory offers an essential framework on which the analytic contributions of this research study are grounded; specifically, that U.S. national belonging is constructed from and within a series of discursive interactions that materialize and manage dialectical tensions. Using a queer perspective to identify and unpack these dialectics, I expand this current scholarship on dialectics to privilege the necessity of ambiguity involved in working in-between categories and spaces. Chávez (2004) explained the benefits of a queer approach:

Because of queer theory's insistence of "queering" boundaries, binaries, and language use, it is easy to see how this tool can uncover meanings in language that were unlikely to be the speaker or writer's intention. Moreover, queer theory's partial emergence from post-structuralism makes it a useful tool to deconstruct the binaries that a rhetor takes for granted, and reconfigure those to be more representative of queer experience. (p. 270)

Much scholarship has taken an intersectional approach to the study of identity that is similar to the one that I advocate in this research. In particular, queer of color scholarship and queer migration research have articulated some necessary points of intersection between the LGBT/Q community and the migrant community. Luibhéid (2004) explained:

Heteronormative policies and practices—which subordinate immigrants not just on grounds of sexual orientation but also on grounds of gender, racial, class, and cultural identities that may result in "undesirable" sexual acts or outcomes (such as "too many" poor children)—are deployed by the state to select who may legally enter the United States and to incorporate immigrants into hegemonic nationalist identities and projects. (p. 227)

As Luibhéid's comment illustrated, one's subject location always already is an amalgam of features, including race, class, sexuality, gender, and geographic location, and, as has been demonstrated in centuries' worth of immigration law, whiteness and heteronormativity have become entrenched as primary features of U.S. discourses of citizenship and belonging. As Epps (2005) further detailed:

A massively unquestioned heterosexuality serves, that is, as the degree zero of the American dream and inflects, among so much else, immigration policy, which privileges

family reunification, marriage, and an entrenched reproductive ethos (children born in the United States are considered citizens; children who ‘merely’ arrive are not. (p. 214)

Resisting the notion that categories, dialectical poles, and/or opposing communication strategies, such as resistance and accommodation, can be clearly defined and firmly entrenched, I call on this approach to theorize the spaces between. In particular, I argue that discourses of national belonging both balance and construct a series of tensions in the United States that give rise to the hierarchies of inclusion that shape the cultural landscape: tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability. These three tensions, I argue, are constructed within discourses of belonging and their necessary engagement with U.S. investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism. Discursive moments in which these tensions are engaged are the focal point of this analysis and benefit from a queer lens that challenges the assumption of binary categories and relationships. Having identified these national tensions, I now briefly explain them before moving into a more detailed explanation of the other literature that informs this research.

National Dialectics of (In)visibility, (In)dependence, and (In)valuability

A national investment in neoliberalism contours the current tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability that make up contemporary discourses of U.S. identity and belonging. Extending from the policies enacted during the era of U.S. President Ronald Reagan and the United Kingdom’s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism can be understood as a political, economic, and social framework that prioritizes the market, privatization, and personal responsibility, oftentimes with unequal benefits (for the already socially advantaged) and consequences (for the already socially disadvantaged). In this way, neoliberal policies and practices are a primary logic that is used to marginalize people and to construct contemporary

understandings of identity. As Harvey (2005) explained about neoliberalism, although “personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being. This principle extends to the realms of welfare, education, health care, and even pensions” (p. 65). Reinforcing the U.S. cultural narrative that strength, perseverance, and commitment are all people need to be successful in the United States, neoliberalism has inched its way into many public policies and cultural attitudes. Taken for granted within this framework, however, are institutionalized inequalities (oftentimes reinforced by neoliberal practices) that make such social class mobility nothing more than a myth for millions of people living in the United States.

By creating and reinforcing a norm for U.S. citizenship that locates the ideal U.S. citizen as being white, reproductively and monogamously heterosexual, and as a valuable laboring body, neoliberalism works to protect white U.S. Americans and to scapegoat others, who, within this logic, are marked as part of the problem/threat. Neoliberalism powerfully grounds contemporary logics of national identity and influences the discourses that shape the three primary dialectical tensions that I outline in ways that tether whiteness to this coveted identity category. Using a critical queer lens, I focus on the resistive and accommodating ways that cultural strangers engage discourses of belonging to both manage and construct this national tension of (in)visibility.

In addition to the role that discourses engaging (in)visibility play in constructing contemporary attitudes of U.S. national identity and belonging, discourses addressing (in)dependence play an important role as well. Today, cultural strangers participating in the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America campaigns engage in this national tension of (in)dependence by deploying rhetorical strategies that, at once, suggest their docility to the

nation and their independence as appropriately self-governing neoliberal subjects. With the encouragement of neoliberalism, the role of personal responsibility, and the privatization of public services, the U.S. cultural capital of *independence* has grown stronger, even as it requires U.S. cultural insiders to remain *dependent* on the nation, such that the United States retains its sense of authority. Indeed, by crafting their discursive appeals for inclusion to build upon common cultural narratives of (traditional) family values and Christian religious faith, cultural strangers demonstrate their *dependence* on foundational U.S. institutions, as well as their *independence* to appropriately manage their bodies within the private sphere. Consequently, video participants highlight independence, dependence, and dependability in culturally meaningful ways that allow them to resistively accommodate the national discourses of belonging in which they are participating. Once again, focusing on the fluidity between categories is what guides this analysis; an analysis that draws out ways in which the spaces between inform how national discourses of belonging are dynamically constructed from the push and pull of dominant culture's expectations, one's cultural identifications, and how one's material body is framed by these discourses.

Within this dialectical framework, not only are cultural insiders and outsiders meant to balance visibility and invisibility, and dependence and independence, but their management of those tensions concurrently contributes to the dialectical tension of (in)valuability that protects/privileges only certain neoliberal subjects. Recognizing that whiteness and heterosexuality both operate as privileged, normative identity markers, it is easy to see how these categories have value, especially because membership within them grants people access to the benefits of U.S. citizenship. Extending from the claim that whiteness and heterosexuality have cultural value, it makes sense that protecting these categories becomes necessary. In particular,

the defense of these subject locations becomes a function of contemporary discourses of U.S. identity and belonging—a rhetorical move that reinforces the invaluability of whiteness and heterosexuality, and that identifies video participants’ value as protectors.

Similarities between and intersections within the appeals made by LGBT/Q and migrant communities for inclusion into the nation have the potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of U.S. national identity and belonging, and they can add insight to scholarly and popular conversations about citizenship and belonging in the post-9/11 world. This research advances the contributions made by scholars who have theorized this post-9/11 landscape (including critical whiteness studies, work on neoliberalism, queer of color scholarship, queer migration scholarship, and vernacular rhetorical research), by centering discourses of belonging as a primary component shaping ever-evolving understandings of inclusion and exclusion. To accomplish this critical analysis, I turn to voices of cultural strangers to illuminate discursive constructions that they employ to make sense of their subject locations and their relationship to the U.S. nation. In conducting that analysis, it is challenging to work within a vocabulary that I seek to challenge. I recognize, for instance, that the terms I adopted to identify migrants and LGBT/Q individuals as “cultural strangers,” and to characterize their discursive efforts as “resistive accommodation” carry with them unique connotations that leave their trace on each application. Nevertheless, I chose such terms to highlight particularities of video participants’ discourses on which I focus.

As this dissertation proceeds, in chapter 2, I first discuss communication scholarship that lays foundations from which this project extends, contouring prior discussions about marginalization, borderlands, and queer of color and queer migration scholarship that oriented my critical attention toward this project in important ways. Because this project argues for a

dialectical framework for understanding U.S. national identity and belonging, I next discuss the benefit of dialectics for this approach, as well as how critical rhetoric directs my methodological orientation. After outlining this project's frameworks in chapter 2, I move on to the analysis chapters 3 through 5 to examine and interpret specific instances of discourse from the video testimonials to illustrate how these cultural strangers participate in the dialectical tensions that comprise contemporary understandings of U.S. national identity. To do so, chapter 3 examines discourses of (in)visibility, chapter 4 focuses on discourses of (in)dependence, and chapter 5 explores discourses of (in)valuability. After theorizing how these video narratives participate in the construction, maintenance, and revision of these dialectical tensions, chapter 6 articulates the conclusions I begin to draw from this research project for academic and nonacademic communities.

Chapter 1 Notes

¹I use the acronym LGBT/Q to reflect the widest possible population that identifies as nonheterosexual. As this essay proceeds, there will be occasion to isolate the term queer (Q) from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community; such a split reflects an awareness of the different politics and investments of each group.

²Those years marked a period where initial headway was made for gay rights and gay political representation, as was evidenced in the Stonewall Riots of 1969 (resulting from continuous police raids of known gay bars in New York City, and which, largely, are credited with starting the gay rights movement), and the election of openly gay officials to office, such as Mayor Harvey Milk in San Francisco.

³Even though many social movement groups appear to work independently of other causes, Out4Immigration, and Gay Immigration Equality Rights (IMEQ) social movement groups that blend [?Like this?] immigration rights and LGBT/Q rights, in particular. Although not the focus of this dissertation, each of these groups appears to take advantage of the internet in beneficial ways that allow it to organize its membership and to advance its causes to broader audiences.

⁴Such groups include I'm from Driftwood, It Gets Better Campaign, Stories from the Frontlines, Welcoming Stories, Shelbyville Multimedia SEIU Faces of Immigration Reform, Restore Fairness, and now, Courage Campaign's, Testimony: Take a Stand, and the Center for Community Change's, We Are America Campaign.

CHAPTER 2

A CRITICAL APPROACH TO DISCOURSES OF U.S. NATIONAL BELONGING: THEORIZING MARGINALIZATION, DIALECTICAL TENSIONS, AND CRITICAL RHETORIC

Exploring video participants' discourses of belonging in relation to previous scholarship on whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism reveals that careful attention to narrative both informs and maintains contemporary understandings of U.S. national belonging. I trace the trajectories of some of this scholarship in the pages that follow, revealing the pivotal ways that U.S. national borders have been erected and enforced in relation to characteristics such as race, sexuality, religious affiliation, and social class. Previous scholarship that has exposed the contours of U.S. national identity and belonging, although importantly detailing how logics of race, sexuality, and capitalism have long influenced the moral and material borders of the nation, could be productively extended with attention to the discourses of belonging. Indeed, doing so moves the scholarly conversation about belonging away from the orientation of borders and borderlands and (back) towards a dialectical framework for understanding individuals' relationship to the U.S. nation that emphasizes the balancing act in which those desiring belonging must engage.

A queer approach to dialectical tensions has the potential to contribute to the current scholarship on national belonging by revealing the nation's ideological investments in good citizenship (Batsone & Mendieta, 1999), as well as demonstrating cultural strangers' simultaneous resistance to, and accommodation of, cultural norms as a way to access belonging.¹

Cultural strangers' video testimonials, as examples of discourses of belonging, participate in the nation's narratives of inclusion and exclusion that are premised upon competing tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability. I prioritize the role of these discourses to expose the sophisticated manner in which culturally dominant social constructs such as whiteness and heterosexuality are discursively constituted, and gain material traction in the execution of national laws, border control, and the granting of certain rights (such as marriage).

In the pages that follow I outline a theoretical orientation that argues for U.S. national identity to be conceived as a set of dialectical tensions that plays out discursively, and that have material implications for how people live their lives. As the analysis chapters 3 through 5 of this dissertation argue, those desiring inclusion engage in constantly evolving discourses of belonging that resistively accommodate the nation's investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism, and that reveal the national tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability I outline below.

Informed by queer scholarship, I ground my understanding of marginalization and belonging within a framework of dialectical tensions that emphasizes the fluidity and flux of identity (and belonging). Orienting my approach to identity and belonging in this way, I begin with the assumption that national belonging is a contested concept in which anyone desiring inclusion has a stake. I privilege the fluidity of belonging to contradict the binary characterizations of individuals and relationships that commonly circulate in the United States—for example, logics that rely on naming insiders and outsiders, citizens and foreigners, straight people and gay people. In this way, the queer orientation to previously theorized dialectical tensions that I adopt, calls these labels into question, and by extension, challenges the normative logics that create these identity categories.

This dissertation advances a theoretical orientation that emphasizes the role individuals' discourses of belonging play in resistively accommodating the nation's investments in whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism. I draw primarily from critical-cultural studies literature, applied communication scholarship (specifically that oriented toward social justice) as well as critical rhetorical studies, to inform the current theoretical commitments of this dissertation. I first discuss broad ways that communication scholars have theorized marginalization, focusing on contexts to which they have attended, markers of difference that they have identified, and how they have described communication strategies that are used by these groups to manage their marginalization, in particular, I attend to how race, sexuality, religion and social class/value have been theorized. These studies then lay the foundation for my theoretical argument, which I next discuss, that discourses of belonging are ways that cultural strangers resistively accommodate the nation's investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism, and that reveal the influential dialectical tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability that contour the nation. I conclude the chapter by explaining the methodological orientation and choices that inform this project.

Foundations: Theorizing the Center and the Margins

How we talk about things and the narratives that we call upon to make sense of our circumstances have profound effects on the ways that people live their lives—this is especially significant when those narratives work in the service of empowering some individuals and marginalizing others. Some scholars have theorized marginalized groups based on the differences they identify with and/or embody, and ways in which these differences locate them within liminal social, economic, and political spaces (see, e.g., Alexander, 1994; Anaya, 2007; Berlant, 2003; Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2001; Carter, 2009; Duggan, 2002; Flores & Moon,

2002; Flores, Moon, & Nakayama, 2006; Hasain & Delgado, 1998; Luibhéid, 2002; Muñoz, 2006; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Peña, 2005,2008; Phelan, 1993; Sloop, 2004). Research with specific attention to race, sexuality, gender, social class and/or geographic location, among other things, has considered how these identity markers have been communicatively constituted, for whom this is advantageous and detrimental, as well as how individuals occupying these social locations have crafted their rhetorical efforts to manage the inequitable social realities of which they are a part.

Considerations of belonging and marginalization inspire a variety of different questions aimed at exploring the contexts in which marginalization occurs, the scope of such marginalizations, as well as the nature of belonging, and for which privileged few it provides access. Inherent within each of these scholarly trajectories is the insight that marginalized individuals must communicate purposefully to express themselves effectively, and that such efforts are complicated by the field of power within which these people find themselves. Exploring some of the previous scholarship that has attempted to explain and understand marginalization and belonging suggests the significance of these questions to communication research.

At the local level, much scholarship has explored the communication between people to understand how and why certain groups, such as migrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/queer (LGBT/Q) individuals, nonwhite people, and individuals of lower socioeconomic status (and any combination of those characteristics), have been marginalized or shunned and simultaneously what groups such efforts protect. The communication practices that occur at this local level are important in an analysis about national identity and belonging because they reflect the national commitments to whiteness, heteronormativity, and

neoliberalism. In other words, these mundane interactions knit together the fabric of U.S. national identity and belonging, providing the glue that makes these ideologies stick within contemporary social consciousness. The interactions one has at the local grocery store, the gas station, or the playground are part of a much larger national narrative of identity and belonging that is understood and constituted within these daily social interactions.

Because people's everyday interactions are structured by narratives that give meaning to one's identity and their subsequent inclusion and exclusion from various groups, communication scholars have attended to a number of environments that structure individuals' daily lives, including the places we live, work, and socialize (see, e.g., Adelman & Frey, 1994, 1997; Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Lipsitz, 2006). Adelman and Frey (1994, 1997) explore the community formed by socially outcasted AIDS patients whose final weeks were spent in the care of strangers rather than close family members due to the stigma of their disease, and they theorize how new communities of belonging can be structured along the margins of dominant culture. Other studies explore how one's race might lead to marginalization in the workplace or from various neighborhoods. Highlighting trenchant social attitudes about difference that circulate locally (in the everyday spaces that we occupy and/or move through), Ashcraft and Allen's (2003) essay, as well as Lipsitz's (2006) book, highlight how our daily interactions reinforce national discourses that devalue nonnormative bodies and keep them from belonging within the nation. Taking a close look at the discursive interactions that structure these environments, a daily practice of marginalization becomes apparent that marks difference (and in many instances, exclusion) based on a myriad of identity characteristics such as race, gender, social class and sexuality.

Although belonging is different from one community to the next, the practices of communication that serve to include some individuals and exclude others is similar and can be expanded for consideration at the national level as well. The ways race, gender, sexuality, social class, and geographic location influence the structure of local groups and communities has been developed to explore how these identity markers are used to exclude negatively coded individuals at a national level as well. Using these studies about national exclusions, once again, indirectly informs a scholarly understanding of belonging insofar as marking what is “out of bounds” implies what is within bounds.

Theorizing belonging is a complex task that attempts to define and to explain something that always already is fluid: the longing and/or desire to be (a part of) something. Probyn (1996) noted inherent challenges of studying belonging, stating, “In the face of the fixity of categorical logics of identity, I seek to instill some of the movement that the wish to belong carries. To consider more closely the movement of and between categories” (p. 9). Compelled by similar interests, communication scholars have further developed Probyn’s discussions of belonging to theorize how communication works to negotiate inherent tensions that arise between one’s identity and groups to which they belong, long to belong, or reject. Advancing a theory of *differential belonging*, Carrillo Rowe (2005) articulated that differential belonging works “to call attention to the ways in which we are already constituted in and through often overlooked modes of belonging, and also to suggest a resistive command” (p. 32). Prioritizing the resistive role of communication, Carrillo Rowe advanced an orientation toward belonging that allows scholars to work within the push and pull of identity politics and group identification, and one that demonstrates the need to theorize belonging in greater detail.

On a regular basis, people must make decisions about how to present themselves to gain acceptance into certain groups, or conversely, to mark themselves in opposition to others. Both cultural strangers' efforts to access inclusion, as well as dominant society's attempt to discipline them contribute to national discourses of belonging that helps to structure and maintain the conditions of inclusion and marginalization that contour U.S. national inclusion. Accessing a group or a community is not an indication of belonging, and there are a variety of communication practices that have been studied and identified as tools for disciplining these unwanted intrusions or trespasses. Some communication scholarship has analyzed how cultural strangers' trespasses into particularly privileged identity categories has been met with violent physical disciplining. (see, e.g., Carrillo Rowe, 2004; Chávez, 2010b; Muñoz, 1999; Moreman and McIntosh, 2010; Puar, 2007; Sloop, 2004). Other scholars have focused on how individuals use discursive discipline to manage the boundaries of belonging (see, e.g., Anderson, 2009; Foucault, 1995; Sloop, 2004). Physical and discursive modes of discipline communicate conditions of belonging that are reflective of (national) commitments and investments. In many ways then, belonging has been theorized through studies of marginalization that attempt to understand which social locations are more or less privileged, and how communication works in the service of circulating dominant and/or normative social and cultural attitudes.

How people talk about things has material impacts on the conditions in which individuals live their lives; therefore, one's ability to communicate within society can directly impact the experiences and opportunities that are available for them. Marginalized individuals, in part, are excluded due to their isolation from dominant communicative practices and spaces. Cultural strangers' discourses of belonging (such as those captured in the video testimonials collected for analysis) represent liminal cultural groups' efforts to speak from the margins and must be

understood in the context of previous scholarship that has theorized the challenges and opportunities that speaking from such a social locations presents.

Muted group theory highlights the difficulty (if not impossibility) for individuals who have been marginalized to communicatively mark themselves and their interests in any culturally or politically significant way (see, e.g., Ballard-Reisch, 2010; Herakova, 2009; Kramarae, 1981, 2005). In some cases, the marginalization that individuals experience renders their communication muted—spoken, but never heard. Attending specifically to how colonization and globalization have contributed to the mechanisms of power that isolate these populations (see, e.g., Bosch, 2007; Spivak, 1988; Varman & Vikas, 2007), scholarship on subaltern peoples highlights the global political, economic, and social forces that work to isolate certain groups such as migrants and/or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBT/Q) community members. As a number of these studies have shown, the various ways people are situated in society cannot be understood without considering the influences of globalization, and legacies of power and oppression that have influenced current conditions of inclusion and exclusion (see, e.g., Das Gupta, 2006; Ferguson, 2004; Ong, 2006; Puar, 2007). Additionally, communication scholars, and others, have drawn from feminist traditions that conceptualize the unique and influential social position of *outsiders within*. These theorists have suggested that outsiders who find their way into dominant social, economic, or political institutions may have special types of influence that can work to advantage other marginalized community members (see, e.g., Anderson, 2009; Griffin, 2012; Lorde, 1984; Mitra, 2011).

Video participants' testimonials represent the efforts of marginalized groups to speak from the periphery about the conditions that have excluded them and must be understood in relation to the breadth of scholarship that addresses the communication challenges experienced

by other excluded populations. Even though video participants' narratives circulate widely—relying on the internet to disseminate their message—these cultural strangers nevertheless formulate discourse of belonging that necessarily contend with the social, political and historical practices that scholars have indicated silence/exclude them.

The United States has participated in a long history of national exclusion that has been traced across disciplines as diverse as communication studies, sociology, history, gay and lesbian studies, and ethnic studies. Although much of this scholarship takes border control and stigmatization as its focus, many of these studies shape contemporary understandings of belonging by exposing the identities and/or bodies who are marked for exclusion from the nation. In pivotal ways, these projects ground the assumptions of this project; specifically, that the United States has a history of excluding individuals who are coded as nonwhite (see, e.g., Jacobson, 1998; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Flores, 2003; Roediger, 2005, 2007;) and/or nonheterosexual (see, e.g., Bell & Binnie, 2000; Canaday, 2009; Phelan, 2001), often using the same logics and/or policies to do so (see, e.g., Cantú, 2009; Chávez, 2010a; Epps, Valens, & González, 2005; La Fountain-Stokes, 2005; Luibhéid, 2002, 2008; Peña, 2005, 2007; Puar, 2007; Roque Ramirez, 2005; Sommerville, 2005).

Contemporary scholarship abounds with research that traces the United States' national exclusionary practices. Two particularly rich areas of inquiry exist at the U.S. border, where many theorists have explored the United States' discriminatory immigration policies, as well as other exclusionary laws and practices that contributed to a U.S. discourse of national identity that is predicated on racist, homophobic, and classist logics. On the border, protecting the nation's whiteness is a priority and is exacted by migration quotas, health criteria, labor skills and language tests (see, e.g., Barrett & Roediger, 1997, 2005; Canaday, 2009; Jacobson, 1998; Peña,

2005, 2007; Roque Ramirez, 2005; Sommerville, 2005). Fearing race suicide, or bringing upon the demise of the white race (Roediger, 2005), U.S. immigration laws attempting to protect the (white) American population, quelled immigration from southern and eastern Europe through measures such as the Johnson Reed Immigration Act and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, that limited, among other things, immigration by individuals who were identified as homosexuals or adulterers (Sommerville, 2005). Such scholarship details the historical legacy of exclusion in the United States and calls into question the U.S. narrative of hospitality toward immigrants (McKinnon, 2010). Indeed, many of these national policies were enacted to protect the nation's investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006), and, concurrently, they imply that whiteness is a condition of belonging within the United States.

In a contemporary context influenced by the events of 9/11, the United States continues to practice similar exclusions based on race, sexuality, and social class at the national border that it has done for centuries. Whereby previously mentioned scholars have traced a historical chronology of national exclusions (and by extension, national belonging), much contemporary research has invested in studying the new ways these similar logics are manifesting. Public debates about citizenship and national identity are riddled with challenges to the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act (hereafter, DOMA), immigration legislation and border control practices. Tapping into these public discourses are scholars interested in unpacking the meaning for, and the significance of these debates as it pertains to the United States (see, e.g., Cantú, 2009; Chávez, 2010a; Das Gupta, 2006; Edwards & Herder, 2012; Fox, 2011; Gring-Pemble, 2012; Luibhéid, 2002; Puar, 2007; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Rich, Schutten, & Rogers, 2012; Schiappa, 2012).

National efforts to demarcate U.S. citizenship and national belonging as a special category that prioritizes whiteness and heteronormativity are further perpetuated by state-wide initiatives, as well as in everyday discourse. Whether focusing on particular racially charged efforts to exclude migrants including California's Proposition 187 (Ono & Sloop, 2002), or Los Angeles's deportation drive in 1931 (Flores, 2003), these studies demonstrate the pervasive ways that national discourses of belonging and marginalization extend beyond the literal and figurative spaces of the U.S. (southern) borderlands. Scholars have further outlined the prevalent national discourses that contour belonging and marginalization by tracing mediated communication about current issues, including sitcoms, news stories, political discourse, zoning laws and discussions among peers (see, e.g., Bailey, 2001; Calafell & Delgado, 2004; Cisneros, 2008; 2011; Chávez, 2010b; Flores, 2003; Lipsitz, 2006; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Puar, 2007; Santa Ana, 2002; Sloop, 2004). These national narratives of U.S. identity and belonging circulate broadly, influencing local attitudes and shaping vernacular rhetorics about difference.

Dominant cultural group members come to understand migrant and LGBT/Q community members by the vernacular and civic narratives that circulate about them, sometimes leading to a perceived justification for violence and discipline. In particular, immigrants and nonheterosexual individuals are situated within lifelong networks of surveillance and are subject to disciplinary regulation (Luibhéid, 2002). Entering into a discursive context that abounds with regulatory narratives, cultural strangers who might be marked as members of deviant groups, or as threats to the nation's core values, must craft compelling and thoughtful appeals for inclusion that attempt to separate rights from citizenship. Das Gupta explained (2006), "As soon as efforts are made to free rights from confining notions of citizenship, a resurgence of patriotism and

nationalism resanctifies the citizen” (p. 26). In some instances, this resurgence of patriotism fuels the discipline that migrant and LGBT/Q individuals’ experience.

Some scholars who have theorized those who have been socially excluded, conceptualize their unique relationship to dominant culture and the ways such marginalization might be managed. Rosaldo’s theory of cultural citizenship has been one framework productively invoked and extended to make sense of the structural inequalities that affect certain groups. Roque-Ramirez (2005) explained that within the theory of cultural citizenship, “domination and marginalization structure society, making some subjects ‘less equal’ than others. But also in this field, those deemed lesser subjects aspire to eliminate such hierarchies to redefine the meaning of citizenship for everyone” (p. 162). A theory of cultural citizenship offers a way to consider everyday efforts for seeking inclusion and affirms the notion that these groups, eventually, can access legal equality, but in the meantime, they can perform citizenship even without its status (see, e.g., Anguiano & Chávez, 2011; Benmayor, 2002; Berlant, 2002; Chávez, 2010a; Miller, 2007; Rosaldo, 1998).

Although cultural citizenship provides a way to understand how marginalized communities might craft their communication within dominant and/or normative culture, it does not account for the way these people are coded within society. Some scholars have theorized these individuals as strangers for the unique threats that they pose by being able to pass within normative society (see, e.g., Bauman, 1988; Chávez, 2010a; Marciniak, 2006; Phelan, 2001). Das Gupta (2006) explained the causes of this marginalization as reflecting international interest in globalization: “As the needs of capital make borders of labor-hungry states more and more permeable, the same states redouble their efforts to socially and legally seal the pores” (p. 26). Contending with these contradictions, marginalized people (such as many of those who

participated in the video testimonial campaigns I analyze) who can pass within normative society occupy a unique social location in the United States, and as a result formulate their discourses of belonging in specific ways—as acts of resistive accommodation. Working from the assumption that cultural strangers’ discourses of belonging both subvert and assimilate normative U.S. cultural logics of citizenship and belonging, reveals that what underlies these commitments is a national investment in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism.

Among the most powerful influences shaping the conditions of (national) belonging is one’s affiliation with whiteness. Extending understandings of whiteness beyond the limited categorizations of phenotypical race, I adopt whiteness as a social analytic (Garner, 2007). I see whiteness “as a complex matrix through which social and cultural practices—legal, historic, embodied, and mundane—converge” (Flores & Villarreal, 2012, p. 88). Functioning alongside and within the protected spaces of whiteness, heteronormativity also conditions people’s bodies and discourses into appropriate performances of national belonging. Protecting the normative positions of whiteness and heteronormativity that hide in plain sight and within everyday discourse, I use the frameworks of whiteness studies and queer migration literature to unpack contemporary theories of belonging and exclusion, tracing their implications for vernacular communities who are seeking inclusion.

Much of the current scholarship invested in studies of national marginalization and exclusion derive from critical whiteness studies and explores how whiteness, as a social analytic and as an identity category, influence these practices (see, e.g., Carrillo Rowe, 2008; Shome, 2000). Sommerville (2005) has argued, “The language of race has long been one of the primary mechanisms for determining the eligibility of migrants to enter the United States” (p. 76), and as queer migration scholars explained, has been a marker that has similarly excluded

nonheterosexual individuals from full inclusion (see, e.g., Cantú, 2009; Chávez, 2010a; Epps et al., 2005; La Fountain-Stokes, 2005; Luibhéid, 2002, 2008; Peña, 2005, 2007; Puar, 2007; Roque Ramirez, 2005; Sommerville, 2005).

Using whiteness as a social analytic and/or as a conceptual category, I assume that it can reference and exceed discrete ethnic categories or markers to include sexuality, intimate relationships and/or religious affiliations (see, e.g., Arnold, 2002; Carter, 2007; Dyer, 1997; Puar, 2001; Vassenden & Anderssen, 2011). Luibhéid (2002) explained, “Since sexual behavior was a crucial nexus through which the racial and ethnic order could become altered, immigration was regulated accordingly” (p. xiii). Whiteness then, as an indicator of inclusion into the United States, marks one’s phenotypical body, as well as one’s ideological coherence to other national values in ways that permit belonging, or that foreclose it. Critical scholars have explored the nation’s investment in whiteness (and subsequently heteronormativity) rendering these commitments transparent within national debates about immigration and gay rights in ways that are significant to these video testimonials—specifically, successful discourses of U.S. national belonging must productively engage the nation’s investment in whiteness, therefore, they would likely be a part of the video testimonials collected for analysis.

The critical orientations of both whiteness studies and queer migration scholarship partner nicely in this analysis, as both approaches encourage the continuous critique of dominant and/or normativity social/cultural influences. Taking U.S. immigration laws and social practices that marginalize cultural strangers, queer migration scholars argue for a necessarily intersectional approach to the study of exclusion to both complicate and nuance our understanding of how systems of power (such as whiteness), function. Much queer migration scholarship complicates our understanding about U.S. national belonging by calling upon citizenship studies that already

question the quality of legal and official belonging in the nation (see, e.g., Das Gupta, 2006; Roque-Ramirez, 2005) and by pushing further to find out how those legal and official categories work to marginalize individuals based on intersecting axes of power. Randazzo (2005) articulated:

The experience of being lesbian, gay, or transgender, and an immigrant is not just a matter of membership in both groups. On the contrary, the intersection of these identities—not to mention their imbrication with class, gender, race, and ethnicity—can result in profound isolation and marginalization from supports and resources. (p. 38)

Attentive to the intersectional quality of identity, and the complicated ways that dominant and/or normative social influences work on individuals, whiteness studies and queer migration scholarship insist upon a multifaceted approach for the study of discourses of belonging—an approach additionally nuanced by research on (racial) neoliberalism and its impact.

Neoliberalism operates as a kind of “non-politics—a way of being reasonable, and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government around the globe” (Duggan, 2003, p. 10). Such logics have contributed to increasingly disproportionate distributions of wealth, as well as social and legal policies to discipline nonconforming individuals—each working alongside and within the nationally significant frameworks of whiteness and heteronormativity. Taking the form of legislation that promotes a neutral regulatory framework, neoliberalism advances white, Western, social, political, and financial interests (to the detriment of many, including the cultural insiders whose discourses of belonging form the basis of this dissertation). As Richardson (2004) explained, “Central to neoliberal modes of governance is normalization, the means by which norms of behavior are identified,

encouraged, and (re)produced within populations” (p. 393)—norms that are informed by whiteness and heteronormativity.

As I will discuss in the chapters below, scholarship on whiteness, queer migration studies and neoliberalism provide the basis for my analysis, and I extend these with specific attention to vernacular discourses of belonging that resistively accommodate these national investments. I argue that discourses of belonging are a specific type of communication that presents a unique perspective on inclusion and exclusion and that examining these texts in greater detail has the potential to extend current research on marginalization and belonging.

Discourses of Belonging

The legacy of exclusion that many nonwhite, nonheteronormative, non-Christian, working-class individuals have experienced when trying to access the United States has required cultural strangers to craft innovative discourses of belonging in order to be recognized. Broadly conceived, discourses of belonging are rhetorical efforts that individuals engage in to affect the degree of ideological and material inclusion they experience within a given culture. These rhetorical acts are persuasive efforts for inclusion, and might be seen as comprised of both resistive and accommodationist intentions. Although resistance and accommodation often are understood as binary terms, I adopt the expression “resistive accommodation” to describe cultural strangers’ communicative practices, to highlight the tension between these two terms and ways in which each term may influence video participants’ communicative practices. In particular, I chose this expression to specifically highlight the contradiction inherent in this dialectic and to emphasize the dynamism that is required to manage it.

A great deal of the scholarship that addresses marginalization and belonging attempts to theorize the communication practices of marginalized populations unnecessarily reinforces an

understanding of this discourse as *either* resistive *or* accommodationist. As the video testimonials taken for analysis demonstrate, marginalized community members' efforts to gain access into the United States are potentially both an act of resistance (an intentional act to fundamentally alter the composition of coveted identity categories, such as U.S. national identity) and accommodation (relying on existing logics of citizenship and inclusion to access belonging). Some studies explore communication accommodation (e.g., Dorjee, Giles, & Barker, 2011; Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, & Coupland, 1988; Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota, 1995; Giles, 2008; Giles, Linz, Bonilla, & Gomez, 2012; Imamura, Zhang, & Harwood, 2011), and cultural assimilation (e.g., Avila-Saavedra, 2011; Prentice, 2008; Rawswitsch, 2011; Ray, 2002; Rodriguez & Clair, 1999), highlighting the ways marginal culture groups might adopt dominant cultural communication practices to belong. Other studies critique such efforts, characterizing them as processes of erasure (Ono & Sloop, 1995) and/or examine the resistive (anti-assimilationist) intentions embedded within these efforts (see, e.g., Amaya, 2007; Butler, 1990; Griffen, 2012; Humphries & McNicholas, 2009; Muñoz, 1999). Although marginalized group members' discourse can be seen as either resistive or accommodationist, it is more productive to understand their efforts as a combination of the two, especially, for doing so is likely more reflective of the impact such discursive efforts have on dominant and/or normative conditions of belonging. In other words, it is my intention to explore how cultural strangers craft discourses of belonging that draw from *both* resistance *and* accommodation as a way to be recognized, as it is within their management of these tensions that constructions of U.S. national identity and belonging become clear.

Discourses of belonging, although accommodationist in their effort to access an established group without directly challenging the logics that condition its inclusions or

exclusions, simultaneously reflect resistive possibilities as well—especially in respect to the ways such discourses might fundamentally change the demographic composition of exclusive categories of belonging. In some cases, it certainly may be that marginalized populations would be willing to assimilate into a dominant culture to find access, or to vehemently resist dominant cultural adaptation and hold firm to their cultural beliefs; however, there are additional ways that cultural strangers' efforts to belong might be understood—as more dynamic and more nuanced than a binary understanding of resistance and accommodation might suggest. As I argue in the analysis chapters below, adopting a more fluid understanding of the cultural strangers' video testimonials reveals the simultaneous ways in which their persuasive appeals both resist and accommodate dominant U.S. cultural expectations and highlight the fluidity and dynamism necessary for one to be able to claim U.S. national identity and belonging.

Exploring discourses of belonging as a specific type of text allows me to focus on the dynamic nature of power relationships, exposing the fluid national commitments that circulate to condition national inclusion. Das Gupta (2006), attempting to capture the fluidity of belonging as it related to migrant rights groups explained:

The struggles for immigrant rights, then, are best understood as constant, versatile encounters with these co-constituted contradictions rather than their resolution. Alive to the ever-shifting terrain of power relations, even when those relations seem oppressively settled, the organizations anticipate, straddle and work within the contradictions, knowing that efforts to stifle their struggles will introduce new issues and therefore new sites of contestation. (p 26)

One of the primary ways power is able to maintain itself is through retaining its invisibility. In other words, people who benefit from white privilege will likely not reveal the advantages

whiteness affords them, for doing so may lead to their privilege and authority being questioned as unearned (see, e.g., Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; McIntosh, 1998). Heteronormativity benefits from similar invisibility, and as such, explorations of dominant and/or normative discourses are limited by the urge to protect its interests. On the other hand, critical focus directed toward vernacular discourses of belonging has the potential to expose the essentialisms and stereotypes that structure current conditions of national inclusion (Ono & Sloop, 1995).

I adopt a critical, queer orientation to focus on the fluidity of (national) belonging and the ways that, “the boundaries about who belongs and why are continually being redrawn” (Garner, 2007, p. 177). Cultural strangers, engaging in discourses of belonging, participate in the construction and maintenance of these boundaries, carefully balancing the nationally significant tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability in their attempts to resistively accommodate the nation’s investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism. Before exploring these tensions in greater detail I will first discuss the queer orientation I have outlined informs my understanding of previous scholarship on dialectical tensions.

Dialectical Tensions

Adopting a queer orientation to explore video participants’ testimonials reveals that U.S. national belonging is dynamic, fluid, and reflective of normative cultural investments that should be challenged. Queer theory, interested in destabilizing categories, is extended in this dissertation to trouble the privileged position of U.S. national belonging and the seemingly fixed positions of visibility and invisibility, dependence and independence, and value, and invaluability. Using this approach, I recognize identity (and belonging) as fluid; and binaries, such as those discussed above, as part of regulatory regimes (see, e.g., Butler, 1991), that protect the United States’ investment in whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism.

The queer orientation upon which I draw derives specifically from previous queer of color and queer migration scholarship. Ferguson (2004) explained a queer of color critique as interrogating “social formations as intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class, with particular interest to how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices” (p. 149). Similarly, Luibhéid (2008) articulated the interests of queer migration studies in the following way:

Most scholarship, policymaking, service provision, activism, and cultural work remain organized around the premise that migrants are heterosexuals (or on their way to becoming so) and queers are citizens (even though second-class ones). Where do queer migrants figure in these frameworks and activities? How do we conceptualize queer migration—which is at once a set of grounded processes involving heterogeneous social groups and a series of theoretical and social justice questions that implicate but extend beyond migration and sexuality strictly defined, and that refuse to attach to bodies in any strictly identitarian manner — in order to challenge and reconfigure the dominant frameworks? Queer migration scholarship, which has flourished since the 1990s, takes on these and other ambitious questions. (p. 169)

Both approaches maintain an investment in exploring the complicated nexus of normative social expectations and how they lead to the marginalization and exclusion of certain people. Attentive to the multilayered and dynamic critique both approaches afford, I turn toward dialectics as a way to understand how the fluid rhetorical negotiation of nationally significant tensions takes place and to analyze the systems of power and privilege that give rise to these binary orientations.

Recognizing that dialectical tensions always are at play within interactions and social relationships, communication scholars have explored important implications of dialectics within

interpersonal contexts, group settings, and intercultural communication exchanges. Extending some of the previous work on dialectics, I bring a queer approach to its study as a way to explore the fluid nature of cultural exchanges and to challenge the normative influences that give rise to the national tensions I have outlined: (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability.

Prentice and Kramer (2006) explained the foundational ways that a dialectical approach works, noting:

In the dialectical tensions perspective promulgated by Baxter and Montgomery (1996), the concept of opposing forces recognizes that people in relationships are pulled by many different forces that can never be resolved. Neither pole in the dialectical tension is more desirable than another; both are equally important. (p. 341)

Stressing the necessarily fluidity and movement between poles, a dialectical approach suggests that the (discursive) performance that people engage in to balance these tensions deserves attention. Approaching this from a queer perspective, I would additionally argue that the dialectical poles themselves need to be interrogated to explore the normative institutions and or interest that they might represent, and that they are not as mutually exclusive as scholars might presume.

This dialectical framework has been used to extend scholars' understanding of the communication that takes places between two people, in groups, or within intercultural exchanges and how it has worked in the service of balancing competing expectations. Interpersonal communication scholars, for instance, applying a framework of dialectical tensions to study interpersonal relationships, have identified basic contradictions in the development of interpersonal relations (see, e.g., Baxter, 1988, 1990, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Cissna, Cox, & Bochner, 1990; Goldsmith, 1990; Montgomery, 1992, 1993; Montgomery & Baxter,

1998; Petronio, 2002; Rawlins, 1983, 1992). Expanding these interpersonal studies, group communication scholars have suggested that similar tensions to those experienced in dyadic relationships also might be identified in group settings (Adelman & Frey, 1997; Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005; Frey & Barge, 1997; Benoit, Kramer, Dixon & Benoit, 2003; Goins, 2011; Kramer, 2004; Prentice & Kramer, 2006), opening up the possibility for dialectical tensions to theorize cultural relationships as well (see, e.g., Cheong & Gray, 2011; Cools, 2006; Kawai, 2005; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Martin, Nakayama, & Flores, 1998; Semlak, Pearson, Amundson, & Kudak, 2008; Toyosaki, 2011).

Intercultural communication scholars have turned to dialectics to explain the complex communicative practices that emerge in situations of cultural differences. As Martin and Nakayama (1999) pointed out, although intercultural communication scholarship does not seek a simple extension of the interpersonal research on dialectics, it has identified six similar dialectics that seem to operate interdependently in (inter)cultural interaction: cultural–individual, personal/social–contextual, differences–similarities, static–dynamic, present–future/history–past, and privilege–disadvantage. Martin and Nakayama further explained that “these dialectics are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive but represent an ongoing exploration of new ways to think about face-to-face intercultural communication and research” (p. 15). Video participants’ online testimonials, although not instances of face-to-face communication, nevertheless represent an effort to engage with dominant culture, constituting a form of intercultural communication. Cultural strangers’ discourses of belonging move among and between competing tensions suggested by dialectics, opening up space to theorize the constantly evolving construction of belonging and to interrogate the normative influences that give rise to them.

Although much of this work on dialectical tensions is grounded in traditions of communication scholarship that deviate from the primary critical cultural foundations upon which I draw, I believe that queering this scholarship on dialectics opens a productive avenue for thinking about power. Queering the interpersonal, group, and intercultural applications of dialectics then, extends this theory's inclination toward exploring the dynamic balancing act between binaries to additionally account for the normalizing influences that shape these tensions. Furthermore, this queer orientation, although challenging the existence of categories such as visibility and invisibility; dependence and independence; and value and invaluability does not seek to eliminate these categories but suspends and challenges them in order to question how they have come to be, and whose interests they serve.

This (queer) understanding of dialectics considers how the privileged identity category of U.S. citizenship and national belonging is comprised, and examines how cultural strangers' resist and accommodate the national expectations reflected within the dialects of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability that I outline. Although communication scholars have suggested that the negotiation of dialectical tensions are a part of many individuals' communication efforts to manage their relationship to/within dominant culture, I queer this and trouble the communication that takes place, and the tensions themselves, to reveal how cultural strangers' discourses of belonging that balance these dialects, also participate in constituting the privileged status of U.S. national belonging.

As I have indicated, my analysis of cultural strangers' video testimonials from the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America Websites reveals three primary tensions shaping U.S. national identity and belonging that include the tensions between visibility and invisibility [(in)visibility], dependence and independence [(in)dependence], and between value and

invaluability [(in)valuability]. After a close textual analysis of the narratives collected, these three dialectical tensions appear to influence contemporary understandings of U.S. national belonging, each of which flexes on contextual and relational shifts, to continually (re)define the nature of this privileged identity category. Berlant (1997) explained, “Citizenship is a status whose definition is always in process. It is continually being produced out of a political, rhetorical, and economic struggle over who will count as ‘the people’” (p. 20). Taking a queer approach to dialectical tensions provides one way to conceptualize the discursive fluidity that constructs this status. Below, I theorize these three dialectical tensions and explain how they rhetorically function to mold U.S. national belonging, as well as how they discipline rhetorical performances of belonging in which those seeking inclusion must engage.

Architecture: Neoliberalism’s Influence on Discourses of Belonging

The populations that are able to move through the material and moral borders of the United States always already are in flux, shaped by discourses of belonging such as those analyzed in this dissertation. Cultural strangers’ testimonials are *strategies* for mediating one’s social location within these influential national tensions, *factors that contribute* to the dynamic flux that constitutes U.S. national belonging, and instances of *resistively accommodating* the nation’s underlying investments in whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism.

The nation’s investment in neoliberalism contours the current tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability that make up contemporary understandings of U.S. national belonging. Extending from the policies enacted during the era of U.S. President Ronald Reagan and the United Kingdom’s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, neoliberalism is a political, economic, and social framework that prioritizes the market, privatization, and personal responsibility, oftentimes with unequal benefits (for the already socially advantaged) and

consequences (for the already socially disadvantaged). Neoliberal policies and practices are primary logics that are used to marginalize people and that shape contemporary understandings of U.S. national identity and inclusion. As Harvey (2005) explained about neoliberalism:

While personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being. This principle extends to the realms of welfare, education, health care, and even pensions. (p. 65)

As neoliberalism has gained traction in the United States it has impacted contemporary understandings of national belonging and influences the tensions that those desiring inclusion must engage with. Video participants' discourses of belonging reveal that inclusion into the United States becomes possible only through carefully managing these neoliberally informed dialectical tensions. To demonstrate, although competing interests of visibility and invisibility play carefully upon neoliberalism's call for the privatization, the tension between dependence and independence similarly rely upon neoliberalism's demands that the U.S. citizenry responsibly manage their use of, and access to national resources. Extending this further, neoliberal logics have also fundamentally linked the notion of *value to people*, influencing the degrees of worth that individuals possess. As Giroux (2003) explained:

Central to neoliberalism is the assumption that profit making be construed as the essence of democracy, thus providing a rationale for a handful of private interests to control as much of social life as possible to maximize their financial investments. Strictly aligning freedom with a narrow notion of individual interest, neoliberalism works hard to privatize all aspects of the public good and simultaneously narrow the role of the state as both a

gatekeeper for capital and a policing force for maintaining social order and racial control”
(p. 196)

Through this logic, national belonging and the dialectical tensions that comprise it, are intimately informed by neoliberalism—a framework that also works to privilege and protect whiteness.

Neoliberalism reinforces the U.S. cultural narrative that strength, perseverance, and commitment are all people need to be successful in the United States. Taken for granted within this framework, however, are institutionalized inequalities (oftentimes reinforced by neoliberal practices) that limit minority individuals’ opportunities to improve their social situations. By creating and reinforcing a norm for U.S. citizenship—that locates the ideal U.S. citizen as being white, reproductively and monogamously heterosexual, and as a valuable laboring body—neoliberalism works to protect white U.S. Americans and to scapegoat others who, within this logic, are marked as part of the problem/threat. As Jones and Mukherjee (2010) explained, neoliberalism:

encouraged economic deregulation, the increased mobility of workers and capital, the undermining of organized labor and national sovereignty, the privatization of social provision, and the dismantling of the welfare state through racialized discourses of dependency and the valorization of the work ethic, individualism and personal responsibility. (p. 406)

This narrative of meritocracy eclipses the systemic disadvantages that nonwhite individuals experience. Roberts and Mahtani (2010) elaborated, “Neoliberalism effectively masks racism through its value-laden moral project: camouflaging practices anchored in an apparent meritocracy, making possible a utopic vision of society that is non-racialized” (p. 253). The United States’ investment in neoliberalism powerfully grounds contemporary logics of national

belonging and influences the discourse that shapes the three primary dialectical tensions that I have outlined in ways that tether whiteness to this U.S. national identity and belonging.

Understanding neoliberal logics that link whiteness to U.S. identity and belonging exposes some primary national narratives that comprise larger U.S. discourses of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability. Prioritizing these *normal* aspects and characteristics of dominant U.S. culture, the nation's investment in neoliberalism contributes to a logic in which certain bodies and identities are marked as *other* in the United States. This is a relationship that is productively explored with a queer approach to dialectics, as it troubles these normative influences and examines the ways that differently positioned cultural groups use discourse to fluidly move among and between positions.

Neoliberalism, further advancing existing national disparities and, simultaneously, eclipsing shifts in capital and property that benefit already advantaged (white) U.S. Americans, nevertheless manages to deflect charges of racism. As Melamed (2006) explained:

Neoliberal policy engenders new racial subjects, as it creates and distinguishes between newly privileged and stigmatized collectivities, yet multiculturalism codes the wealth, mobility, and political power of neoliberalism's beneficiaries to be the just desserts of "multicultural world citizens" while representing those neoliberalism dispossesses to be handicapped by their own "monoculturalism" or other historico-cultural deficiencies (p. 1)

Within neoliberalism, marginalization occurs along racial lines but it is coded as something else—something that is not racially motivated—and, indeed, as something that marks any discussion of race as an invocation of racism. This "post-racial" narrative contributes to the popularly circulating myth that race isn't an issue in the United States any more unless you make it one.

Because “neoliberalism was constructed in and through identity politics” (Duggan, 2003, p. 3), it works in a similar way to marginalize nonheteronormative people, as well as being used by homonormative groups as a way to advance particular gay rights causes.

The influences of neoliberalism manage the cultural attitudes and subsequent material possibilities for video participants, impacting the tensions that cultural strangers must balance, and protecting the nation’s investment in whiteness and heteronormativity. Jones and Mukherjee (2010) noted that within neoliberalism, “racial reference transcends phenotype, and culture becomes a matter individual choice, enabling distinctions between ‘good’ racial subjects who consume culture in private and ‘pathological’ racial subjects for whom culture provides a common ground for an oppositional politics” (p. 408) and thus, comes to be a governing framework with marginalizing impacts on a number of groups/communities. By couching their exclusionary policies and practices in discourses of privatization, personal responsibility, and the welfare of the market, those individuals who already have been marginalized (due to a variety of factors discussed above) are further stigmatized within neoliberal discourses that mark them as lacking value and/or as a burden on the already fragile U.S. government systems (something to which I turn greater attention in chapter 5). Testimonial participants, whose bodies have been marked as marginal within these neoliberal logics, must combat such stigmas by intervening in the same neoliberal frameworks that have excluded them, if they desire to pass through the nation’s ideological and material borders.

Colorblind logics of neoliberal citizenship that privilege and protect whiteness (and heteronormativity) influence the tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability with which those desiring belonging must contend. In particular, the perceived progressive nature of colorblindness, provides the logic upon which tensions constituting U.S. national

belonging are constructed, and conceals a logic of marginalization with which cultural strangers must contend in their discourses of belonging. Giroux (2003) noted that this colorblindness “deletes the relationship between racial differences and power, and in doing so reinforces whiteness as the arbiter of value for judging difference against a normative notion of homogeneity” (p. 199). By extension, if neoliberalism does the marginalizing work of excluding certain bodies from belonging within the nation, it must also be protecting certain identities, for inclusion cannot be understood without also attending to what it excludes. National neoliberal narratives contribute to the logics of marginalization that are discussed above, and they work to protect whiteness at the expense of those identities that are considered (phenotypically or ideologically) to be nonwhite. Identifying neoliberalism as a primary logic on which U.S. national inclusion and exclusion operates, I align myself with scholars who have theorized ways in which this cultural, political, and economic logic protects whiteness (e.g., Enck-Wanzer, 2011a; Giroux 2003; Harvey, 2005; Jones & Mukherjee, 2010; Melamed, 2006).

Cultural strangers’ rhetorical engagements with the tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability are what reinforce, revise, and repopulate the privileged category of national belonging in ways that analysis chapters, 3 to 5 discuss. Before engaging in an analysis of how cultural strangers construct discourses of belonging that resistively accommodate the nation’s investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism, I first explicate the critical rhetorical orientation that I employ to analyze the video narratives, and articulate how this rhetorical perspective has informed this dissertation.

Developing a Rhetorical Approach

Interested in how cultural strangers’ discourses of belonging engage with national narratives of inclusion and marginalization, I have adopted a critical rhetorical orientation to the

study of the video testimonials I have collected. I am interested in the rhetorical force of discourse; that is, how this functions to shift social conditions, relationships, and possibilities, and ways in which everyday discourse contributes to doxastic knowledge about those conditions. For this reason, I adopt a rhetorical position that understands discourse as material and that sees my role as being a critic who participates in the construction of discourses that lead to more just social conditions. In this way, the rhetorical perspective that I use to craft and implement this dissertation project follows from the ideological turn described by Wander (1983, 1984) and the critical rhetoric project that McKerrow (1989) outlined.

To address how national belonging is discursively constructed and the material impacts such constructions have, I have assembled a body of texts for analysis from a variety of vernacular fragments (McGee, 1980) that were available through online, mediated channels (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2). In particular, this text is comprised of 154 video testimonials from Courage Campaign's Testimony: Take a Stand campaign, and the Center for Community Change's campaign, We Are America. These videos represent the experiences of people on the margin and tell the stories of migrant, LGBT/Q underresourced, nonwhite, nonChristian people (to name only a few), and their relationship to the United States. The mediated nature of these texts allows them to circulate widely, placing these cultural strangers into conversation with other U.S. national community members, and presenting discursive moments to explore how U.S. national belonging is constructed and understood from and within these groups' narratives and exchanges. Before analyzing this material in chapters 3 through 5, I first discuss critical rhetorical traditions and methods that inform my approach, followed by a description of the texts selected for analysis, followed by a discussion of the research objectives and questions that guide the methodological

choices made in this project, before concluding this chapter with a detailed accounting of the particular practices used to analyze the collected texts.

Table 2.1

Videos from the Testimony: Take a Stand Campaign

Name	Length
Videos from “FAIR”	
Amina Testifies	3:19
Dottie & Katie Burkhart Testify	7:29
Gigi Testifies	1:42
Jacqueline Talks about her Son	4:46
Jamir Testifies	3:01
Mys Testifies	1:48
Richard Testifies	1:56
Videos from “I am from Driftwood”	
I am from Bloomsburg, PA	3:57
I am from Grand Forks, ND	2:51
I am from Louisville, KY	2:53
I am from Mayflower, AR	2:50
I am from Perry, IA (1)	3:14
I am from Perry, IA (2)	2:54
I am from Pleasantville, NJ	3:46
We are from Queens, NY & Clear Lake, TX	2:53
I am from Turkey	4:24
I am from Willow Grove, PA	2:23
Videos from “Granite State Courage Campaign”	
Allison D Testifies	0:19
Amy L Testifies	2:25
Barry F Testifies	2:48
Beth T Testifies	4:00
Betsy H Testifies	1:56
Chiona V Testifies	2:06
Fred K Testifies	2:24
Jessica O Testifies	1:44
Jim D Testifies	1:37

John S Testifies	0:18
Jon Testifies	1:47
Kerry B Testifies	0:54
Laurie G Testifies	1:03
Linda M Testifies	1:57
Lisa M Testifies	3:32
Lisa M Testifies (2)	0:37
Lisa S Testifies	1:19
Lisa S Testifies (2)	2:24
Mara S Testifies	2:53
Matty L Testifies	1:57
Roberta B Testifies	4:25
Susan M Testifies	2:34
Zandra R Testifies	2:10

Videos from “The Wedding Matters”

Amy & Annie	2:15
Arika & Cynthia	1:55
Ashley & Rene	2:08
Barry Wally	2:07
Carmen & Rose	1:58
Dontavious & Manny	2:06
Felicia & Liz	1:55
George Barrett	1:24
Jillian & Alice	2:03
Jim Graham	1:50
Julie & Sara	1:59
Laura & Karla	1:48
Lisa & Eileen	1:58
Lynne & Gail	1:56
Matt & Sean	1:47
Melissa & Taryn	2:21
Mike & Joel	1:38
Ofer & Randy	1:31
Paul & Joe	2:23
Paul Kirste	2:09
Paul-Isaac & Erin	2:15
Response to Bob Shore-Goss: Bob & Joe	1:54
Response to Bob Shore-Goss: Joe Shore-Goss	1:48
Response to Lisa & Eileen: David Wally	2:14
Reverend Freda	2:07
Sunshine & Sunny	2:20
Xavier & Michael	2:17

*All of the video testimonials collected from the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign were uploaded between January and April of 2011.

Table 2.2

Videos from the We Are America Campaign

Name	Length
Videos from “Featured Video Archive”	
Alberto: Hard Work Builds a Successful Business	3:15
Ana Sol Gutierrez: A Life of Service	2:52
Beth’s Story: A Police Officer’s Husband Deported to Algeria	4:58
Brittney and Serge Babo: Speaking out about a Husband and Father’s Deportation	4:31
California Story: Immigrant Workers Challenge Exploitation, Discrimination	4:55
Candelario: A Young Immigrant’s Story	8:56
Carlos: The Story of an Undocumented Student	3:13
Deepak Bhargava: The American Dream is about our Responsibility to Each Other	3:08
DREAMer Unshacked	2:25
Fidel’s Story: Long Time Main Resident Faces Deportation	2:35
From America’s Voice: Alabama Teacher Voices her Concern	1:53
Ifoia’s Story: Haitian Immigrant Building Community in America	3:06
Jackie & Jamie: Fighting for Their (Maryland) Dream	5:53
Jose Antonio Vargas: Prominent American Journalist Comes Out as Undocumented	4:33
Liuan’s Story: Connecting Family Separation to Faith	4:12
Mandeep Chahal: DREAMer calls on President Obama and Congress to Bring Relief to Undocumented Youth	5:48
Mauricio’s Story: Beloved School Custodian Granted Residency	5:39
Michael’s Story: Undocumented Student Strives to Serve his Country	4:50
Montserrat’s Arizona Story	2:37
Rev. Mendis: Sri Lankan Immigrant Voting for the First Time	4:00
Rim’s Story: Getting Engaged in Politics and Voting as a Young Person	3:49
Saif Kahn: A Veteran’s Story	2:48
The Guzman Family: Separated by Detention, 19 Months and Counting	7:22
Tony & Janina’s Story: A Wife’s Deportation to Poland Tears Family Apart	4:10

We Are America Stories Project Trailer	3:09
Yves Gomes: Maryland 17 year Old to be Deported	3:15

Zahid's Story: Disabled Veteran Set to be Deported Despite Years of Service	4:55
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Videos from "Immigration Stories Archive"

"No Place:" Maria's Story	2:57
18 Year-old Durham Resident, Fausto Palma-Guifarro Faces Deportation	1:53
Araceli's Story: Tucson Mom faces Detention, Possible Deportation	4:54
Atour Eyvazian: Business Owner Finds Success in the United States after Escaping Iran in the 1980s	1:33
Bernard's Story: A Town Galvanizes Support around Youth Leader	4:50
Cesar's Story: Pursuing a Dream to Serve in the Military	3:44
Children Tell Stories of Separation and Loss of Parents	6:14
Chris's Story: Kept Apart from Partner of 17 Years Because of Immigration Policy	3:38
Cristina & Monica's Story: Couple Facing Deportation because of DOMA and Immigration	2:32
David Cho's Story: Korean Immigrant Graduating from UCLA Fighting for the DREAM Act	1:57
Decorated War Vets Face Deportation	1:32
Deportation Horror: A Journey from Texas to Bangladesh	4:20
Domingo's Story: Phone Calls from Papi	3:58
Edgar's Story: Police Academy Graduate Detained by ICE Narrowly Escapes Deportation	6:39
Emily's Story: Four Year Old U.S. Citizen Deported to Guatemala	1:03
Fatima's Story: Arrested at a California ICE Raid	4:20
Gricelda's Story: Achieving a Dream	3:18
Guadalupe's Story: Family Pride for student who is Ivy League Bound	3:04
Hawo's Story: From Somalia to Shelbyville (Part 1)	3:12
Isabel's Story: Living Between Borders	3:06
Isabel's Story: Accomplished Undocumented Student Challenges Governor	1:22
Ivan Nikolov's Fiancée Talks about his Pending Deportation	4:29
Ivan's ICE Abuse Story: Home Raided and Mom Strip Searched	
Juan Manuel's Story: An Arkansas DREAMer and a Businessman	7:48
Juan's Story	2:10
Julieta's Story: A Nursing Career Delayed because of Immigration Status	1:16
Kentucky Immigrant Students Speak Out	3:28

Liliana Ramos: A Single Mother Threatened with Deportation	9:57
Loida Silva: I am Tired of being Treated as a Second Class Citizen	6:19
Marlen Moreno's Story: Young Arizona Mother to be Deported August 8	6:38
Micheline's Story: Haitian Immigrant Active as Part of Nurse's Union	2:09
Muhammed Zahid Chaudry: Military Veteran Tells his Story of being Denied Citizenship	5:05
Nazry's Story: A Changed life that Deserves a Second Chance	3:52
Nidya's Story: The Only Country I've ever Known	3:55
Ola's Story: Detroit Honors Student Faces Deportation	1:17
Olga Zanella: Day's Away from Possible Deportation	2:12
One Woman's Testimony about Violence Faced by Immigrant Women	5:48
Pedro's Story: Arizona Man who wants to be a Marine Faces Deportation	2:48
Phoury Chun: Cambodian Exile Working Hard for his Community in L.A.	1:56
Ranjan's Story: Joining in Solidarity with Undocumented Students for a Common Cause	2:31
Raul Zamora: Austin Student Athlete Facing Deportation after being Picked-up for Broken Taillight	5:23
Raul's Story: Wife and Children Fear Denver Man's Deportation	2:49
Ricardo Muñiz: DREAMer Fights to Stay in the United States	2:09
Roderigo's Story: Recently Married to Partner Edwin	2:33
Ruben Vives: Pulitzer Prize Winning Reporter was Nearly Deported	2:03
Second Part of Hawo's Shelbyville Story	3:58
Selvin Arevalo Fights Deportation	5:35
Shirley's Story: Battling to Stay Together	3:39
Shuling's Welcoming Story	0:31
Soo Ji's Story: Overcoming Challenges. Fighting for the DREAM Act	2:43
Stephanie's DREAM Story: Lost & Found	5:23
Texas State Rep. Ana Hernandez Luna Tells Story of being an Undocumented Immigrant	4:43
The Mathe Family: Fighting Deportation to South Africa	4:50
Tolu Olubunmi Shares the Story of her Immigration Struggle at a Press Conference, Reintroducing the DREAM Act with Senator Durbin, Denator Reid and Senator Menendez on May 10, 2011	4:43
Tolu's Story: Chemical Engineer Unable to Pursue her Career Continues Call for the DREAM Act	4:58
Tony Choi: Korean-American DREAM Student Speaks Out about Challenges his Family Faces	3:10

U.S. Citizen's Wife Deported	3:57
Undocumented Asian Immigrants Tell Their Story	8:40
Voices of Children Affected by June 1 Workplace Raid in Fort Morgan, CO	2:20
Voices of Day Laborers in the United States	2:43

*None of the testimonials collected from the We Are America campaign indicated when these videos had been uploaded

Critical Rhetoric

Whether exploring ways in which changing discourses affect material conditions, critiquing larger cultural narratives that circulate within societies, or examining how various bodies are interpellated into those discourses, the critical rhetorical perspective on which I draw prioritizes the role of language as an essential way of knowing (and changing) the world. Thus, I orient this project in such a way that my criticism might reveal unequal social structures and relationships that unfairly advantage some people and disadvantage others. Stemming from this orientation, I see this dissertation project as an instance of rhetoric, a direct performance and/or political act with consequences and implications (Ono & Sloop, 2002). Further I identify one of my primary critical responsibilities to be mediating those meanings (and consequent relationships) in the social world (Wander & Jenkins, 1972; Wilhelms, 1995).

Critical rhetoric is an orientation that examines narratives of power and knowledge construction. Using critical rhetoric in this study, to explore cultural strangers' discourses of belonging, allows me to unpack how video participants' discourses of belonging engage with national discourses of power and knowledge and with what effects. McKerrow (1989) explained

In practice, a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power. The aim is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society—what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change. (p. 91)

I use critical rhetoric in this dissertation to expand scholarly knowledge about national belonging, to focus on the power relationships inherent in discourses of belonging and marginalization, and to consider the social justice implications of these constructions. Partnered with the queer commitments of this research and the other critical scholarship that informs my theoretical framework, critical rhetoric directs specific analytic focus on the role discourse plays in shaping the normative influences with which cultural strangers must contend in their discourses of belonging and in their efforts to manage the dialectical tensions outlined above.

Critical rhetoric is understood as a “fluid and flexible orientation, not a formal rule governed method” (McKerrow & St. John, 2004, p. 345), and as such, serves as a dynamic approach for exploring discourses of belonging that continue to proliferate across a variety of communication mediums. Indeed, video participants’ testimonials utilize the increasingly influential medium of online communication to both solicit and to spread their message, capitalizing on video as a way to tell their stories, and oftentimes pairing that with written text to accompany their appeals. Additionally, some narratives are professionally filmed, others are shot by the video participant themselves, and still others are nightly news segments about marginalized community members—each framed within another layer of discourse that collects, organizes, and introduces these videos in ways that serve the interests of the larger organizations of which they are a part. The multilayered quality of these testimonials, coupled with the variations in production style and/or expertise, make these videos complex texts to analyze, however, are once again reflective of the fluid constructions of discourses of belonging, and of the tensions they seek to balance.

The changing contexts of communication and the ease with which individuals can engage with others, promote their beliefs, and respond to the social and cultural discourses around them

have fundamentally altered the way that rhetorical critics understand the texts with which they work (McGee, 1980). Because of these advances in mediated communication, coupled with the ideological turn (Wander, 1983), critical rhetoricians have recognized the need for their analyses to extend beyond the close reading of a single text to, instead, reach toward the collection of textual snippets that would provide an alternate view of dominant interests such as national belonging. A critical rhetorical approach provides opportunity for this, orienting my scholarship toward discourses of power inherent in the text (critique of domination), as well as to having them consider new possibilities for action to guard against “taken for granted” that endanger our freedom (critique of freedom; McKerrow, 1989).

Challenging the perceived bifurcation between critiques of freedom and critiques of domination, Ono and Sloop (1992) expanded critical rhetoric to account for *telos*, noting:

The critic in our conception maintains a commitment toward *telos* through which criticism is directed, while simultaneously recognizing the contingencies of this goal. One of the results of this configuration of a critical rhetoric will be the transcendence of the critiques of domination and of freedom; our critic will recognize that all criticism, because it shifts the current relations of power, critiques forms of domination by transforming them into new forms of power. (p. 52)

Exploring video participants’ discourses of belonging with a critical commitment to *telos*, such as that suggested by Ono and Sloop (1992) advances what I deem to be a socially just critique of the very systems of power that marginalize cultural strangers as well as myself, and reveals the sophisticated workings of power as it circulates discursively. As Sloop (2004) articulated, “By reversing ‘rhetoric’ and ‘criticism,’ critical rhetoric focuses on the critic’s role as a political performance” (p. 19). Hence my critique functions as a political practice that shifts

public knowledge and awareness, by demonstrating how understandings of belonging have been constructed. As the analysis chapters 3 through 5 suggest, and as the conclusions chapter (6) implies, cultural strangers' discourses of belonging and their management of national dialectical tensions expose the naturalized ways that whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism function to contour U.S. national inclusion.

Deviating from traditional rhetorical criticism that emphasizes a careful reading of a narrowly defined text and its implications, critical rhetoric offers a broad framework in which to conduct ideologically based criticism. As I began this project, I started with the fundamental assumption that U.S. national belonging was a privileged status—an assumption I made based on the proliferating discourses of migrant and LGBT/Q rights groups who were arguing for admission into this category. In other words, because so many people were expressing their desire for recognition and acceptance within dominant U.S. communities, I inferred that this status was desirable—and by extension, when something is desirable, it holds a particular kind of influence or power for those who can claim membership, and can be wielded against those who cannot. Wander (1983), ushering in the ideological turn in rhetorical criticism noted, “Criticism takes an ideological turn when it recognizes the existence of powerful vested interests benefiting from and consistently urging policies and technology that threaten life on this planet, when it realizes that we search for alternatives” (p. 18). Assuming that U.S. national belonging benefits from certain policies and technologies (such as immigration control, and federal regulations such as the DOMA) that protect the nation's investment in whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism, I organized this project to consider how these ideological forces contribute to everyday discourses of belonging, and in turn, how these discourses resistively accommodate such investments.

Critical rhetoric then, marking a paradigmatic shift in rhetorical criticism, directs the critic's attention toward "the discourses of average human beings engaging in the production of rhetoric" (Hasain & Delgado, 1998, p. 248). Although vernacular rhetorics are often directed toward more limited audiences, as Enck-Wanzer (2011b) explained, this does not always need to be the case. Taking a case study of the Young Lords, a group of young Puerto Ricans living in New York City in the 1960s, Enck-Wanzer described:

A media savvy group and knew that the words they spoke and activities in which they engaged would become otherwise mediated images (film, television, and news photographs) that could circulate within a vernacular (counter)public sphere and to a broader public audience. (p. 14)

Cultural strangers participating in both the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America Campaign's discourses of belonging can be seen as also simultaneously circulating within (counter)public spheres and for broad audiences.

More traditional forms of rhetorical analysis have privileged the study of verbal, expository, discrete, hierarchical texts (Brummett, 2006), focusing on vernacular text, however, leads to valuable insights for knowing the world. This doxastic knowledge, available through "the study of discourse that resonates within and from historically oppressed communities" (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 20) comes from the ground up (or the margins inward) and illuminates alternate, everyday forms of knowledge that are generated within communities that have been systematically ignored. Specifically, the study of vernacular rhetoric is one way to attend to the concrete, immediate, and material needs of everyday people (Cloud, 1994; Hasain & Delgado, 1998). As West (1993) articulated, "Individuals are capable of articulating the contradictions,

inconsistencies, and ambiguities that encompass their lives” (p. 214), and for this reason, the discourses they construct form a type of (vernacular) rhetoric that deserves critical attention.

Ono and Sloop (2002) characterized what they understood to be various forms of discourse as *civic* or *vernacular* discourses. *Civic discourse*, they explained, provides information for large populations of people and is inattentive to various (sub)cultures—something they indicated stands in contrast to *vernacular discourse*, or discourse from and for smaller (historically oppressed) communities. They conceptualized *Dominant discourse* as those understandings, meanings, and logics that work within the most commonly accepted frameworks of what is just–unjust or good–bad, and *outlaw discourse* as representing a position that is incommensurable with dominant positions, explaining that these logics introduced two additional ways in which civic and vernacular discourses might be understood.

Ono and Sloop (1995) further characterized vernacular discourses by identifying the qualities of *cultural syncretism* and *pastiche*. As they articulated, cultural syncretism reflects the ways that vernacular rhetoric affirms culture (something that might be contrasted with seeing vernacular communities as entirely counter-hegemonic). They wrote, that even though the idea “that rhetoric affirms as it protests is nothing new within rhetorical criticism” (p. 22), they noted that what sets vernacular rhetorics apart are how these two impulses work together by way of cultural syncretism, resulting in culturally specific community rhetorics. Additionally, Ono and Sloop (1995) explained that vernacular discourses are characterized by pastiche, or efforts to borrow from dominant culture without mimicking it. Indeed, the cultural syncretism and pastiche that characterize the cultural strangers’ video testimonials I explore are a primary focus of my analysis. Exploring the simultaneously resistive and accommodationist qualities of cultural strangers’ testimonials, I argue that video participants, and others seeking inclusion, craft

discourses of belonging that reflect the unique social locations that they occupy and that carefully call upon aspects of dominant culture but, nevertheless, subtly trouble them.

Video participants' discourse of belonging, seen as examples of vernacular rhetoric, carefully work on and against the dominant and/or normative influences of U.S. culture. Even though these vernacular rhetorics are generated by members of historically oppressed communities, they reference dominant logics that are "dependent upon the general cultural ideology found in public discussions, educational textbooks, legal decisions, legislation, and so forth" (Ono & Sloop, 2002, p. 14). Ono and Sloop (2002) suggested that being able to characterize cultural strangers' video testimonials as instances of dominant vernacular discourse exposes the complicity of seemingly resistant voices in upholding systems of power. In spite of this complicity, as my analysis and conclusions in the remaining chapters suggest, these discourses are also instances of resistive accommodation—accommodating dominant logics for national belonging, but concurrently resisting them through blurring the categorical distinctions of whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism that course through the dialectical tensions I have outlined. With the possibility to spread more widely than face-to-face communication, the mediated quality of video participants discourses of belonging have the potential for greater impact on cultural understandings of dominant identity categories, something to which I will now turn.

The Influence of Mediated Technology

In recent years, the availability and dissemination of vernacular discourse has increased exponentially with the introduction of the internet and other mediated technologies. Many social movement groups have begun to capitalize on those mediated opportunities, as they offer forums for the inexpensive dissemination of netroots groups' messages across broad channels—a move

that subsequently increases the scope of their potential influence. Extending scholarship conducted on vernacular discourse, Howard (2008) explained his vision of a *vernacular web*, noting that instances of online participatory media are foundational to the formation of vernacular communities and discourses that they use. The Courage Campaign and Center for Community Change's efforts demonstrate the nature of online participatory media to render individuals' intentions visible to others is both a valuable social movement tool and a mechanism for founding/forming community.

Migrants (and particularly migrant youth) have adopted the internet as a primary way to share information and organize social/political action, whereas organizations, such as Human Rights Campaign (HRC), that represent portions of the LGBT/Q movement have similarly moved many of their awareness raising efforts online. As explained previously, I focus on the efforts of two organizations, Courage Campaign (an organization that promotes LGBT/Q rights) and the Center for Community Change (an organization that promotes migrant rights). Both organizations have launched large-scale testimonial campaigns, gathering narratives of individuals' experiences as members or allies of their respective community from across the United States.

Problematizing the vernacular, and attempting to distinguish between what Howard (2008) identified as different types of vernacular, he explained the unique ways that technology has impacted these discourses noting:

Although many culture critics have recognized that mass media often serve the interests of institutions instead of local communities, participatory Websites, however, have the potential to be more empowering than media objects because they offer network locations where agents can express themselves. At the same time, the technologies that create

these locations are typically produced, maintained and funded by institutions. As a result the discourse that emerges from these websites is a hybrid between local and institutional interests. (p. 492)

Migrant and LGBT/Q communities who are positioned beyond the fields of U.S national belonging, and yet who are able to speak to and within dominant U.S discourses with the assistance of technology, occupy an important subject position, that as Anguiano and Chávez (2011) have noted, might be significant to consider in the context of vernacular rhetoric. They explained, “Perhaps in the study of vernacular rhetoric it is important to pay special attention to the subject positions from which people speak, especially as they pertain to citizenship” (p. 98). Migrant and LGBT/Q video participants who have utilized the internet as a way to collect and disseminate their discourses of belonging, speak from, and within, dominant U.S. culture (by virtue of their familiarity with it, and proximity to it), but also from a marginalized location (due to their continuing isolation from full citizenship rights). The unique subject locations from which these vernacular rhetorics emerge, and the use of the internet as a way to disseminate them, reflect the dynamic and fluid ways that contemporary understandings of U.S. national belonging are assembled and suggest the varying material impacts that they may have on individuals who occupy various social locations.

The Materiality of Discourse

Within rhetorical criticism there has been much debate about whether or not discourse derives from the material world, if the material world is constructed through discourse, or if instead, some combination therein exists. Informed by these different trajectories, which I will trace in the paragraphs below, I ascribe to the belief that the narratives that we tell, shape our

experiences in the material world—and indeed, shape that material world. Butler (1993), attempting to elucidate the relationship between discourse and materiality noted:

One cannot get outside of language in order to grasp materiality in and of itself; rather, every effort to refer to materiality takes place through a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material. In this sense then, language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified. (p. 68)

Bringing Butler's considerations to the realm of rhetorical criticism, McGee argued in his influential 1982 essay, that rhetoricians should move away from thinking about rhetoric as abstraction and to understand it as material. As Sloop (2004) explained, McGee's argument was compelling, insofar as:

He was claiming not only that a theoretical concept has meaning only in how it is used but also that the concept has a materiality, that it, it resists change, and that once a term has meaning grounded in common usage, it resists easy transition. (p. 19)

By extension, we might then assume that discourses of belonging have a materiality—a kind of fixed quality that has taken shape through the common usages we see demonstrated in video participants' online testimonials as well as through civic discourses that circulate within our cultural surround.

The relationship between discourse and materiality has been, and continues to be a slippery one, that rhetorical scholars have debated for decades. Although most scholars acknowledge a relationship between discourse and materiality, the degree to which each influences the other is less clear. Critical rhetoric's concern with the materiality of discourse derives from and inspires a number of these discussions that help orient this dissertation. In

particular, ideology criticism (broadly) and critical rhetoric (more specifically) have been challenged and/or extended by scholars such as Greene (1998) Cloud (1994), Sloop (2004) and Ono and Sloop (2002) who have elaborated on the implications of the critical rhetorical orientation for discourse and materiality. Drawing on these scholars, I articulate ways I understand the complicity of discourse and materiality below, highlighting how such conceptualizations inform my analysis of video participant's discourses of belonging.

Theorizing the relationship between discourse and materiality is significant because of the implications it holds for rhetorical criticism. The degree to which we understand how rhetorical texts influence the material world affects the social justice work in which critics can conceivably engage. Greene (1998), pushing rhetorical scholars to see rhetoric as more than representation (that is to see rhetoric as doing more than simply reflecting the material conditions of the world) argued for seeing constructive possibilities of rhetoric—in other words, how material discourses merge with other forms of rhetoric (such as mass media, education, and government) to service dominant culture group interests. Evaluating the material implications of various discourses (such as discourses of belonging) opens up a space for critical rhetorical scholars to interrogate the workings of power within a dominant culture and engage in social justice work that might impact the opportunities marginalized groups' experience.

Some scholars have argued that the significance of the material world should not be subverted to privilege discourse (see, e.g., Cloud, 1994; Cantú, 2009; Halberstam, 1998), claiming that ideological criticism and critical rhetoric invest discourse with too much influence. Cloud (1994) explained:

We ought not sacrifice the notions of practical truth, bodily reality, and material oppression to the tendency to render all of experience discursive, as if no one went

hungry or died in war. To say that hunger and war are rhetorical is to state the obvious; to suggest such rhetoric is all they are is to leave critique behind. (p. 159)

Pointing to the very embodied experiences of hunger, or violence, Cloud and others make a valuable point that rhetorical analysis must go beyond the text, into the material world if it is to significantly impact inequitable social conditions. However, as others have argued, (see, e.g., Greene, 1998; McGee, 1982; Sloop, 1996, 2004) through the reiteration of discourse, certain relationships, possibilities, and experiences become sedimented—become material, and as such, the critical analysis of text, is the critical analysis of that which is material (that which operates materially in the world).

The examination of the cultural strangers' discourses of belonging is necessarily both a study of rhetoric and of culture—the discursive, and the material. Sloop (1996), drawing from an analogy forwarded by Paul Willis explained culture “could not be experienced without the bricks and mortar that give it shape and substance” (p. 4). The experiences that video participants relay (of being unable to marry their partners, being deported from the United States, and/or being the subjects of violence) are material insofar as they impact the conditions that inscribe their lives—however, they are also discursive. Sloop (1996) continued, “As discourses and definitions become generally accepted within culture they are assumed and hence act as sedimented practices” (p. 4).

Discourses of belonging that circulate at both the vernacular and civic levels fix particular understandings of U.S. national identity and belonging that then act with material force. Sloop (1996) explains the implications for this, noting, “It is what is in the open, what is accepted as true, what people are willing to claim in public places, that acts as true and provides meaning for those who embody specific terms and positions” (p. 6). U.S. national belonging

then, whose truth is openly claimed in public spaces (such as video testimonials—but also political discourses, street corner conversations and television sitcoms), directly contributes to the material experiences and opportunities that individuals experience—as either cultural members or as strangers. Critical rhetoric, concerned with the public arguments and understandings of these conceptions is a crucial way to unpack discourses of belonging and to potentially impact their materiality. As Ono and Sloop (2002) explained, “Critical analysis of culture and cultural texts can play a material role in shaping culture” (p. 9); consequently, I understand the analysis that I engage in to necessarily take a social justice orientation (see Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, & Murphy, 1996).

To trouble the normative influences that give rise to contemporary discourses of belonging, I organized this project around two research objectives and four research questions to which I will now turn my attention. As the following objectives and questions suggest, I have designed this project to critically engage vernacular discourse of belonging, with the assumption that doing so would uncover some of the taken for granted (and consequently invisible) influences that give rise to contemporary national inclusions and exclusions.

Research Objectives and Questions

Attentive to how narratives structure people’s lives by interpellating them into discursively constituted social relationships, this project reveals and theorizes what discourse of belonging are, how they circulate, and whose cultural interests they serve. Conducting this analysis, I was motivated by an interest in social justice and a desire to learn more about the ways that discourse of belonging materially impact the conditions for inclusion into the United States. To accomplish that goal, I conducted a critical rhetorical analysis of 154 online video

testimonials, paying particular attention to two primary research objectives and four corresponding research questions, as outlined below.

I needed my primary research objectives to create boundaries for this study that prioritized the discursive nature of national belonging. Specifically, the two primary objectives of this project included determining (a) how national belonging is discursively constructed and understood, and (b) what could excavated from the vernacular appeals made from the margins about U.S. national belonging. Attending to how national belonging is *discursively* constituted grounded this study within a communication tradition that explored how the material world is talked about, as well as a critical tradition that examined consequences that come from talking about the world in certain ways.

Assuming that, in these videos, participants' appeals for belonging would reveal broader national discourses of power and control that protect some people and disadvantage others I proposed a series of specific questions to guide my analysis. The first question posed asked:

RQ1: How do cultural strangers describe and relate discursively to the conditions of belonging within the nation?

As discussed previously, the term *cultural strangers* connotes a particular type of relationship that both members of the migrant community and portions of the LGBT/Q community have to the nation—neither as complete outsiders but not as insiders either. Furthermore, *conditions of belonging* refer to symbolic and material boundaries that permit inclusion into the United States (symbolic boundaries being those attitudes about who is and is not a U.S. American; material boundaries being those laws, citizenship papers, and so forth that limit one's movement through national spaces).

In addition to examining how vernacular voices describe and relate to conditions of national belonging, I addressed how voices of cultural strangers construct/shape contemporary notions of belonging in their ways. This interest led to the second research question:

RQ2: Do cultural strangers describe being affected by and affecting conditions of belonging within the nation and, if so, how?

To answer that question, I examined language that cultural strangers used to narrate their experiences of belonging and exclusion, to reveal some implications of constructing belonging and exclusion in particular ways. Engaging these narratives with careful attention to how migrant and LGBT/Q individuals understand and experience their positions in the United States allowed me to focus on how power and privilege (in the form of national belonging) affects people's lives.

In addition to examining migrant and LGBT/Q individuals' vernacular discourses of belonging, and focusing on national narratives that affect cultural strangers' appeals for inclusion, another question that guided my inquiry focused on possibilities for change within the structures of U.S national belonging, and what opportunities for coalition, if any, might be possible. The third research question posed, thus, asked:

RQ3: What are the possibilities of extending the current discursive conditions of belonging within the nation?

In conceiving that third question, I constructed my analysis of the texts in such a way that the intersectional and fluid nature of identity might be captured. In other words, instead of examining each group as a separate community, I looked at all 154 video testimonials as a single collection of texts, identifying themes and arguments regardless of the original online communities from which they were selected. It was through this thematic analysis that it became

clear how each group engaged with the national tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence and (in)valuability in similar and/or different ways, leading to the subsequent differentiations I draw throughout the dissertation. Although there are limited moments when both groups express an awareness of, or interest in coalition building, the critical queer lens I used to examine these groups theorized the potentiality for this in the conclusion chapter (6) of this dissertation

Finally, a fourth question explored how vernacular voices engaged with national narratives of identity and belonging. The fourth research question asked:

RQ4: What rhetorical strategies do cultural strangers' use to affect the discourses of belonging within the nation?

Training my analysis of these texts on cultural strangers' rhetorical efforts focused attention on some foundational elements of rhetorical analysis, including the rhetors' goals, delivery, and persuasive outcomes. Combing through the video testimonials with an eye on rhetorical strategies lead me to categorize these cultural strangers' discourses thematically, and allowed me to derive a framework of dialectical tensions to make sense of cultural strangers' efforts.

The Text

The textual fragments collected from each of these netroots groups' websites, when drawn together, comprise discursive foundations on which belonging is predicated, and that powerfully implicate both civic and vernacular voices as contributing to such structures. Between April 11, 2011 and January 10, 2012, I collected a total of 154 video testimonials for analysis. Sixty-seven of those videos come from Testimony: Take a Stand's website; 87 come from the We Are America website. Anyone with a webcam and internet access was able to upload videos onto either of these websites. Although some of the videos, clearly, were amateur (e.g., shot in people's living rooms or during community meetings), others were professionally

edited and of greater production quality. As a result, although it does not appear that either community selected which videos to include or omit, those that were professionally shot and edited were formatted in ways that increased their persuasive appeal (highlighting a message of inclusion and/or equality, and developing the pathos of video participants' narratives). I selected video testimonials that were available through these websites to provide the text/data for this study for four reasons: (a) because these testimonial-gathering efforts appear to be representative of a broader push in netroots' campaigns to solicit and share personal stories of struggle; (b) because the scope and construction of these efforts are so similar; (c) because, despite these similarities, there are productive nuances to explore in ways that these narratives account for identity, belonging, history, and inclusion/exclusion; and (d) those moments of comparison could reveal differences and similarities that may exist amongst these experiences. To be more specific about the videos I used, and the communities that sponsored them, I first turn toward Courage Campaign and Testimony: Take a Stand to provide some background, followed by a similar discussion of the Center for Community Change and the We Are America campaign.

Testimony: Take a Stand videos. On Testimony: Take a Stand's website, there is a link that makes it possible for anyone to upload a video testimonial about their experiences related to LGBT/Q equality. Furthermore, individuals who register as members of the site have the potential to form communities, which tend to focus on a particular aspect of LGBT/Q equality.² Determining which videos to work with, it was easiest to select/download the testimonials, as they were organized into such communities. I selected four communities (out of a possible 20) because they had the most video testimonials available: *FAIR*, *I'm from Driftwood*, *The Wedding Matters*, and *Granite State Courage Campaign*, each of which argues for various aspects of

recognition and respect for LGBT/Q persons and/or issues. From these groups, I collected all available 67 videos, with each video being about 2 minutes in length.

The type, quality, and context of the videos on Testimony: Take a Stand's website varied considerably, depending on the group/community that was posting them. For instance, there were a total of 27 The Wedding Matters videos about weddings and their significance in people's lives, all of which were shot in a single day by a professional filmmaker, on a budget of \$1,600, (meaning that their quality was high). In contrast, the 23 videos I took from Granite State Courage Campaign (another online community that was formed) appeared to be recorded by amateurs, with a number of them filmed at a local civic meeting where citizens/members of this particular community spoke about their experiences as LGBT/Q individuals and/or allies. I'm From Driftwood offered yet another vantage point, for unlike the other communities being studied, this organization is separate from the Courage Campaign, maintaining a website where there are many more video testimonials that are similar to those posted on Testimony: Take a Stand's website. In this instance, I'm From Driftwood formed a community on Testimony: Take a Stand's website and uploaded 10 high-quality videos that were recorded by a trained videographer. In this way, I'm From Driftwood used Testimony: Take a Stand's website as an additional forum to gain exposure for its like-minded project of increasing the public's awareness and familiarity with the LGBT/Q community. Finally, FAIR, which uploaded seven videos, also appeared to be an amateur effort, recruiting individuals from the same outdoor, public space and interviewing them about their LGBT/Q experiences and attitudes.

Visually reflecting the diverse and intersecting identities and interests of the LGBT/Q movement's participants, the testimonials collected from Testimony: Take a Stand discursively foreground participants' sexual identity and/or gender expression as primary concerns, and none

of those videos could be considered “rogue” in the sense that they deviate from an overall, common message of LGBT/Q equality and/or inclusion. Consequently, it was important when analyzing these texts to attend to both the physicality of video participants’ bodies (captured within the medium of video) and their discourse. I explored these videos to uncover ways in which cultural strangers’ discourse and material bodies function together to communicate about belonging and marginalization. This, in conjunction with the queer orientation to dialectical tensions I adopted, meant the bulk of my analysis focused on troubling the normative influences that inform national belonging and attending to the fluidity of cultural strangers’ efforts to balance the tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability.

We Are America videos. The We Are America website also had a link that made it possible for anyone to upload a video, and it organized these narratives into two categories. To collect testimonials from this site, I identified what appeared to be the largest video collections that were available on it. I selected all available videos that were organized within two major portions of the website. From the section of the website titled “Immigration Story Archives” and the “Featured Video Archive,” I gathered 87 video testimonials ranging in length from 31 seconds to 8 minutes.

Unlike Testimony: Take a Stand’s website, We Are America’s website makes it harder to ascertain if the individuals who are featured in the videos were responsible for posting them, as well as impossible to identify the posting date or number of views that each video has received. Overall, the quality of the videos in both archives was high (although, as with Testimony: Take a Stand, they range from amateur-shot videos to more professionally captured narratives, and span between personally recorded stories and local news segments featuring migrants’ struggles) and the content was consistent. Within the Featured Video Archive, however, there appeared to be

greater consistency in length, formatting, quality, and content than in the Immigration Story Archives. In particular, each of the featured videos opens with one of two professionally designed trailers and, consistently, last 3 to 5 minutes. Finally, several of the videos included extensive accompanying written material, but because they mirrored the filmed testimonials so closely, I did not include that material in my analysis.

Once again, as in the *Testimony: Take a Stand* narratives, video participants' physical bodies reflected a component of their identities that are not referenced directly in their confessional speech acts. The intersection between participants' spoken words and their material bodies captured by virtue of this video, allowed me to interrogate how materiality and discourse function in tandem to subvert and to uphold dominant cultural logics of belonging—indeed, how participants resistively accommodate such logics in their quest for inclusion.

Conducting a Critical Rhetorical Analysis

The analysis of these video testimonials was a meticulous process of thematically organizing comments, exploring the relationships between topics, and attending to the nuances between participants' discourses, resulting in a dynamic theoretical understanding of national belonging as comprised of a set of dialectical tensions that are managed through rhetorical acts of resistive accommodation. After gathering the 154 video testimonials and assembling a body of text from which to work, I analyzed these videos with careful attention to the relationships between discourse and materiality that were displayed, paying attention to how participants' narratives (as well as popularly circulating narratives) of belonging intersected with the physicality of strangers' bodies in certain ways. Simultaneously attending to these analytic elements in a close reading of these videos, a variety of themes emerged that, eventually, revealed a set of dialectical tensions that I highlight in the following chapters of this dissertation.

Specifically, I first attended to common topics that appeared across all video testimonials (those from the We Are America and the Testimony: Take a Stand campaigns). When I explored these recurring topics more deeply I focused on if and when similarities across topics occurred, and gradually, I began conceiving of some of these topics as themes. For example, several topics that emerged had to do with work, value, and contribution. Although separate topics, these discursive threads might best be considered as a group (a theme), especially as categorizing them in that way encouraged me to explore how they worked together as a coherent discourse. From these topics, I identified three primary themes to explore: (a) the choice to conceal or make public one's identity as a member of the LGBT/Q or migrant community; (b) an expressed commitment to U.S. institutions, including traditional family values and Christian religion faith; and (c) arguments expressing and/or proving one's worth or value to the nation.

After assembling a collection of primary themes, I returned to the videos a second time and revisited each category, focusing, this time, on what was distinct about the claims that comprised each grouping. This additional analysis revealed that within each of the thematic categories, cultural strangers employed several logics in their discourses of belonging. For example, when a collection of video participants' narratives expressed "their value to the nation," I identified this as a theme. Upon further analysis these themes could be differentiated based on different cultural logics that they used: although some video participants' appeals centered on the value of one's physical labor for the nation, others highlighted one's investment in the nation as home and/or business owners. Curious about these distinctions, I reviewed the videos in each category a third time, and theorized that what appeared to be cultural strangers' use of *different logics* to find belonging might be better understood as cultural strangers' *differing efforts to manage a singular set of tensions*.

Identifying varying strategies used in each of these thematic categories as *tensions* provided a dynamic lens for considering cultural narratives that shape U.S national identity and belonging. After I conducted several close readings of each of these thematic categories, I articulated three dialectical tensions that construct U.S. national belonging, and to which cultural insiders and strangers constantly contribute: (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability. Organizing the topics discussed in these video testimonials into themes, although a crucial first step in organizing discourses of belonging, nevertheless, seemed to emphasize rigid categories of discourse rather than the fluidity of rhetorical strategies used by these cultural strangers. Understanding identity as always already fluid, a queer reading of dialectical tensions allowed me to think more carefully about the dynamic nature of belonging as it related to normative cultural influences, and it suggested an alternate way to conceive of larger national narratives of U.S. belonging.

In addition to using a queer approach to dialectical tensions to theorize the verbal components of these videos, it also proved helpful in conceptualizing that which was materially present but discursively absent from these appeals. In particular, what was noticeably missing from all but 3 of the 154 narratives were verbal references to one's race or ethnicity. Intrigued by the discursive absence of racial/ethnic references (despite the possibility of phenotypical coding many cultural strangers' bodies as nonwhite), I carefully considered this void, focusing my analysis on the ways that cultural strangers' discourses interacted with their material bodies and dominant and/or normative U.S. culture.

Incorporating the material and discursive contradiction of race in these video testimonials provided a unique opportunity to theorize the relationship between discursive and material components of U.S. national belonging. What emerged from that process was a critical

rhetorical analysis of mediated vernacular fragments that suggests cultural strangers employed rhetorical strategies to resistively accommodate the nation's investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism, in so doing, exposing the influential national tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability.

In the following analysis chapters (3 through 5) I draw upon this theoretical and methodological orientation discussed above to more carefully explore cultural strangers' discourses of belonging. Chapter 3 delves into the national dialectical tension of (in)visibility, exploring how video participants needed to manage the nation's expectations for visibility and invisibility within the United States. Chapter 4 focuses on the dialectical tension of (in)dependence, and attends to the ways that influential institutions such as Christianity, and traditional family values influence the ways cultural' strangers construct their discourses of belonging to balance both national dependence and independence. Chapter 5 narrows in on the dialectical tension of (in)valuability and examines how national logics of whiteness and neoliberalism congeal to construct hierarchies of value in the United States, and that challenge video participants to manage expectations for value, and invaluability within the United States.

Chapter 2 Notes

¹I realize that this expression of “cultural stranger” is an imperfect term. Because this dissertation is invested in the material implications of language, I do not take this lightly but, rather, I selected this term to move away from border metaphors that suggest insiders and outsiders (a framework that I challenge throughout this project).

²The sampled videos cut across 4 of the 20 Testimony: Take a Stand’s online communities I have identified to work with, as well as We Are America’s *Featured Video Archives* and *Immigration Story Archives*. Hence, I selected a cross-section of data from which to make some initial claims about the nature of these texts.

CHAPTER 3

(IN)VISIBILITY: HOW CULTURAL STRANGERS NAVIGATE THE DEMANDS OF (PUBLIC) CITIZENSHIP AND (PRIVATE) LIFE

Looking out across the post-9/11 landscape, it seems that every direction people turn, borders are a part of life, staking out ideological and material boundaries that give meaning to citizens' lives and that dictate the communities to which people belong, long to belong, or reject. In recent years, these margins have become a focal point for intense political debates about national security and citizenship, making those who occupy those borderlands ever more aware of their liminality in relation to the U.S. nation. Although there are those whose allegiance to the nation and its well-being never is questioned, others live amidst the daily scrutiny of neighbors, coworkers, and civil servants, who are not quite convinced of their claims of belonging. For years, members of both the migrant and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/queer (LGBT/Q) communities have occupied a social location as strangers within the U.S. imaginary (e.g., Bauman, 1988; Chávez 2010a; Marciniak, 2006; Phelan; 2001, Puar, 2007). Remaining hidden or “coming out” about one’s respective status as nonheterosexual or as undocumented often is an intentionally public and calculated rhetorical move that positions these cultural strangers within the public sphere.

As I argue throughout this dissertation, a primary condition of U.S. citizenship is one’s participation in the nation—participation that is exceedingly complicated for cultural strangers whose presence has been cast (conditionally) to the nation’s dark margins (the closet or the shadows). In spite of this marginalization, migrant and LGBT/Q video participants cultivate a

coming out strategy (or manage their “outing” by others), such that they resistively accommodate national commitments to whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism, exposing the dialectical tensions of *visibility* and *invisibility* that contour U.S. national identity.

Visibility and invisibility are often understood in opposition of each other, however, as I argue, are often used together, or simultaneously within discourses of national belonging. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.-e) defines visibility as, “The condition, state, or fact of being visible; visible character or quality; capacity of being seen (in general, or under special conditions).” On the contrary, it defines invisibility as, “The quality or condition of being invisible; incapacity of being seen” (n.d.-c). One’s visibility or invisibility in the world are conditioned by a number of considerations, including (but not limited to) race, social class status, sexual orientation, and citizenship status. Cultural strangers, occupy unique social locations in relation to visibility and invisibility, particularly as they can move largely undetected (invisibly) through American spaces, and yet, when they are “outed” or “out” themselves, move into a space of (hyper)visibility that can be both detrimental and beneficial. Additionally, dominant and/or normative U.S. culture has additional expectations for the ways cultural insiders must manage their visibility and invisibility within the nation, encouraging, from its inception, public participation in the nation’s civic life, and yet privatizing many other aspects of identity. These national expectations, coupled with cultural strangers’ own challenges make it essential for video participants to carefully balance expectations for visibility and invisibility in their discourses of belonging.

Democracy has been theorized as private people coming together as a public to discuss social conditions and needs of a broader society (see, e.g., Habermas, 1989), but questions of who can engage in such conversations (and what topics can be engaged) have been more

contested. If, indeed, the public sphere is “a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment” (Hauser, 1998, p. 86), having a voice within this arena can be consequential to one’s security in society. Although Habermas (1989) argued that the public sphere, inherently, is an inclusive space, other scholars have suggested the problematically exclusive nature of this domain for distinctions that it draws between the *public* and *private* (Benhabib, 1992; Berlant 1997, 2002; Fraser, 1990; Warner, 1992, 2002).

Influencing what is appropriate for public and private consumption, hegemonic culture in the United States has used whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism to make sense of what should be visible and invisible within U.S. culture. Given the impulse within neoliberalism, however, to privilege and protect whiteness—a whiteness, I argue, that is constituted by a nexus of privileged social identities as they intersect with phenotypical appearance—a variety of minority subject locations are driven (contingent to cultural, political, and historical context), into the darkness of the nation’s closets and shadows.

Although some nonwhite identities are invisible to broader U.S. publics, others, who appropriately consume culture (Jones & Mukherjee, 2010), can populate the visible identity category of U.S. cultural insider—albeit some, through temporary states of exception. As Puar (2007) explained, post 9/11, sexual exceptionalism has emerged in the United States—a national homosexuality, or what she terms *homonationalism*—that has led to the temporary inclusion of certain LGBT/Q subjects. As she explained:

The fleeting sanctioning of a national homosexual subject is possible, not only through the proliferation of sexual-racial subjects who invariably fall outside of its narrow terms of acceptability, as others have argued, but more significantly, through the simultaneous

engendering and disavowals of *populations* of sexual-racial others who need not apply. (p. 2)

Within the logics of neoliberalism, the ideal (white, heteronormative) citizen who behaves in nationally appropriate ways balances a discourse of rights with a discourse of personal responsibility to mark their bodies as visible in particularly calculated ways that allow them to be governed from a distance (Bailey, 2011). Those who remain on the cultural margins must also discursively construct themselves in this way, publically marking their nonnormative identities and appropriately confessing their deviance so as to be seen as docile. Video participants, testifying to their cultural difference, render themselves visible as a way to both absolve their deviance and to restore their personal authenticity—a confession that exposes carefully selected characteristics to reveal. Cultural strangers’ selection of what to expose, and what to keep hidden implies that national belonging requires those seeking inclusion to balance a tension between these two behaviors, making visible certain characteristics, and keeping others shadowed. Exploring the vernacular discourses of belonging captured in video participants testimonials reveals some of the national expectations regarding what should be publically claimed, and privately managed. Status as a U.S. community member, then, depends on one’s ability to balance (a neoliberally informed) visibility and invisibility.

Notions of public citizenship always have been a part of civic life, but in recent years, and with a national turn toward neoliberal governmentality (Harvey, 2005), notions of what constitutes public and private life have shifted. What was once theorized as the public sphere—“a space in which citizens deliberate about common affairs” (Fraser, 1990, p. 57)—Berlant (1997) explained, now might be considered an *intimate public sphere*, for in recent years, citizenship has become a condition of social membership that is “produced by personal acts and

values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere” (p. 5). The family, especially the intimate sexual practices and partnerships that are responsible for reproducing the nation’s citizens, always have garnered considerable national attention, especially with regard to how sexuality functions within that relational unit. Many scholars have shown how sexual desire and sexual practices have come under the purview of government regulatory regimes, such that reproductive sexuality safeguards the (re)population of the nation and helps to select traits for citizenship that already have been deemed desirable (e.g., whiteness and heterosexuality; Carter, 2007; Dyer, 1997; Epps et al., 2005; Foucault, 1978; Luibhéid, 2002). Foucault (1978) explained that although sex always has been regulated by certain technologies (that is a method for shaping conduct) such as Christian religious faith, medicine, and law—it came to be regulated in the 18th century through public discourse, shifting an otherwise private act into an act for public consideration. In particular, Foucault noted, “the legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law” (p. 3), marking normative national sexuality as reproductive, monogamous, white, heterosexual, and as occurring within the confines of marriage.

As some scholars have noted, there are many racial, religious, sexual, and class-based stipulations for U.S. citizenship and national belonging (see, e.g., Alexander 1994; Berlant, 1997; Brandzel, 2005; Desai, 2002; Chávez, 2010a; Eng, 1997; Luibhéid, 2002; Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005; Sommerville, 2005) that, historically, have led some marginalized groups to be relegated to “regimes of enforced invisibility” (Beltrán, 2009, p. 599). Explaining whose identities are least privileged, Luibhéid (2002) wrote, “Race and class dimensions [of sexuality] further determine whose heterosexualities are valued and whose are subject to surveillance and punishment” (p. xxi). Although nonheteronormative behaviors of people of color are subject to particular scrutiny (see, e.g., Eng, 1997; Ferguson, 2004; Feldstein, 2000; Muñoz, 1999; Puar,

2007), as a consequence of social ordering, variations in white, heterosexual desire have come to be stigmatized as shameful, deviant, and/or debasing, producing persistent ripples for individuals who, for the purposes of this dissertation, I term “cultural strangers.” Characterizing the conditions of U.S. national inclusion and exclusion, Carrillo Rowe (2005) argued that heterosexuality, whiteness, and citizenship function in tandem to create the most precious nexus of cultural inclusion, rendering LGBT/Q and migrant families to darkened closets and shadows.

Although the family always has been a foundational relational unit for the larger nation, recent attention to the role of family and family values has imbued these domestic relationships with a disproportionate amount of influence. Cloud (1998) argued that the overwhelming attention to the family is “imbalanced in emphasizing private responsibility to the near-total exclusion of considering system, state, corporate or other collective responsibility in the face of social problems” (p. 4). Although citizens and strangers alike have been impacted by this shift, migrants and/or LGBT/Q individuals, in particular, have used “coming out” to gain visibility and public support, and, thereby, to affect public discourse surrounding U.S national identity and belonging, by redrawing boundaries of what and who publically can be a part of the nation. Indeed, equal rights campaigns (e.g., LGBT/Q rights and migrant rights movements), as Richardson (2004) noted, have shifted their focus away from demanding the right to exist in private, “where the boundaries of private are marked by the limits of tolerance,” and, instead, now focus on “the right to public recognition *and* the right to privacy” (p. 405). In spite of using discourses of belonging to make oneself visible, cultural strangers, nevertheless, express an ability to privately manage the deviant aspects of their identity, keeping them invisible.

Rhetorical strategies that manage one’s visibility and invisibility are central to cultural strangers’ discourses of belonging. Within the LGBT/Q community, terms such as *passing*, *the*

closet, and *coming out* have long been familiar phrases associated with the gay and lesbian experience. These expressions capture people's fears of being honest about their identity and of needing to hide parts of themselves to be accepted into the normative national landscape. As Decena (2008) explained:

Conventional views of coming out in contemporary queer communities celebrate the individual, the visible, and the proud. Given the growing legitimacy of predominantly white and middle-class lesbians and gay men in the United States, and of models that presume to uphold individual decision making, negotiations, of the closet that refuse speech, visibility, and pride, have been generally viewed as suspect, as evidence of denial and internalized homophobia or as outright pathology. (p. 339)

The "closet," as a metaphor for gay experience, is regarded by some as a fundamental feature of LGBT/Q social life (Sedgwick, 2008), and that metaphor carries a variety of positive and negative connotations, suggesting unpredictable and often complicated consequences for remaining within its boundaries or for stepping outside of them. For example, individuals who are nonwhite or working class (those who do not fit the culturally engrained mold of acceptable Western gay subjectivity) do not stand to benefit as clearly by coming out as those who are more normative; indeed, more *white*)—problematizing the often unquestioned political success of such actions (Fraser, 1999). Indeed, the act of coming out suggests that one's LGBT/Q identity was invisible in the first place, but as I would argue, that identity is invisible only with regard to certain bodies (namely, white, homonormative, middle- to upper class bodies), perpetuating assumptions that characterize LGBT/Q identity in particularly raced, classed, and gendered ways. Explaining this further, Gross (1991) wrote:

The resentment against those who choose to stay in well-appointed closets rests on more than an understandable anger at their refusal to join or assist the gay liberation movement. The argument made most often is that, by staying in the closet, successful, prominent homosexuals in all walks of life help perpetuate the invisibility that fuels anti-gay stereotypes. (p. 358)

Clearly, the call for visibility is an important feature of the LGBT/Q movement, albeit one that reflects the interests of only certain community members, and that harkens back to the nation's founding documents that call for the establishment of a democratic society.

Balancing a complicated tension between the relative safety that the closet provides for sexual minorities and the political invisibility to which it leads, LGBT/Q individuals must weigh costs and benefits of coming out of the closet with their experiences. In some instances coming out is not desirable and cultural strangers might prefer to avoid coming out, but still want to keep the closet door ajar (Decena, 2008). Indeed, many LGBT/Q individuals might remain closeted in certain social domains but be *out* in others, always evaluating what is at stake with each "outing." In this way, LGBT/Q individuals participate in a politics of (in)visibility that carefully manages their identity in relation to possibilities of establishing/participating within broader neoliberally informed (national) communities.

(Undocumented) migrants also must engage in a politics of (in)visibility when they mediate their "life in the shadows." Unlike the closet that metaphorically organizes LGBT/Q experiences, the shadow metaphor often has been used to mark migrants' supposed invisibility and lack of political presence (Galindo, 2010). According to Rancière (1999), undocumented migrants' invisibility results from the categorization of their bodies into two groupings: "those that one sees and those that one does not see" (p. 22). The metaphor of the shadows locates

migrants who occupy its reaches as being further from U.S. civilization (Chávez, in press), or, as I argue, further from U.S. domains of domesticity and nation, than does the metaphor of the closet. Although the closet is a space that often opens up into the home—a privileged, albeit troubled, domestic space within the nation (Moon, 1999)—the shadows are not as closely associated with U.S. domains of domesticity. Undocumented migrants' ambiguous relationship to the nation is what leads them to be perceived as threatening, in particular for the danger they pose to whiteness as potentially hybrid subjects—hybrid insofar as many have become so familiar with U.S. cultural expectations they can recognize and deploy those logics (such as coming out) to their advantage. Shugart (2007) noted:

The challenges to whiteness in a contemporary, global, and highly mediated age are many, varied, and increasing exponentially, and in fact, in such a postmodern era, hybridity may well represent the most lethal and pervasive threat facing whiteness. (p. 134)

The metaphor of the shadows that conceals undocumented migrants carries with it a more dangerous quality, if only due to metaphorical significance of lightness and darkness. Popular cultural narratives regularly describe shadows as dark recesses where danger lurks, areas whose darkness conceals threats that, otherwise, would be obvious in the light of day. Public discourses that rhetorically locate migrants within the shadows always already cast them (literally) in a negative light, contributing to unfavorable cultural stigmas that regularly follow them through the U.S cultural landscape.

The closet and the shadows are social locations in which many cultural strangers have been placed by dominant cultural groups, or willingly place themselves, and what the video testimonials collected for analysis demonstrate is that migrant and/or LGBT/Q individuals,

nevertheless, may strategically use these spaces to reveal certain identities. In this way, some video participants rely on otherwise marginal social locations to hide select qualities of their identity and to expose others. Although it is the case that some bodies are unable to operate invisibly (due to the social stigma that is associated with their phenotypical appearance), even those materially apparent qualities are mediated through video participants' intentional silence about them, and, thus, they are rendered discursively invisible, suggesting how coming out and remaining hidden are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, through deeper analysis, it becomes apparent that individuals frequently move between visibility and invisibility in their discourses of belonging as a way to frame and/or balance national (neoliberal) expectations for good citizenship.

The core of U.S. identity and community membership is constituted by a regular mediation of visibility and invisibility. This mediation occurs both discursively and materially, serving to uniquely position cultural strangers *in visibility*, a state in which they must carefully manage the complicated nexus of their material bodies, intended self-representations, and broader U.S. cultural expectations. On a daily basis, U.S. national community members balance a delicate tension between their public and private selves; however, for members of marginalized communities who previously have occupied metaphorical spaces, such as closets and/or shadows, this tension is even greater. As is evidenced in the video testimonials collected for this research, migrant and LGBT/Q individuals use online video forums to manage their appeals for U.S. national belonging and inclusion by participating in a variety of discursive performances that either bring selected components of their identities into the open and/or that manage the effects of being outed by another. Thus, migrant and LGBT/Q video participants showcase how cultural strangers make choices rhetorically to manage their identities within the larger U.S. landscape—

choices that demonstrate the always already complicit ways that visibility and invisibility function in tandem (rather than exclusively) to demarcate conditions of U.S. national belonging. Although one's body can operate invisibly because of its racial (white), classed (middle- to upper), and/or gendered privilege (masculine), it might be necessary for such bodies to discursively mark themselves as visible in other ways; for instance, to label themselves as undocumented and/or as queer to garner acceptance for these marginal subject locations. Concurrently, some material bodies are overtly visible, with their difference seen as a trespass into protected national spaces, and for whom invisibility is discursively desirable, especially as it renders less consequential one's body and the perceived identity for which it is a vessel.

As this chapter argues, cultural strangers resistively accommodate hegemonic cultural demands, participating in larger national discourses of (in)visibility that highlight competing ways that citizens and strangers must negotiate material and rhetorical visibility and invisibility. To demonstrate this claim, I discuss discourses of (in)visibility that circulate in contemporary U.S. culture, paying particular attention to (a) the metaphors of the closet, the shadows, and coming out; (b) the "logic of a national future; (c) performances of patriotism; and (d) how cultural strangers manage being "outed."

The Dialectical Tension of (In)visibility

U.S. national belonging is a sought-after category of inclusion, drawing thousands of people across U.S. borders each year, and leading to forceful LGBT/Q rights-based efforts to make access to U.S. national belonging more available. For sexual minorities and undocumented migrants whose identities, historically, have necessitated a degree of secrecy, the very public demands of civic participation, as well as social movements' efforts to leverage increased equality, produce a tension that cultural strangers must negotiate. Engaging in discourses of

(in)visibility—a set of discursive practices that balance the tension between visibility and invisibility—cultural strangers alter the construction of national discourses of U.S. identity and belonging to redraw the boundaries of *what* and *who* might constitute a U.S. insider. Extending contemporary notions of visibility politics (see, e.g., Brouwer, 1998; Gray, 2009a, 2009b), a politics of (in)visibility does not assume the value of visibility, or the harm in invisibility but, instead, suggests that careful mediation between the two dialectical tensions is a discursive strategy that cultural strangers employ in their discourses of belonging. As I argue, observing how migrant and/or LGBT/Q community members work with these metaphors of isolation, as part and parcel of their strategy for belonging, suggests the importance of national discourses of (in)visibility and the need for U.S. community members to always balance their identities along this axis of visibility and invisibility.

As this chapter explains, migrants and LGBT/Q community members reveal the national tension of (in)visibility by engaging in discourses of belonging that negotiate national commitments to whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism. To negotiate U.S. national demands for public and private citizenship, migrant and LGBT/Q individuals use coming out as a discursive strategy to (a) reinforce the “logic of a national future” (Berlant, 1997, p. 18), (b) reinforce the “benevolent” authority of the nation, and (c) manage being outed as a way for national authority to be reinstated. Through these efforts, migrant and LGBT/Q individuals participate in discursive practices of resistive accommodation that (re)construct public narratives of U.S. belonging that strategically engage in a politics of (in)visibility.

Fundamentally, all of the video testimonials collected for analysis are individual demonstrations of public patriotism and citizenship insofar as they were recorded with a public audience in mind. Although the 154 videos are instances of individuals coming out, there was

additional evidence, after conducting a close reading, that many migrant and LGBT/Q individuals also *talk about* coming out, or being out with their respective statuses. Closer investigation of *those* testimonials led me to isolate discursive moments that provide the fodder for this analysis. In particular, when migrants and LGBT/Q individuals use coming out (and, subsequently, related strategies of passing or remaining hidden), they construct discourses of belonging that attempt to intervene in national narratives of inclusion and exclusion. Although each discursive act of sharing one's story publicly is a personal decision, it also is a decidedly public one, with implications for national visibility and invisibility that, ultimately, affect the possibility for cultural strangers to be included in the broader U.S. community, and for them to influence constructions of U.S. national belonging.

Health and Happiness: Reinforcing the “Logic of a National Future”

Migrant and LGBT/Q video testimonials collected for analysis privilege the performative act of coming out as opposed to remaining silent, accommodating national demands for public citizenship but, simultaneously, resisting them as well, by requiring publicity for preferably privatized characteristics. Individuals who participate in Testimony: Take a Stand or the We Are America campaign have done so knowing that their remarks will be uploaded onto the internet and will be visible to countless others.

Balancing their personal well-being with demands of the larger cultural communities of which they are (or desire to be) a part, video participants who make themselves visible to the nation place themselves within the national field of discipline that governs their material and discursive performances of belonging in different ways. Thus, even though cultural strangers may make a calculated decision to come out of the closet and/or the shadows, they must make subsequent decisions, as a result of this visibility, that continue to be restricted to nationally

appropriate, normative performances of race, sexuality, gender expression, and other related identities—identities that, largely, are scripted by the nation’s neoliberal investments. In spite of the difficulties presented by both publicity and privacy, the politics of (in)visibility pulls steadily, calling cultural strangers to be (selectively) visible.

LGBT/Q video participants in both the Testimony: Take a Stand and the We Are America videos talk about coming out for personal reasons that have led to improved psychological and social conditions, and, thereby, contribute to a public discourse about the benefits of living a visible life. As these testimonials demonstrate, members of this LGBT/Q community come out (as sexual minorities) in these videos to counteract *particular* stereotypes that include (a) the cultural myth that gays and lesbians are specters of disease and death, and (b) that their sexual desires are perverse and shameful.

LGBT/Q individuals participating in Testimony: Take a Stand distance themselves from stereotypical concerns that they are symbols of death (Crimp, 2002; Puar, 2007), and that their blood somehow is diseased or impure (Bennett, 2008, 2009), and frame the act of coming out as offering new life for sexual minorities who previously have been living unfulfilled and/or unhealthy lives. As Puar (2007) explained:

There is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families). (p. xii)

These cultural tropes, considered in conjunction with the material bodies of LGBT/Q community members reveal some interesting characteristics of U.S. expectations for visibility and invisibility. Within these cultural metaphors, the diseased body—sickened by its sexual depravity—is understood as both *hyper-visible*, yet *invisible*, a spectacle that is intended to

publically warn LGBT/Q individuals of consequences for their sexual acts, yet whose sickness and ghostly presence in this world is so temporary that it can fade away. Just as the material body serves these dual functions, video participants' discourses of belonging imply that the diseased LGBT/Q body is rhetorically understood as the negative—*UNfit*, *UNwell*, *UNhealthy*—defined by its absence of characteristics rather than by their presence, but also rendering such physical deteriorations extraordinarily visible by calling rhetorical attention to them. To contend with this stigma, LGBT/Q individuals use coming out to balance how they are perceived as a cultural group, and they do so by managing their (in)visibility within larger U.S. national spaces.

In one example from the video testimonials, Jessica O. (2011) relays a painful tale of growing up, discussing her dad's death at age 16 and her simultaneous struggle to realize her sexual orientation. After chronicling years that she spent contemplating suicide, abusing illegal drugs and alcohol, and performing poorly in school, she finally "was more honest with herself," moving away to go to college, becoming president of that college's LGBT/Q social organization, and working for Equality Florida (An LGBT/Q rights organization). Inspired by these experiences, as Jessica notes, "I went to Tallahassee and told my story to legislators there and busted out crying. It was, like, the best part of my activism ever" (Jessica O Testifies, 2011). Jessica states that the unhealthy and dangerous behaviors she had engaged in as a closeted young person (biographical content that demonstrates a high level of self-disclosure) turned around when she became *publically* involved in LGBT/Q activism and shared her story in front of a group of legislators. Navigating the concurrent demands and expectations for visibility and privacy, Jessica shares detailed personal information about herself, redrawing the lines of what information is appropriate for *public* consumption and who is an appropriate national community member. Discourses of belonging such as this resist and accommodate the national logics of

whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism by simultaneously challenging national expectations for what is to remain private (nonheteronormativity), and heeding national expectations for public (docile) citizenship.

The role of visibility is a powerful undercurrent in these narratives, both for how the medium features participants' material bodies and for how they present coming out as a desirable rhetorical strategy. Highlighting qualities such as vivacity, futurity, and health (through her discourse, as well as through capturing her physical body in action by virtue of film), Jessica O. and other video participants combat culturally specific stereotypes that prevent cultural strangers from *visibly* contributing to the logic of the national future. Furthermore, seeing video participants' material bodies deliver discursive messages about their fitness for inclusion can affect how those viewing the videos understand their message, and its implications for U.S. national belonging. Although all video participants have the option to publish an open letter to the public (in lieu of a video testimonial), the choice made by Jessica and others to be filmed allows their physicality to be captured. The medium (video), therefore, allows video participants' material bodies to contribute to the larger discursive messages that are being framed in these testimonials. LGBT/Q video participants such as Jessica render themselves visible, both discursively and materially, and, thereby, reinforce their presence (by virtue of their visibility) in the nation and its neoliberal future.

In many instances, coming out allows cultural strangers whose bodies are read in particular ways to take control of how their material body and/or identity are perceived by others. In another example, Amy L. demonstrates this agency, explaining how unhappy she had been in her heterosexual married life, and describing how depression had led her to contemplate suicide. Amy shares:

I needed to open my mouth and start talking. I started talking to a therapist. I actually talked to my husband who was very understanding. He actually knew what I was going to say before I said it. And I talked to friends and, finally, to family, and started living life the way it was supposed to be. (AmyH Testifies, 2011)

As this clip further illustrates, it was only through coming out and publically sharing her sexual identity (as well as her very intimate struggles with suicide and depression) that Amy is able to recapture her life and to begin living in a more fulfilling way.

To narrate personal stories in such a public way, discursively locates members of this community as part of the nation's future. Publically narrating her intention to *live*, Amy claims her future as a member of the LGBT/Q community, but also as a member of the broader national community. Even though LGBT/Q community members have been marked by members of the dominant and/or normative culture as jeopardizing the national future (Berlant, 1997), Amy and Jessica's testimony suggest how members of this marginalized community engage in discursive efforts in ways that render them *visible*—particularly in narratives of the nation's neoliberal future. Discursively placing themselves in visibility, these video participants challenge hegemonic structures that have marginalized them (by virtue of their presence), but, concurrently, they accommodate them as well (by not seeking to fundamentally alter the logics that cohere such structures). In doing this, video participants craft a new place for themselves, whereby they are discursively (re)located within narratives of the national future (so long as they continue to selectively render certain aspects of their identity invisible—a topic to which I return in greater detail in the final analysis (chapter 5). Such actions, Richardson (2004) noted, challenge the presumption of heterosexuality in the public sphere and claim a right to LGBT/Q public visibility—a challenge issued by participating in the alteration of *what* and *who* constitutes

“public” life and the nation’s future. As these testimonials demonstrate, LGBT/Q references that equate coming out to *living* and to *life* highlight qualities, such as vivacity, futurity, and health, as essential components in sustaining the nation.

Detailing how coming out has led to greater personal satisfaction and fulfillment—and, more particularly, how it has led to a more vivacious and fulfilling life—strategically counteracts the public stigma that marks LGBT/Q bodies as diseased; however, in another significant rhetorical effort, LGBT/Q community members also adopt discourses about coming out that attempt to excoriate the shame that accompanies their sexual preference and identity. Warner (1999) explained that a culture of sexual shame marks nonheterosexual, nonmonogamous, extramarital sex as deviant. As a result of that stigma, LGBT/Q individuals who desire increasing degrees of national belonging must get out from underneath this charge (and this feeling) that the most intimate parts of their desire and identity are shameful, and, instead, find a way to make themselves visible while keeping their desire private. Warner (1999) noted:

When a given sexual norm has such deep layers of sediment, or blankets enough territory to seem universal, the effort of wriggling out from under it can be enormous. The burden becomes even heavier when one must first overcome shame, or break with the tacit force of sexual morality that other people take to be obvious. (p. 6)

What begins to reveal itself in these video testimonials is the delicate way in which U.S. national identity and belonging are predicated on the careful management of the tensions inherent in (in)visibility—a management that requires constant attention to the facets of one’s material and discursive identities in relation to the expectations of U.S. society, such that coming out or remaining closeted are not as unrelated as scholars and U.S. citizens think.

Even though undocumented migrants participating in the We Are America campaign also adopt coming out as a strategy to advance their claims for belonging, their discourses of belonging and understandings of this action are different than those of members of the LGBT/Q community in *Testimony: Take a Stand*, even going so far as to discuss coming out as risking one's life rather than rendering one a healthy national community member who can contribute to the longevity of the nation. In particular, LGBT/Q community members use coming out to make their health and vitality visible; but that keeps their sexual practices private, opening them to new fields of discipline—a discursive practice, as explained below, that differs from migrants' application of coming out that highlight the risks they are taking and the danger in which are putting themselves.

Performing Patriotism: Reinforcing the “Benevolent” Authority of the Nation

Unlike LGBT/Q testimonials, which largely feature phenotypically white, nonheterosexual bodies, the majority of the videos collected for the We Are America campaign feature heterosexual and phenotypically nonwhite bodies, which require different strategies for managing (in)visibility. Although the migrants featured in these videos also use coming out as a discursive strategy to undo cultural stigmas and to alter the tenor of national public discourses, they address different cultural attitudes than do LGBT/Q individuals, and they may reinforce the “benevolent” authority of the nation. Explaining the nexus of race, gender, sexuality, class, and geographic location that impact cultural strangers' social location (and their subsequent discourses of belonging), Ong (1996) articulated, the specific challenges that racialized individuals may experience in the United States: “Because human capital, self-discipline, and consumer power are associated with whiteness, these attributes are important criteria of nonwhite citizenship in Western democracies in the ways that whiteness, heteronormativity and

neoliberalism directly impact racialized individuals” (p. 739). Migrant video participants’ discursive appeals, must then take into consideration their nonwhite racial status in ways that many LGBT/Q video participants were able to bypass, even though both communities are ultimately crafting discourses of belonging that must contend with the nation’s investments in whiteness.

Discursively publicizing its benign authority on one of the nation’s most prestigious national landmarks, the United States makes itself visible as a beacon of generosity and strength—offering to the world’s most desperate individuals a place where they might be “taken in” to the hearth of the nation. Memorialized on the Statue of Liberty, the nation’s call to care for the world’s most desperate individuals reminds U.S. citizens, “Give me your tired your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” (The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, n.d.). Narratives such as this help to reinforce the role of whiteness in the nation by framing the United States as a place where the disenfranchised can find security, however, what remains discursively invisible is that this security depends upon the benign generosity of those with power and influence (those who can access, among other privileges, whiteness). Migrants who use the We Are America campaign to petition for their inclusion draw on these narratives of the nation’s beneficence, (re)building its “altruistic” identity through discursive performances of coming out as public servants who forever are indebted to the nation’s openness and willing to serve it for the common good. Working against cultural stigmas that see migrants as dangerous and/or as a threat to U.S. resources (see, e.g., Cisneros, 2008, 2011; Delgado, 1998; Flores, 2003; Moreman & Calafell, 2008; Ono & Sloop,

2002; Santa Ana, 2002), these video participants come out as *public servants*—docile, abiding, and willing to be governed by the nation’s laws.

Participation in public service has long been part of the national calling of citizenship, and inherent in this practice is the understanding that public service is both for the public good and performed for a public audience. Public officials, police officers, and military service members go to work to protect and serve the nation’s public, but they also perform their jobs under public scrutiny. Public service, as it ebbs and flows between *servicing* the public and *performing* for it, represents a place where cultural strangers can significantly leverage public opinion in their favor. Even though it stands to reason that both migrant and LGBT/Q community members participate in public service occupations, among the videos surveyed for analysis, overwhelmingly, migrant identified video participants were the only ones to include this in their discourses of belonging. Repeatedly, across the We Are America videos, participants stressed their desire to serve the nation, aware of both the imagined audience for their filmed testimonials but also of the audience that daily legitimates migrants’ public works. Acts of public service directly contribute to the larger national narrative of what the United States represents, rendering cultural strangers who participate in such acts as visible community members (instead of as shadowed interlopers) whose actions affect public discourses of what and who constitutes a U.S. cultural insider.

As cultural strangers talk about their commitment to serve the nation, they influence the structure of the public sphere by virtue of their presence within it, but they also strengthen its value, reasserting the powerful cultural narrative that the United States is a beneficent nation to which everyone owes a debt. Public service and civil service jobs allow people to directly affect the quality of life for U.S. citizens. As the U.S. Department of State (n.d.) described, “A career

in the Civil Service is a unique opportunity to help Americans abroad and represent America to the world” (para. 2). Cultural strangers who exist in liminal spaces of U.S. national belonging and inclusion make themselves visible through talking about their participation in public service—effectively mediating the national politics of (in)visibility in ways that both resist and accommodate demands for U.S. national identity and belonging. In particular, migrants accommodate the national expectations for (grateful) public citizens but they resist the concurrent expectation that (undocumented) migrants’ labor must remain invisible. Thus, testimonials that highlight participants’ public service to the nation (a) materially and ideologically reinforce the authority of the U.S. nation, (b) use the public profile of their work to legitimate their *visible* presence within these national spaces, and (c) dispel the myth that identifies migrants as a threat to the nation.

Whether by defending the nation from foreign threats or by participating in local or federal government, migrant video participants rhetorically embrace public service as a key component in their discourses of belonging. The visibility of such narratives rhetorically functions to reinforce their debt to the U.S. nation and to further instantiate a hierarchical set of power relationships that reinscribe the national value of the U.S. government. Migrants discuss their desire to serve the nation in a way that suggests their subordination, publically reinforcing a hierarchical power relationship within the nation that renders them *servants* to a higher power. In other words, by (re)iterating the significance of public/civil service, cultural strangers profess the value of the system that they have agreed to serve, but they also begin to corrode the integrity on which such systems, historically, have been based—specifically, that public service to the nation be provided by loyal (white) U.S. citizens (with the nation’s reliance on migrant labor remaining invisible).

Although cultural strangers call on public service as a way to demonstrate their allegiance to the U.S. nation, what deserves greater attention is what narratives about public service suggest about national expectations for (in)visibility, and how such expectations are addressed by those desiring belonging. Coming out as undocumented, migrants make an otherwise invisible aspect of their identity visible (although, for many migrants in these videos, their racialized bodies already are suspect). When migrants come out as undocumented, they call attention to their citizenship status (a status that one might expect could be materially addressed with different documentation), and they distract attention away from their raced bodies—characteristics that cannot easily be materially altered. Coming out as undocumented might then be understood as a *lightening strategy*, both metaphorically and literally, as it takes migrants out of the shadows and casts them in a light that presents their status (rather than their race) as that which is significant. Directing attention in this way, migrants manage national discourses of (in)visibility, by using language to render their raced bodies invisible, but making their documentation status visible.

Migrants weave their discourses of belonging to cast their nonwhite status to the shadows in favor of highlighting their documentation status and the value of their labor. By demonstrating their unwavering national commitment, undocumented migrants concurrently reinforce the nation's identity as a beacon of democracy, but, additionally, they contradict common U.S. narratives that suggest (undocumented) migrants are a drain on national resources and that their labor is not valuable. Muhammed Zahid Chaudry (2011), a war veteran appearing in the We Are America's featured video archive, powerfully expressed in his testimonial his conviction to serve the nation. As the video opens, the camera focuses on a carefully folded and meticulously encased U.S. Flag that demonstrates the speaker's military service. Immediately after viewing the flag, the camera pans to Chaudry, who sits beside his military honors in a

wheelchair. Chaudry faces deportation in spite of his military service, and uses the We Are America campaign to publicize his struggle. His testimonial begins:

While in service for the American people I have received injuries, which made me use the wheelchair today. As you can see for yourself, I have truly given my heart and my body to America. I decided to serve my country because I had a very heart-to-heart talk with my father so many years ago, and he told me, he said, “If you love America so much, you should go and serve the country you love. (Zahid’s Story, 2011)

Using the materiality of his body and the carefully preserved U.S. flag as evidence of his service to, and belonging within, the nation, Chaudry publically performs his allegiance to the United States—something that stands in contrast to his Pakistani features, which never are directly referenced. Using the materiality of his disabled body, Chaudry comes out as a public servant who has sacrificed his physical health for the well-being of the nation. Although he never explicitly references his phenotypically nonwhite appearance, nor his accented English, he discursively frames his appeal to highlight only particularly commendable qualities of heroism and patriotism—qualities that he tries to discursively de-link from the properties of whiteness and/or U.S. citizenship. Furthermore, Chaudry engages in resistive accommodation when he highlights, very visibly, his military background—an act of public service that caused him to be physically disabled, but that occurred alongside his narrative of being illegally in the United States. Indeed, Chaudry discursively manages his material body by referencing his disability and by not naming his race or ethnicity.

In another video testimonial, Saif Kahn (2011) also resistively accommodates larger national discourses of (in)visibility when he explains, “I want to give back to the United States. I am so happy I’m a part of this new country now, and I decided to join the Virginia National

Guard” (A veteran’s story). Kahn, ethnically Indian and having moved to the United States as a young boy, similarly does not call attention to his phenotypical appearance. Instead, Kahn presents his military participation as a way to repay a debt or a deficit—something that stands in stark contrast to common cultural narratives that locate migrants as being ungrateful for the opportunities and the security the United States has offered. Although legally in the United States, Kahn narrates his story in a similar fashion to Chaudry, making his service to the nation visible, but, through his silence about race/ethnicity, rendering his nonwhite, Eastern appearance invisible. Thus, by leaving his Eastern, nonwhite material body unspoken, he marks these aspects of his character as being discursively invisible, reframing his identity to highlight only desirable (and subordinated) qualities of his character. Choosing which facets of identity to make discursively visible and invisible is a primary way that migrants craft their discourses of belonging—resistively accommodating national investments in whiteness.

Speaking not of military service but of her role in the U.S. House of Delegates, Ana Sol Gutierrez’s (2011) narrative highlights her role as a (public) servant to/for the nation. Gutierrez’s testimony begins with a text over that reads, “Since becoming a U.S. citizen in the early 80s, Ana has been giving back to her community as a public servant” (A life of service). Just as Kahn talks about his military service as a way to demonstrate respect for his new country, Gutierrez’s testimonial is framed in similar terms, identifying her as someone who has made a decision to provide for the well-being of the nation through public service. Although Gutierrez’s narrative is similar to Kahn’s and Chaudry’s, it differs in her explicit use of the words “to serve.” In particular, making herself visible as a public servant, Gutierrez locates herself as a subordinate—accommodating national expectations for citizens to provide service to the nation, but also visibly demonstrating her belonging (evidenced by the fact that she serves as an elected

official). Gutierrez's testimonial discursively frames her participation in the U.S. House of Delegates as a performance of accommodation, but, simultaneously, demonstrates the value of migrant bodies to foundational systems of U.S. government.

National discourses of (in)visibility require cultural insiders and outsiders to constantly balance shifting requirements of publicity and privacy to stay within the margins of the U.S. community's standards of cultural acceptability—an acceptability that is tenuously managed by a rhetorical mediation of one's material body, discursive self-presentation, and national standards of identity and belonging. Extending what these testimonials suggest, certain aspects of one's identity should be visible in the public sphere, whereas others should remain invisible. By visibly showcasing their public service and commitment to the nation, and by rendering their racial difference discursively invisible, cultural strangers move rhetorically between these categories, coming out to the (dominant) U.S. public in strategic ways that highlight particular characteristics and not others. As their testimonials demonstrate, discourses of national belonging depend on a public—private divide that requires cultural insiders (and outsiders) to constantly balance shifting requirements of visibility and invisibility to stay within the margins of cultural acceptability.

Given that many of these testimonials are delivered by DREAM activists (undocumented migrant youth who were illegally brought to this country as children and who now are petitioning for the DREAM Act (a piece of legislation that will provide a path to legal U.S. citizenship for certain migrant youth), their narrative appeals for belonging emphasize the ways these individuals could benefit the nation if they were able to access full U.S. citizenship rights. In particular, because many of these youth realized their undocumented status during their high school years, their dreams to participate in military service, attend college, and/or serve in the

U.S. government never have materialized. Anguiano and Chávez (2011) explained the significance of this segment of the migrant population, noting, “Focusing on immigrant youth is significant in that these young people retain a unique relationship with the government, and subsequently the public sphere due to their participation in the public school educational system” (p. 83). Such a unique relationship with U.S. public domains positions these young people to engage in national discourses of (in)visibility in significant ways, leading to some of the migrant rights movement’s most visible protests.¹

Michael Nazario’s testimony (2011) is filmed in front of an urban campsite that he and several other DREAM activists erected outside Arizona Senator John McCain’s office after trying (and failing) to enlist in the military. After detailing how he was turned away due to his undocumented status, Michael explains that he and his fellow DREAM activists set up camp in front of the senator’s office to deliver a quick message to the senator; specifically, “Like many other Americans, we, too, love this nation. We’re patriotic, and we are asking for an opportunity to serve” (Michael’s Story). Nazario’s language in this quote (and throughout his testimonial), although direct, nevertheless, is submissive, as he is *asking* for the opportunity to *serve*—a discursive move that signals DREAMers’ apparent adoption of U.S. American dream logics. Phrasing his concerns in this way, Michael successfully comes out as a dedicated patriot and as a committed public servant, couching his public protest within a discourse of respect and deference for laws and protocols of the nation—*accommodating* the call for national public service but *resisting* the current legislation that does not allow him to participate in such structures. Nazario participates in national discourses of (in)visibility by organizing his protest to occur in a very busy urban area, near a prominent senator’s office, and setting up a primitive campsite in a bustling first-world cityscape—something that features his (and other migrant youths’) reliance

on *visibility* to communicate a point about migrants' otherwise *invisible* contribution to the nation.

David Cho (2011), similarly exiled from military participation and other forms of public service, was filmed delivering a public speech discussing similar concerns. Cho emphatically states:

I actually *want* to serve in the in the U.S. Airforce after graduation. I *want* to attend Harvard Kennedy School Government, and, ultimately, I *want* to become a U.S. Senator because I *want* to make changes in this country. (David Cho's Story)

In this excerpt, Cho expresses his desire to serve the nation in a variety of capacities, contributing to a larger body of migrant discourse that foregrounds (visible) docility, but, like other migrants, he leaves his racial/ethnic identity unspoken. Thus, in the very visible performance of delivering a speech for a captive and extended audience, Cho resistively accommodates national discourses of (in)visibility in such a way to discursively claim a place in the nation for his phenotypically nonwhite body.

As seen, migrants' testimonials that were highlighted in this section indicate a careful balance of (in)visibility whereby video participants engage national commitments to whiteness in different ways—specifically, featuring the invisibility of nonwhite racial identity and the visibility of other identity markers, such as immigration status. Through this public forum, migrants capitalize on self-presentations to recast themselves favorably, but that also allow them to intervene in larger discourses of national belonging—shifting the composition of such categories by virtue of their presence. In this way, migrants both visibly alter legislated boundaries of U.S. citizenship with their presence in public service and silently shift the racial field of U.S. citizenship, attempting to relegate their racial/ethnic features to the background of

discourses of national belonging. Certainly, coming out is one influential way in which migrant and LGBT/Q individuals engage in larger discourses of U.S. national belonging; however, as explained below, there are other instances when these individuals are “outed” against their will.

Out in the Open: Managing Being “Outed”

All of the examples discussed previously showcased cultural strangers’ agency in determining when, how, and to whom they will make themselves visible, but the practice of coming out cannot always be managed in that way. Although people certainly can make the decision to come out, they also can be *outed*, or publically identified for their difference by a third party. There are different implications for individuals who identify themselves as *other* and those who are identified by another as *other*; in particular, if people intentionally come out, they retain some agency over their identity and body, willfully engaging in the impression management that such a performance requires. Conversely, if people are outed by another person(s), they have limited agency or control over the information that is shared and, instead, may publically deny their identity to save face or claim their identity in spite of being unprepared to deal with the likely social and cultural consequences that result. Marginalized communities negotiate being outed by constructing discourses of belonging that manage the consequences of exposure—exposure of their previously (invisible) identity and the implications for how this revelation affects the always already visible phenotypical characteristics that mark their material body.

For people who live in closets or in shadows, the discursive utterance of coming out, certainly, never is an isolated act (Sedgwick, 1999) but, instead, is a series of speech acts, each to different communities, for different purposes, and at different times. Migrant and/or LGBT/Q individuals constantly are engaged in a coming out process, managing the release of personal

information where possible, and accordingly, moving between positions of visibility and invisibility. Although all video participants intentionally made the decision to publically share their stories—coming out to vast virtual audiences—many participants describe coming out as an experience of *being forced out*. For example, some migrant participants who lived comfortably in the United States relayed stories of being pulled over for minor traffic violations, only to be identified by police officers as undocumented immigrants and, consequently, arrested, detained, or deported under the prying eyes of their neighbors. Although LGBT/Q individuals certainly can be outed as well, interestingly, none of the testimonials analyzed depict members of that community being *unwillingly* outed—a point returned to at the end of this section.

Mandeep Chahal (2011) conveys the difficulty of coming out in a public speech she delivers that was filmed and archived as part of the We Are America campaign. Facing deportation back to India, as Chahal describes:

I went to the few people I had trusted with the truth about my status. We sat down and decided that with deportation just 55 days away, the best way to stop this was to go public. To an undocumented immigrant, that’s a scary, scary term. The fear of being discovered is one that constantly weighs on our minds. You learn to avoid bringing attention to yourself, to live below the radar at all times, to stay hidden in the shadows at all times. (DREAMer calls on President Obama)

Unlike LGBT/Q individuals who use coming out as a way to claim their places within the nation’s future, migrants who are outed see this visibility as threatening. As Chahal describes, many migrants go to great lengths to keep their status hidden and to be “outed” is to lose one’s ability to manage the nation’s expectations for (in)visibility.

Throughout the We Are America campaign, migrants describe experiences of others outing them for being undocumented. In some instances, this outing is a surprise to migrants, revealing a previously unknown aspect of their identity, whereas at other times, migrants who are outed knew of their undocumented status and tried to conceal it for fear of consequences. Whether one's identity and/or status is intentionally or unintentionally revealed, such revelations must be seen as discursive efforts that influence how one's material body is perceived by the U.S. public.

In another example, Olga Zanella (2011), demonstrates *how* members of the migrant community are outed and consequences of such actions. Olga's story aired on a local news segment that was included within the We Are America Video Archive, and begins with a news anchor remarking, "Facing deportation, Olga Zanella decides to go public with her struggle to gain citizenship." The video then cuts to a reporter in the field, who explains, "Olga Zanella's family might not be ready to come out of the shadow of illegal immigration but she has no other choice. She is, again, facing deportation, but this time, there are no tears." Finally, Zanella remarks, "I'm actually not worried. I'm ready to fight this" (Days Away). Although Zanella has been outed as an undocumented migrant, she takes her newly minted visibility and uses it in her favor—outing herself on this local news segment and through the We Are America campaign. Through these efforts, Zanella reclaims control over her visibility by reshaping the discourse surrounding her belonging within the nation. Although Zanella's previous invisibility does not allow her to easily engage in public discourses about national belonging, being outed (and, now, newly visible to the broader community) is something from which she can benefit.

Even though many migrants' identities have been made public against their will, it is apparent in a number of testimonials that many of these individuals reclaim control over their

(in)visibility within their discourses of belonging. Outed individuals ascribe to a politics of visibility, equating greater visibility with greater influence and, consequently, they try to capture some of the public's attention. For instance, Ricardo Muñiz (2011), capitalizing on his visibility, explains:

On May 19th, I received a letter of deportation saying I had to leave the country on June 9, 2011. I felt, as if the world I knew had come to an end. I felt like those chains that had been holding me down finally won. My mom and my siblings all have legal status; I am the only one without. Umm, I lost my court case, and it felt like I lost my family as well. I'm asking you guys for your support by signing this petition that would, ultimately, grant me a stay here. (DREAMer Fights to Stay in the U.S.)

Describing his documentation status as “chains that had been holding [him] down,” Muñiz discursively constructs his invisibility as an undocumented immigrant as being oppressive. Although viewers do not know the circumstances of Muñiz's deportation (or his forced outing), like Zanella, Muñiz uses this new visibility in his discourses of belonging. Muñiz directly appeals to an audience to “grant him a stay of deportation,” and petitions the benevolence of the nation's community members (and their authority) to make a decision on his behalf—a rhetorical move that allows U.S. community members to maintain their position of authority and to exercise it in consideration of his circumstances. Muñiz's discourse of belonging works to reinforce the authority of the nation, and its citizens who might grant him access, but, nevertheless, questions the national regulations that limit his inclusion.

Returning to Mandeep Chahal's public speech (2011), it is clear that she uses the inevitability of her deportation (made possible by being forcibly outed) to embrace her visibility—ultimately leveraging that exposure in her appeal for belonging. As Chahal relays:

Having kept my status secret from even my closest friends, going to my community for help was not easy. To expose my secret to everyone I've known, to put my future in their hands, was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. When the Facebook group went up and the message was sent out to my friends, colleagues, and community members, I was scared. I didn't know what to expect. I had no idea how people would respond. What happened next was bigger than anyone had expected. The news spread across Facebook like wildfire. The overwhelming support I received knocked me off my feet. Once the news went out, my friends sent the petition to their friends, who sent it to their friends, who, in turn, invited more and more people. In the end, nearly 20,000 faxes were sent to senators, ICE, and the department of homeland security. Thousands of people signed a letter on my behalf and hundreds of people called their senators, and it worked!

(DREAMer calls on President Obama)

As Chahal's and other migrant's narratives demonstrate, although visibility is not always desirable (nor even elected), petitioning to a broader public in this way—outing oneself—uses one's visibility as a resource to shift public discourses of national belonging.

Making themselves visible to a vast U.S. public, migrant video participants rely on the publicity of their appeals to alter the circumstances that threaten their deportation. Using the visibility that being outed necessitates, migrants in these videos make their appeals for inclusion to broad audiences, who, by virtue of these discursive moves, participate in the co-construction of alternative narratives of national identity and belonging. In particular, migrants in these videos resistively accommodate national discourses of (in)visibility by embracing their recently claimed visibility and by denouncing national attempts to use that visibility against them.

Even though LGBT/Q community members also can be outed by others, it does not appear, in these videos, that such outing is the case. Migrant video participants' narratives about being outed suggest that their experience of being exposed by the nation, although an invasive action, is something that they can and will use to their advantage. Having lived invisibly within the nation for extensive periods of time, many migrants are accustomed to and familiar national discourses of belonging and value systems that they can use to their advantage when they make appeals for inclusion. Publically coming out with one's status (as either a member of the LGBT/Q community or the undocumented migrant community) and/or keeping other elements hidden is one way in which cultural strangers balance national investments in whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism.

Conclusion

Reaching all the way back to the nation's founding, documents, such as the Bill of Rights, are among the first explicit rhetorical texts to outline expectations for (public) citizenship and national belonging. Not only does the Bill of Rights protect free speech but it also communicates that free speech, and public participation within democratic discussion, is an expectation for national belonging. How marginal communities discursively frame and rhetorically intervene in discourses of national belonging reveals the significance of managing (in)visibility. Migrant and LGBT/Q individuals participating in forms of public protest (such as Testimony: Take a Stand or the We Are America campaign) attempt to legitimize themselves and their belonging through such activities, but in doing so may also alter the foundations on which such expectations are grounded, moving fluidly between accommodating and resisting dominant norms.

The nation's investment in (in)visibility calls on cultural insiders and outsiders to both visibly (civically) engage in the nation's call for public service and to invisibly (privately) manage their bodies and desires. Thus, as cultural strangers decide what aspects of identity to reveal, and to which publics, they engage in a fundamental practice of U.S. national belonging—the negotiation of (in)visibility—both revising their rhetorical appeals for national inclusion and affecting how these national tensions (and the subsequent identities which they inform) are constituted. Hence, the act of coming out operates on a personal and a social level, and it can be historically traced to demonstrate its cultural resonance in the United States.

As coming out became institutionalized in 1987 with National Coming Out Day, “the transformative power of self-identification to organize politics, culture and intimacy” became apparent, even though “the increase in visibility has not translated into progay stances at the voting booth or in the halls of congress” (Gray, 2009a, pp. 1182, 1163). Indeed, coming out has become a desired and celebrated act, allowing both the LGBT/Q community to gain (limited) recognition and national institutions of power to demonstrate their neoliberal commitment to multiculturalism. Cultural strangers' working through a confessional/therapeutic framework (Bailey, 2011), publically testify to their difference, locating previously identified deviant subjects as good, personally responsible neoliberal citizens.

The speech act of coming out immediately locates its speaker within a field of national discipline that suggests both compliance with national values and resistance to them. Flexing the line of (in)visibility that exists within neoliberal logics of U.S. national belonging, cultural strangers engaging in this rhetorical act publicize sex and publicize their subversion. Because the desire and the act that coming out implies diverge from heteronormative practices, both the norm and the divergence become publicized (Chávez, in press). Thus, the act of coming out

discursively intervenes in a politics of (in)visibility to call into question that which constitutes public and private identity—an act that, simultaneously, is resistive in its desire to make same-sex desire public but also accommodationist in its (re)iteration of cultural norms.

Although coming out often is talked about by the LGBT/Q community in positive terms, it is a problematic concept that threatens to oversimplify choices made by sexual minorities and/or by migrants. The act of coming out suggests that publically identifying oneself as a marginalized individual always is a positive act, even though, as Sedgwick (2008) noted, it cannot always be considered so. As Cantú (2009), Decena (2008), and Kole (2007) indicated, the act of coming out is a Western (largely U.S.) phenomenon, with particular cultural significance that is not necessarily the case elsewhere. Recognizing that people are comprised of intersecting identities and commitments might make it easier to see that it never is just one community to which LGBT/Q or migrant individuals come out, nor is it ever just one thing about which people come out; instead, how people discursively punctuate coming out performances frames their identities in certain ways for certain publics.

Although many cultural strangers can manage the information that they reveal about themselves, unspoken and embodied personal characteristics also communicate information about identity, influencing how people's identities are constructed and received. In other words, a queer, nonwhite, migrant woman may come out as queer, but she does not discursively come out as nonwhite (even though her material body already, nonverbally, makes that statement for her). Nevertheless, those qualities and characteristics that are visually read from speakers' bodies correspond to their coming out, and influence ways in which speakers understand themselves and how various communities receive them. The politics of (in)visibility that marginalized migrant and LGBT/Q individuals must engage demands attention to public

discourses of the body—what they mean, to whom they are valuable, and in what ways they affect possibilities for community.

Migrant or LGBT/Q individuals' decisions to remain hidden or to come out are embodied decisions whose consequences and implications can be considered only by evaluating people's physical bodies and material desires in relation to norms of U.S. national identity and belonging. In spite of the visibility that coming out suggests, the video testimonials collected for analysis demonstrate that many migrant and LGBT/Q video participants fail to reference their physical bodies; instead, they highlight favorable characteristics or personality traits that they possess (e.g., being hardworking, desiring to make a contribution to the nation, and/or being devoted to one's family). Coming out, then, marks the movement between visibility and invisibility, and, literally and figuratively, lightens the perception of these cultural strangers to render them more appropriate neoliberal U.S. subjects.

Even though coming out of the shadows emerged separately from coming out of the closet, the "lateral appropriation" (Anspach, Coe, & Thurlow, 2007, p. 99) of the expression, coming out, is significant. As scholars have demonstrated, there are many points of overlap between the LGBT/Q and migrant rights community (see, e.g., Brandzel, 2005; Cantú, 2009; Chávez, 2010a, 2011b; De Genova, 2010; La Fountain-Stokes, 2005; Luibhéid, 2002; Puar & Rai, 2002; Roque Ramirez, 2005; Somerville, 2005). Although coming out, and lateral appropriations of this discursive strategy, hold promise for suggesting how marginalized communities might mutually contribute to public discourses about inclusion and exclusion, such efforts also are not without consequences; in short, making oneself visible in the public sphere also may make one susceptible to new forms of discipline.

Positioned in relation to the other discursive tensions that I argue give rise to the conditions of national belonging—tensions of (in)dependence and (in)valuability—national discourses of (in)visibility implicate how discourses of belonging constantly must be negotiated in relation to the nation’s investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism. As this chapter suggests, understanding cultural strangers’ rhetorical efforts as balancing acts that do not fully reject U.S. systems of power or fully embrace them (re)focuses the lens through which belonging is understood. Cultural insiders (and outsiders’) discourses of belonging fluidly interact with national boundaries and borders, providing a productive point of similarity between groups that might otherwise only identify their differences. Indeed, it is through rendering these tensions transparent, and exploring muddled ways in which they work together to maintain systems of domination and subordination, that the nature and practice of privilege might be revealed.

As this exploration of (in)visibility has revealed, discourses of national belonging are predicated on a careful negotiation of one’s public and private life. In particular, this chapter illustrated, that video participants constantly be vigilant about which aspects of their identity to render visible and invisible, and that this balancing act places cultural strangers *in visibility*—a state whereby they are neither fully marginalized, nor fully included within the United States. As migrant and LGBT/Q individuals chart their course through the darkness of shadowed and closeted spaces, determining best ways to discursively manage national expectations of (in)visibility, they engage other tensions that pull on them, including cultural demands of (in)dependence and (in)valuability. The next chapter examines the tension of (in)dependence, exploring how concomitant expectations for citizens and strangers to be *independent* enough to

not burden U.S. national resources plays against the expectation for them to be *dependent* enough on the nation to be disciplined by U.S. social institutions.

Chapter 3 Notes

¹Some of these protests include the “Great American Boycott” of 2006 that intended to demonstrate migrant’s impact on the U.S. economy, DREAM Activists’ marches in major cities and to the nation’s capital to rally for passage of the DREAM Act, and the protests that went nationwide to challenge Arizona’s immigration law (SB 1070) that requires immigrants to carry their alien registration documents at all times and requires police to question people if there is reason to suspect they are in the United States illegally.

CHAPTER 4

(IN)DEPENDENCE: HOW CULTURAL STRANGERS CLAIM

(PERSONAL) INDEPENDENCE AND DECLARE (NATIONAL) DEPENDENCE

Ostensibly founded on the principle of freedom, the United States has been discursively constructed as a beacon of hope for oppressed people around the world. Described as proudly launching her shining light over the coastal waters of Ellis Island and the United States, the Statue of Liberty is as a symbol of independence. Claiming liberty from Britain in 1776, colonists declared their intention to settle and govern this new country as an independent entity. Building this new nation on the foundations of independence, these early settlers began claiming land, establishing government, and violently colonizing native populations—efforts that continue to shape contemporary U.S. attitudes about dependence and independence that circulate today. Since those early years of colonization, national discourses have circulated that link burden and overdependence with marginalized communities, and simultaneously, revere independence as, perhaps, the most valuable characteristic that cultural insiders possess. Consider for instance, the cultural discourses that circulate about welfare queens (see, e.g., Littlefield, 2008), white trash (see, e.g., Heavner, 2007), illegal aliens (see, e.g., Dick, 2011; Stewart, Pitts, & Osborne, 2011), or nonprocreative queers (see, e.g., Golz, 2012)—metaphors that highlight the financial or social burden they place on the United States, or the lack of value they hold for the nation.

Identifying themselves with culturally and socially valuable institutions (such as the Christian religious faith and/or traditional family structures), cultural strangers participate in discourses of national belonging that revise contemporary understandings of (in)dependence.

Cultural strangers efforts to balance the expectations of (in)dependence reflect a constant tension between independence and dependence that, similar to the tension of (in)visibility, demonstrate the nation's investment in whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism (investments that inform those previously mentioned institutions of Christianity and traditional family values). Within the logics of neoliberalism, capital accumulation is paramount, and as Luibhéid (2011) explained, this has led the United States' to shift its selection criteria to incorporate only those cultural strangers who provide value to the nation—value that is directly tied to whiteness and heteronormativity. Cultural strangers seeking inclusion into the United States craft discourses of belonging that engage contemporary understandings of (in)dependence, such that commonly accepted notions of who is independent, dependent, and dependable are redrawn to include different (nonwhite, nonheterosexual) bodies within the privileged social space of (white) U.S. national belonging.

Both cultural strangers and those who are already included as community members resistively accommodate the nation's commitments to whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism through crafting discourses of belonging that attend to (in)dependence. By carefully balancing national expectations for cultural insiders to be, at once, docile and abiding (*dependent*) to the nation, and self-sufficient (*independent*) contributors to the nation—cultural strangers resist and accommodate national expectations that challenge the value that their nonnormative identities might have for the United States.

The Dialectical Tension of (In)dependence

Proclaimed as one of the nation's guiding principles by the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the value of *independence* permeates all manner of public debate and policy in the United States. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.-a) provides several definitions for

independence; among them are “the fact of not depending on another” and “exemption from external control or support.” In these ways, and from the earliest identification of the United States, the ideal of independence has been something that sets the United States apart from other nations. Indeed, the concept of freedom that grounds the nation is celebrated with national holidays (e.g., Independence Day) and collectively remembered at historical sites across the nation (Independence National Historic Park; e.g., Aden, 2010). Operating alongside the nationally privileged concept of independence, however, is the more subversive quality of *dependence*.

Just as independence is discursively and materially coveted in U.S. culture, dependence is devalued and cast as a liability. Contemporary conservative discourses, influenced by neoliberal ideologies, that shame and blame individuals who rely on government resources and aid, for instance, demonstrate the negative cultural associations ascribed to dependence. Cultural strangers’ alleged *overdependence* on national resources is used to discursively mark them as a *burden* (see, e.g., Cisneros, 2008; Santa Ana, 2002). As Ono and Sloop (2002) explained, “Migrants are represented in terms of economic value, connected to their position within the system of capital rather than, for instance to their right to be seen and treated as members of a social community” (p. 32). A similar association plagues lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/queer (LGBT/Q) individuals (as well as queer migrants), whose “deviant” sexual activity makes them a burden or a risk to national well-being. Portrayed as figures of death and disease (see, e.g., Crimp, 2002; Puar, 2007) or as overly sexualized creatures who prey on heterosexuals to sate their physical desires (see, e.g., Barton, 2010), LGBT/Q individuals are victim to similar cultural logics that cast them as outsiders due to their perceived (over)dependence on the nation and its citizens. Thus, members of both the LGBT/Q and

migrant communities often are cast as overburdening (and, hence, threatening) U.S. social and economic systems, being too dependent on U.S. resources, and, consequently, at risk of becoming a national liability within the prevalent logics of neoliberalism.

Just as a cultural tension exists between visibility and invisibility, U.S. national belonging also is construed and negotiated within a dialectical tension of dependence and independence. For cultural strangers to effectively construct appeals for national inclusion, they must participate within the discursive strategy of resistive accommodation to negotiate and/or affect the national tension of (in)dependence. Indeed, this national tension of (in)dependence, influenced by the logics of neoliberalism, are engaged at the same time that national discourses circulate that identify the *overdependence* of cultural strangers on U.S. resources, and their appropriately *independent and self-reliant* U.S. citizen counterparts.

Although independence certainly is part of the nation's promise of citizenship, it is *dependence* and *dependability* that must be discursively managed if cultural strangers are to find their way into U.S. national communities of belonging. These threads of independence, dependence, and dependability are woven together as part of the intricate tapestry of U.S. national identity and belonging, and, together, they delimit conditions of inclusion that regulate both insiders' and outsiders' lives. Moving between arguments that cast themselves as independent, dependent, and dependable, cultural strangers carefully mitigate damaging stereotypes and rework contemporary notions of (in)dependence as they relate to neoliberally informed understandings of U.S. national identity and citizenship that privilege and protect whiteness. It is through resistively accommodating the nation's investments in dependence and independence that cultural strangers position themselves *in dependence*—a social location permitting conditional belonging to/in the nation.

Through targeted appeals for inclusion that highlight the significance of Christian religious values and traditional family structures, cultural strangers in these video testimonials shape the national tensions of (in)dependence in strategic ways that alter discursive and material spaces of U.S. identity. In doing so, these video participants make room for a new category of cultural insiders—one that is conditionally included based on their calculated discursive and material performances of (in)dependence that mediate their otherwise culturally stigmatized racial and/or sexual identities. To demonstrate how such efforts function, below, I analyze how cultural strangers' discourses of belonging invoke and work within U.S. institutions of Christianity and traditional family values to resistively accommodate the nation's commitments to whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism.

Christian Religious Values

Video participants' relationships to religious faith are varied, with some people not having any religious faith at all, professing extreme devotion to Christian values and traditions; others honoring alternate faiths, such as Mormonism or Judaism; and still others actively resisting the religious upbringing that they experienced. Each religiously nuanced narrative is significant within the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America campaigns, as these testimonials showcase how *Christianity* is recognized as a foundational U.S. ideological institution (see, e.g., Borer & Shafer, 2011). People within and beyond U.S. borders must manage discourses of religiosity in strategic ways to suggest their inclusion. Discourses of religion, thus, are discourses of U.S. identity and belonging insofar as they are primary ways in which U.S. national belonging is constituted. As migrant and LGBT/Q individuals participate in narratives of Christian faith, they engage in the discursive process of resistive accommodation to demonstrate their (in)dependence. This resistive accommodation, then, reinforces the national

value of independence and freedom (in this case, freedom of religion), and cultural strangers' dependence on national institutions, thereby, legitimating their inclusion, and, simultaneously, balancing the nation's investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism that undergird it.

As the following analysis suggests, cultural strangers in these videos engage religious discourses in three primary ways. First, they foreground their devotion to the Christian faith and their willingness to adhere to Christian teachings in live their lives. Second, cultural strangers reinforce the national value of Christian principles by acknowledging a higher order of personhood that reinforces the notion that they, as well as everyone else on this planet, were made in God's image, and, consequently, that they should be acknowledged as valuable (regardless of the claims made by the United States as a nation state). Third, in addition to these discourses that support Christian teachings, there is another segment of cultural strangers who, by discussing their resistance to religious faith on the grounds that it has disciplined their bodies and behaviors in unwanted ways, nevertheless, reinforces the influence of such religious ideologies as a disciplinary mechanism for the U.S. nation. Within each of these discourses, migrant and LGBT/Q individuals engage in resistive accommodation, managing the nation's underlying commitments to whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism by balancing the national promise of *independence* with a concurrent expectation for their *dependence* on external institutions. As cultural strangers move within this dialectic, they reveal how discourses of (in)dependence constitute and affect contemporary U.S. national belonging. In particular, in the section that follows I explore how cultural strangers' construct discourses of belonging that foreground one's Christian faith as a way to suggest docility.

Christian Faith and Docile Subjects

Cultural strangers discursively locate themselves within Christian religious values as a way to mark their similarity to current U.S. national community members, and to demonstrate their docility. In recent years, U.S. insiders, drawing on the logics of neoliberalism to inform public policy and cultural attitudes, have sought an alliance with the Christian right (Harvey, 2005). As Harvey (2005) explained, the foundation of Jerry Falwell’s moral majority as political movement in 1978 led to the merger of Christian religious doctrine with political action. Mobilizing the political base through espousing the morality and traditional values of Christianity and cultural nationalism, conservatives in the United States were able to, “divert attention away from capitalism and corporate power as in any way having anything to do with either the economic or the cultural problems that unbridled commercialism and individuals were creating” (Harvey, 2005, p. 50).

Using discourses that render themselves particularly devout Christians, cultural strangers illustrate the ease with which they can be incorporated into the folds of U.S. national belonging. In particular, some migrant and LGBT/Q community members in these videos construct narratives of Christian faith that showcase how such values provide the moral code by which they live. Discursively situating the locus of their moral judgment as being beyond themselves (rather than as being derived from personal intuition or experiences) renders cultural strangers docile to (national) institutions and practices that prescribe such values. As I will demonstrate, migrant and LGBT/Q individuals construct discourses of belonging that suggest their *dependence*—specifically, their dependence upon (national) Christian religious values as a way to access U.S. national belonging. Discourses of belonging that balance the national tension of (in)dependence are foundational for constituting U.S. national belonging, and reveal how

(Christian) religiosity functions as a national (exclusionary) discourse. As I argue, the vernacular nature of these (national) religious discourses provides cultural strangers with a point of access to engage (and alter) the cultural logics of U.S. belonging.

Amina (2011), whose testimony was collected as part of the Testimony: Take a Stand series, provides an example of how cultural strangers manage these broader national discourses—making them theirs, and, in the process, altering their fundamental nature and that of U.S. national belonging. Describing her faith, Amina relays the difficulty that she faced as a Christian and as a lesbian. Upon coming out to some high school friends, Amina notes:

Some of them didn't believe me. They were like, "Amina's a good church girl, she does everything right, like, she can't be gay," but I guess it was more trying to teach them that gay isn't wrong, so I could still be the good church girl and a lesbian, umm, because I do identify as a lesbian Christian. (Amina Testifies)

As Amina's testimonial demonstrates, she uses her Christian religious conviction to characterize her morality, something that may be seen as sharply contrasting with her sexual preference. She describes being identified as a *good* church girl and as a lesbian, with the latter's lack of qualifier signifying something other than good and creating a contrast between the morality of the Christian faith and the absence of it within her internal drives and desires. Amina's narrative uses Christian faith to foreground her dependence on nationally approved belief systems, implying the need for such institutions in her life, but, nevertheless, exercising independence in her sexual preference. Hence, Amina does not attempt to reconcile the culturally assumed chasm between the Christianity and same-sex desire but, instead, embodies their coexistence—a similar coexistence to the dependence and independence that conditions discourses of U.S. national belonging.

Narrating one's adherence to Christian faith as a way to participate in larger national discourses of (in)dependence is a recurring theme throughout these testimonials. Bernard Pastor's (2011) story is another example of Christian religious faith being invoked to manage national discourses of (in)dependence. Having been deported after a routine traffic stop, Bernard is not able to narrate his story, but, instead, his pastor and other community members created a video testimonial to share his story and to plead for his amnesty. As his pastor, filmed leading a community group in protest, claims:

We are here today because of Bernard Pastor. People knew him as a young man who is not deserving of deportation. They know him as a young man who is the model citizen, the model person who we would like to see contribute to our country for the next several decades, which he is poised to do, having served as a youth minister and worship leader at his father's church. (A Town Galvanizes Support)

In this excerpt, Bernard is cast as a model citizen and it is his desire to *contribute* to the nation that qualifies him as such; thus, faith in Christian religious principals are equated directly with attributes of positive neoliberal (white) citizenship. Bernard's narrative demonstrates that the lines between independence and dependence can be blurred, affecting larger national discourses of U.S. identity and belonging, such that U.S. cultural insiders are always already navigating national expectations that require their concomitant *independence*, *dependence*, and *dependability*—behaviors whose value to the nation are assigned by contemporary logics of neoliberalism. Repositioning Bernard as an independent subject suggests how spaces of belonging can be discursively opened for cultural strangers.

U.S. cultural insiders' investment in Christianity is consequential to how national belonging is discursively constituted. Further evidence of this is seen in another narrative

published in the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign, where two male clergy members discuss their relationship with each other, as well as with God. Bob Shore-Goss (2011) comments:

When we started dating, Joe knew, directly, that there was another person, another group of people in my life that would be part of it, which is my church, and understood that, uh, there was this other love and passion. (“Response to Bob Shore-Goss,” 2011)

Following these comments, Joe Shore-Goss added, “There was a whole process of actually discussing this what this means [sic]—not just for us, but for our denominations, and to our congregants.”

In this example, both men *resist* traditional, intimate understandings of family through their gay male coupling, but they *accommodate* national Christian values, not only by stating their belief in Christianity but by discursively *inviting* God and Christianity into their family. Extending this invitation positions these men as agents—independent decision makers who consciously and intentionally depend on Christianity. Subsequently, if the Christian faith is an extension of U.S. national values and institutions, these men’s statements of religious faith (and of the role that God and the church plays in their relationship) might be understood as a metonym. In other words, by placing one’s faith in God, and depending on that God and the consequent values that such faith requires, these men demonstrate their dependence on the *nation*, and their willingness to be governed by those foundational national institutions that reap legitimacy and meaning from the larger Christian religious faith.

Whereas many cultural strangers narrate their devotion to Christian religious values, others discuss religion in more hostile ways. Many LGBT/Q individuals, in particular, talk about Christian religious principles as contributing, in damaging ways, to their discipline—that is practices that call upon institutional, pervasive, and psychological measures to influence people’s

behavior (Shugart, 2006). These testimonials are consequential within broader narratives of religiosity in that they expose how those who willfully submit to Christian value systems and those who do not are subject to its authority. If Christianity is viewed as a metonym for broader U.S. interests, how religion exercises control over people also reveals ways in which the nation exercises control over people, further demonstrating the U.S. cultural value of Christianity. These counter-Christian discourses might be seen as an effort to reclaim some degree of independence from the religious value systems that have demanded their obedience. Even in rejecting Christianity, these video participants exercise their independence, however, they subject themselves to the nation's authority in different ways.

National insiders and cultural strangers both engage in a carefully choreographed discourses of belonging that balance the tensions of (in)dependence, such that both independence and dependence are variously required and stigmatized. The resistive accommodation that LGBT/Q cultural strangers, in particular, develop appears to result from instances when such faith-based ideology has been used to correct (deviant) behavior. For example, as Gigi (2011) explains about his experience of growing up in a Catholic household:

I grew up in a Catholic family so I went to Catholic school from third grade to ninth grade. It was hard to express myself because they expected me to grow up a certain way. And, so, I kind of got tired of it, and just wanted to be who I am and express who I wanted to be. So, I started dressing the way I wanted to dress, doing my hair a certain way, and I started wearing makeup, very lightly at first, just to kind of ease into it. (Gigi Testifies)

As Gigi's narrative implies, his parents used Christianity (and Catholicism, in particular) to provide him with a substantial education, both in terms of intellectual content and with respect to

teaching him social norms and expectations. Resistively accommodating Catholicism, Gigi emphasizes his independence from the church by altering his material body in ways that directly counteract expectations of his faith (e.g., by wearing makeup and dressing in an androgynous manner). In doing so, Gigi claims his independence, accommodating national beliefs in the virtue of independence, but he does so by resisting the religious foundations on which the nation was based. This complicated tension is materially evidenced in/on Gigi's body, but it plays out in more abstract ways as well.

Narratives such as Gigi's stand in contrast to other cultural strangers' discourses of belonging that call on their Christian religious values to justify their difference. Although Gigi's testimonial highlights oppressive ways that he was forced to live and perform his identity, there are other instances captured in these videos that highlight violent forms of disciplining that have been perpetrated under the sanctions of the Christian religious faith. In a wrenching account, a young man, whose testimonial was uploaded to *Testimony: Take a Stand*, paints a much darker picture of Christianity, one that demands strict dependence and obedience from its adherents lest they be violently disciplined. As this young man describes:

I grew up the son of Southern Baptist Missionaries and we were living on a mission base, so a lot of missionary families living together, and the way I like to say it is, "sin entered the building." A *Playboy* [magazine] got on campus and, of course, all the middle school boys my age [were interested], it was perfect because we had been limited to censored PBS for most of our lives, it was, you know, heavenly. And I thought I was so righteous because it didn't affect me at all. I went up to my dad and said, "Dad" (and, of course, tattling on the others, because I was so wonderful it didn't hurt me), and told him, "But it's weird. I didn't get the same feelings [as the other boys]." I said, "I have those

feelings when I think of Dale” (my best friend). My dad just started punching [me].

Umm, that was the first day that I was sent to the emergency room because I had “fallen down the stairs.” I was sent to the emergency room about six more times for falling down the stairs or tripping on the sidewalk. I’m in this constant state of fear. (I am from Perry, IA—Part 1)

This young man’s story paints a very violent image of the Christian faith and the lengths to which its adherents can go to ensure strict obedience to its social and moral codes. Extending these disciplinary measures to broader considerations for U.S. national belonging reveals how religious conviction can and has been the basis for marginalizing certain groups. In spite of the physical danger, this young man asserted his independence (later narrating his expulsion from his parents’ home and his subsequent ability to live apart from them), but, simultaneously, showing his dependence, (by foregrounding his continued Christian devotion in spite of the violent ways that his faith was used to discipline him).

Although cultural strangers continue to call on their faith to demonstrate their docility (and subsequent governability) by U.S. national institutions, video participants resistively accommodate expectations of U.S. national belonging by calling on God (as the highest order) to legitimate their personhood and subsequent value to the nation. In this way, cultural strangers resist the nation’s authority to validate their belonging, but, simultaneously, they accommodate the moral institution that grounds the nation’s identity. Asserting their independence, as exercised by their decision to answer to a different (higher) moral order, cultural strangers, nevertheless, remain dependent on one of the very institutions on which the nation was founded and whose influence continues to structure neoliberal understandings about U.S. identity and inclusion—Christianity. Regardless of their intention, as shown below, cultural strangers’

participation in discourses of Christian faith extends beyond discussions of how Christianity models a desirable way of life to usurp U.S. authority with God's perceived authority.

In God's Image

Cultural strangers use logics that locate their worth/value as being derived from God, demonstrating their dependence on institutions and value systems that are far greater than the nation, itself, but that, nevertheless, (re)enforce the moral (and social) foundations on which the neoliberal (white) nation has been built. For instance, a video from the We Are America campaign presented Judy and Raul's courtship and marriage, exposing how Raul (an undocumented migrant) and Judy (a U.S. citizen) have been fighting a year-long legal battle to keep Raul in the United States. Combating dominant cultural narratives that see Raul's undocumented status as an encumbering dependence on the nation, Judy and Raul's testimonial shifts the conversation from immigration and border control to highlight their Christian religious faith, something so intimate that it cannot be called into question with the same ease as can citizenship status. As the video's narrator explains, "Judy is a second-generation Unitarian Universalist. Her church, First Universalist of Denver, has formed a migrant justice task force to take up Judy's cause" (Wife and Children Fear). A church member then notes that the reason the congregation has taken up Judy and Raul's cause is because "immigration is a moral issue because we're talking about people's lives. We're talking about people who are trying to find not only some way to survive but a way to live a meaningful life" (Wife and Children Fear, 2011). To discuss immigration as a moral issue elevates it to a spiritual field of consideration where legitimacy and value can be prescribed by something greater than the U.S. government. If the United States, indeed, is a nation that is guided by Christian ideology, U.S. community members cannot argue with discourses that appeal to God as a higher order power for

authentication. Efforts such as Judy and Raul's shift discourses of U.S. national belonging to prioritize Christian religious faith, potentially altering the discursive grounds on which they have been marginalized.

Similar attitudes reflecting God's authority as being greater than that of the U.S. nation are echoed by Reverend Mendis (2011), a Sri Lankan migrant and evangelical Lutheran minister who remarks:

First of all, you know, as a Christian, I firmly believe there is no legal or illegal, especially when you take the United States. It is a country of migrants. People came from all over the world for many different reasons. (Sri Lankan Migrant)

As Reverend Mendis demonstrates, U.S. constructions of *legal* and *illegal* are inconsequential when one appeals to God and Christianity as a higher order. Such efforts authenticate cultural strangers' value and worth to the nation, and they invest God and their Christian spiritual beliefs with increased authority, a discursive effort that reinforces their dependence on Christian values to give their lives meaning, and, simultaneously, asserts their independence from traditionally conceived legitimacy-granting national institutions, such as the U.S. government.

Cultural migrants construct discourses of belonging that locate them within a broader spiritual context allowing them to grasp some control over the meaning of their narratives. Importantly, video participants' professed reliance on and respect for Christian religious values, and for God, permit cultural outsiders to seek legitimacy and belonging from alternate sources, effectively overriding the authority that U.S. governmental institutions appear to exclusively possess. By resistively accommodating these discourses of U.S. national identity and belonging, migrants alter the discursive structures of citizenship, by rewriting how (in)dependence is understood and managed within the United States.

As evidenced in Liuann's (2011) story, (a testimonial collected from the We are America Featured Video Archive), Liuann relies on Christian religious convictions to provide the substantive cognitive framework on which she understands her current circumstances. Liuann came from China when she was 3 years old. After arriving in the United States, her parents eventually divorced, and although her father had acquired a Green Card, her mother had not yet been able to do so (something that became nearly impossible to achieve after the divorce). As a consequence of this change in relationships status, Liuann's mother's legal residence status was in jeopardy. As Liuann states:

My family has gone through a lot of unstable times. I think what's really helped me to keep going and not just feel like things are hopeless is a sense that there's a story beyond our own personal story that we are a part of: the story of the Gospel and the story of God redeeming his people, and God hearing the cries of his people. There's a passage in the Bible that says "Perseverance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint," and God has not disappointed me in the past. I can look back and see that I've been through a lot, and it's been really difficult, but here I am, and I've made it through all that. (Connecting Family Separation)

In this example, Liuann draws on a discourse of Christian faith to make sense of the difficulties encountered in her life. Importantly, she frames her remarks to cast U.S. governing institutions as responsible for the hardship but her faith as responsible for the enlightened insight that she, subsequently, has garnered.

In addition to some cultural strangers drawing on Christianity and God to illustrate their value to a nation that might not otherwise recognize them, other video participants draw on similar spiritual justifications to prove themselves. Xavier and Michael (2011), two men filmed

as part of Testimony: Take a Stand's The Wedding Matters campaign, describe the ways they depend on their Christian values to make sense of their feelings for one another and their subsequent commitment to marriage. As Michael explains "I've never said who I've chosen to be because, to me, it's never been a choice; it's merely been an expression of what God intended my life to be" (Xavier & Michael). Following up, Xavier notes, "We've always felt a special connection—from God—that everything has happened for a reason and that we're together for a reason" (Xavier & Michael). Explaining that their connection is an embodiment of their spiritual relationship with God, Xavier and Michael demonstrate the materiality of their faith by illustrating how it acts on them and around them in the same ways as do the nation's laws. Cultural strangers' discourses of belonging that call on one's faith blur common cultural understandings of (in)dependence and shift understandings of that which is independent, dependent, and dependable, invoking U.S. neoliberal ideologies that are influenced by Christianity as a way to appeal for inclusion.

In spite of cultural strangers' efforts to privilege the role of God and Christian faith in their lives, both Xavier and Michael participated within "The Wedding Matters," a Testimony: Take a Stand community that highlights the value of marriage (a relational status that, although spiritual in nature, enjoys secular rights conferred by the State). When two people marry, their identity changes as a consequence of their altered relationship status, and individuals, such as Michael and Xavier, gain a degree of legitimacy that they describe as never having experienced before. As many narratives from both the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America campaigns demonstrate, the wedding ceremony, and the religiously connoted union that it marks, showcase the significant crossover among religion, traditional family structures, and nation occurring within discourses of U.S. national belonging. Michael and Xavier's testimonial about

their wedding, at once, also is a narrative about the role of family in their lives, highlights the significance of both family and marriage as legitimating national institutions within the logics of contemporary neoliberalism. It is to the role and value of family that I now turn, to explore how cultural strangers index “family” as a marker for inclusion.

The Value of (Heteronormative) Family

Discourses of Christian faith are one way that constructions of national belonging are managed, as are discourses that center the role of family. Functioning in similar ways to discourses of the Christian faith, discourses of family reinforce the value of these specific domestic relationships in legitimating national insiders. Cultural strangers’ discourses of belonging require cultural strangers’ dependence on the family unit to structure their lives and, simultaneously, on their independent self-sufficiency (as a unit). For Berlant (1997) family life is a site of state regulation that is legitimated, in part, by a neoliberal discourse that politicizes the intimate sphere. As a result, the family and the conduct of individuals at the center of discourses about the moral strength of the nation must, in their discourses of belonging, demonstrate their ability to appropriately govern/discipline themselves as a (private) domestic unit. As the section below discusses, it is by demonstrating their interest in marriage that video participants engage in a particular narrative of belonging that balances national tensions of (in)dependence.

The Role of Marriage

As shown above, some cultural strangers discuss their religious convictions to highlight how they have come to personally value marriage, the particularity of which draws a comparison between the religious ceremony (wedding) and the legal commitment (civil union). Many of the video participants in both the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America campaigns call on

the religiously observed ceremony of the *marriage* as a pivotal means by which their identities are recognized by/within U.S. national institutions. Although civil unions also are available in a number of states for same-sex couples, and heterosexual migrants from the same or differing countries already have the right to marry, the marriage ceremony and its implications are discussed by video participants as being especially consequential in their lives, particularly for the rights they afford.

The religious foundations on which marriage rests demonstrate the cultural value of Christianity and the significance of the traditional family, reinforcing their power within the United States. The rhetorical move to associate marriage (the religious practice) with citizenship (the supposedly secular identity category) engages in a discourse of belonging that remaps U.S. national inclusion, such that belonging in the nation can be predicated on one's (religiously acknowledged) relationship status. Marriage, then, functions for both migrant and LGBT/Q individuals as a ceremonious condition of belonging, with both groups drawing on arguments that justify their fitness for inclusion based on their (married) relationship status.

Although one of Testimony: Take a Stand's communities is dedicated exclusively to documenting the significance of marriage to LGBT/Q individuals, migrants also reference marriage as evidence for why they should legally access U.S. national identity and belonging. By arguing that deporting a spouse will tear their family apart, migrants rely on the national value of "family" to offset traditionally leveraged arguments for who does and does not belong within the nation. Indeed, the status and authenticity that marriage appears to provide is discursively cast as a primary condition for U.S. national belonging, allowing otherwise unrecognizable subjects to be acknowledged (and potentially included) within two of the most foundational institutions to the neoliberal nation: Christianity and family. Brady (2008)

explained the significance of this relationship, and cultural strangers need to manage it, by noting “homophobia and nativism come together around ‘family values’ and reveal the ongoing project of the state to manage sexuality, to educate desire and consumption, and to restrict the targets of its largesse” (p. 7). Discursively casting marriage (and the traditional family unity that it forges) as a primary feature in their lives, cultural strangers resistively accommodate the nation’s investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism, concurrently activating other national tensions of visibility and invisibility (the visibility of their traditional family life and the invisibility of that which renders their relationships exceptional in some way).

In many instances throughout the video testimonials collected for analysis, cultural strangers discuss how getting married altered/affected their view and understanding of themselves within broader society, oftentimes equating these sentiments with a newfound cultural recognition and respect. Although marriage, itself, does not confer citizenship status or national belonging, it is discursively constituted by migrant and LGBT/Q individuals such that it might very well bestow the same *affective* reaction, especially once such relationships are *legally* recognized—a status that requires both spiritual and secular acknowledgment. For instance, Arika and Cynthia (2011) describe the change in their families’ attitudes toward them after they got married:

After the wedding, to see there was an actual change because it was something they understood. They knew what a marriage was and they knew what that meant. It’s made a huge impact. Marriage is something that everyone understands what that is, and because it was legal, they weren’t scared to call it that either. (Arika & Cynthia)

Arika and Cynthia acknowledge that both the religious and secular qualities of the wedding were significant to them, suggesting their independence (choosing to get married, even though gay

marriage remains a highly contentious national issue) and their dependence on Christianity and traditional U.S. legal frameworks to legitimize (to others) the status of their relationship. Using discourses of faith and family, Arika and Cynthia reinforce the nation's power to authorize their relationship, and, consequently, they depend on these legal frameworks to demonstrate their docility and their willingness to abide by social and cultural laws.

The value of "legal status," either as a married or documented person, is a theme that many video participants reference. In another instance from *Testimony: Take a Stand*, Sunshine and Sunny describe the meaning of being legally wed, saying, "I knew I didn't want to get married unless it was legal." They further remark that "once being pronounced 'legally wed,' there was a shift in my consciousness" (Sunshine & Sunny). Indeed, they identify the *legality* of their union as shifting their consciousness. Garnering legitimacy from the legality of their wedding, and for the spiritual connection that it affirms, cultural strangers craft a discourse of U.S. national identity and belonging that resists as it accommodates.

In addition to the legitimacy that being legally married appears to confer on people, the public celebration of this event is also significant. As Amy remarks in the testimonial that she and Annie made:

I think everybody wants to have that moment where we all stop and we say this is who I am, and this is where I am, and this is who I choose, and this is how our life is. And to be supported and to be around everyone, friends and family that loved you so much to be there, was beyond anything that I think we ever could have imagined. (Amy & Annie)

Relaying their story, it becomes apparent that Amy and Annie see their social and cultural status as deriving from the ability to publically share their ceremony with others. Emphasizing the legality of their marriage, video participants like Amy and Annie, and Sunshine and Sunny,

suggest their dependence on U.S. institutions, however, assert their agency to commit to each other in a particular way. Such actions locate cultural strangers *in dependence*; neither fully agentic, nor fully dependent but somehow held between the two.

As their and other narratives suggest, many people in the United States, before they enter into a *married* union, are not recognized as valuable U.S. national community members. Carter (2007) explained that monogamous heterosexual union is seen as a civic responsibility; thus, there is a powerful discourse in the United States that suggests unmarried people, indeed, are less *valuable* than are married, heterosexual, procreative couples; that they are dangerous due to their *dependence* on the nation, their lack of national dependability, and their unstable, unregulated procreation. Discourses of the threat posed by migrant and LGBT/Q individuals are prevalent within the U.S. imaginary (see, e.g., Berg, 2009; Carrillo Rowe, 2004, Chávez, 2010a).

Narratives of predatory migrant men who travel to the United States alone, leaving their families at homes far away, or of sex-crazed and promiscuous LGBT/Q individuals who do not have a spouse and/or children to care for, abound within U.S. popular culture, implying the danger that cultural strangers pose to the United States and whiteness (Carrillo Rowe, 2004).

Serving as the foundation for good citizenship, the family, at once, is the visible face of U.S. domesticity and the invisible machine that exercises the neoliberal State's control (and protection of whiteness). Carrillo Rowe (2004), focusing on the specific challenges posed by immigrants noted, "Racial and ethnic demographic shifts within the U.S. population, particularly in the southwestern United States, have called into question the viability of U.S. America because they destabilize its implicit foundation in whiteness" (p. 119). By extension, some scholars have argued that LGBT/Q individuals pose a similar danger to the nation (and/or whiteness), in particular because same-sex relationships do not lead to procreation [and the

ability to sustain the (white) nation]. Luibhéid (2008) noted that heterosexual coupling and family relationships provide the nation with a way to regularly surveil people (migrants, in particular) and hold accountable to the nation. This implies that individuals who are not a part of these relationships are not under the same degree of national control and/or influence, and might be seen as more threatening. In this way, cultural strangers' discursive and material participation in such relationships is a way for them to leverage their national belonging. Pledging devotion to another person, video participants construct national discourses of belonging, that express their commitment to family (and, subsequently, to the nation) and direct attention away from those cultural stigmas that has done the most to marginalize them. As I will now discuss, the role of reproduction partners with the function of marriage in cultural strangers' discourses of belonging to further balance national expectations for (in)dependence and presents another way in which video participants resistively accommodate national commitments to whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism.

The Role of Children and Family

In addition to wedding ceremonies signifying how people publically acknowledge their commitment to one another and petition for legitimacy from the U.S. nation, the wedding also culturally signals the potential for a couple to have children, and, thereby, to grow their family (and the nation's citizenry). Carmen and Rose (2011), for example, whose story is archived in Testimony: Take a Stand's the "Wedding Matters" community, note, "I wanted to start a family soon, so that's why we started planning our ceremony" (Carmen & Rose). The religious and secular acknowledgment that marriage provides authorizes a couple's legitimacy to parent. Julie and Sara (2011) express similar sentiments in their story when they remarked:

The kids—they wouldn't be here if we hadn't gotten married. That was an important step for me, particularly, that I felt was really symbolic and that I needed to have that in order to move forward. It just really solidified the level of commitment. I just wanted...I just wanted to do it in that order. (Julie and Sara)

The symbolic value of marriage is apparent in Julie and Sara's quote, as is the public ceremony that solidifies the commitment that these two women have made to each other, and, thereby, provides the stability that the nation requires to raise children. Although these women could have raised a child together without getting married, they perceive that it was the wedding that authenticated them—that materially made them into a family (and, by extension, deserving community members). Casting themselves as *family members* (a different identity marker than *partner* or *spouse*) showcases cultural strangers' dependence on the family unit to fulfill and sustain them, and doing so allows them to participate (as already acceptable cultural insiders), in the U.S. community—a status that is leveraged by video participants engaging in larger national discourses of (in)dependence that imbue the *family* with elevated cultural authority.

Although marriage can authenticate cultural strangers' identity and presence within the nation, it also legitimates certain types of sex—namely, heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive sex—something that both migrant and LGBT/Q community members appear to tap into when constructing their appeals for national inclusion. Indeed, in many instances, family status is among the first things described in these video testimonials, oftentimes, within the first 30 seconds of the recording. Beth (2011), a woman whose narrative is captured as part of the We Are America campaign, for instance, begins her testimonial by stating, “I've been married over 9 years to the same man from Algeria. We have four daughters” (Beth, a Police Officer's Husband). Similarly, Fidel (2011) tells of his impending deportation, reporting, “I live in Maine

about 10 years. I'm happy in this country. Everybody [is] friendly here. I married about 6 years ago, and I have two beautiful baby daughters" (Long-Time Maine Resident). Once again, we see similar efforts to identify oneself as a member of a larger family in the Guzman family's story (2011). Their testimonial begins, "So we were together, umm, 4 years before we got married, and then Logan was born in 2006" (Separated by Detention). In each of these examples, migrant individuals immediately frame themselves as family members, encouraging their audience to see them as part of the nation's coveted domestic space of the home—a concept that became linked to citizenship in the New Deal era (Reddy, 1998). Doing this, cultural strangers position themselves in dependence, affecting discourses of national belonging by focusing questions of belonging on their *family status* rather than on their *documentation status*.

Cultural strangers rely on narratives of marriage, and the subsequent addition of children to an intimate partnership, as a primary means by which to construct their discourses of belonging. Lisa and Eileen (2011) provide further evidence of the influence of children in these narratives. Eileen, talking about her mother-in-law's difficulty accepting her daughter's same-sex relationship, notes how their relationship changed when their daughter was born:

When Megan was born, she [Eileen's mother-in-law] turned to me and said, "You know, you're the mother of my granddaughter," and gave me a big hug, which was just an amazing sort of transformation in the relationship, and by the time, actually, by the time she died, you know, she, fully, you know, took me into the family. (Lisa & Eileen)

These women, thus, gained acknowledgment and acceptance from family members upon the birth of their child, suggesting that similar acknowledgment and acceptance is possible from broader national communities as well. These narratives imply that discourses of belonging that mark the value that *family* relationships have brought to these individuals' lives are ways for

cultural strangers to appeal for U.S. belonging; indeed, these narratives allow video participants to discursively name themselves in culturally meaningful ways as members of the national domestic sphere by being members of families. As I will now discuss, how video participants identify themselves in relation to their families frames the way they will be perceived by others, and are important considerations within cultural strangers' discourses of belonging.

The Role of the Wedding

Using their marriage (a religiously and secularly significant ceremony) to provide an initial degree of national credibility, cultural strangers further develop their familial identities and, hence, their U.S. national belonging. Furthermore, the wedding, in addition to legitimating one's (previously) marginal identity, enfranchises couples with the opportunity to authenticate familial relationships, normalizing the function of certain traditional familial roles, including *father*, *mother*, *husband*, and *wife*. Cultural strangers' discursive reiteration of such relationships builds the credibility of the family as an institution for national neoliberal authentication. Thus, migrant and LGBT/Q individuals, discursively emphasizing their roles as *father*, *mother*, *husband*, and or *wife*, rhetorically infiltrate the coveted national space of the family by resistively accommodating traditional discourses of (in)dependence that frequently have cast them as *solitary* figures who (inappropriately) depend on the nation in the *absence* of a family. Luibhéid (2008) explained, "Family, in short was intended to maintain a white racial order. It was also intended to maintain patriarchy and heteronormativity" (p. 297). Serving the personal function of inclusion, and national function of protecting normative structures of power, the family, and familial roles do a great deal of rhetorical work in cultural strangers' discourses of belonging.

By positioning themselves as staunchly committed family members, or as otherwise invested individuals who care about the well-being of families (theirs or others), cultural

strangers align themselves with a primary national institution, rhetorically recasting themselves as national insiders by virtue of their commitment to the coveted national institution of the *family*.

Isabel (2011) describes the value of family to her life:

I'm hearing of families being separated, parents being sent to Mexico and having to leave their children here. It's pretty harsh to hear that. For me, it's hard to think I'd be separated from my child. And I think it would be for every mother, and my heart goes out there to the parents and to the children, both the children who are here without their parents [and] the parents who are [in other countries] without their children. And the children that are courageous to go to a country they haven't been in and they haven't been brought up, to be with their parents. (Accomplished Undocumented Student)

As this example illustrates, cultural strangers shift national discourses of belonging away from papered citizenship or sexual deviance to, instead, prioritize the role of family. Specifically, Isabel describes her role as a mother and the social benefit of parents raising children.

Describing the seriousness with which she takes these responsibilities, Isabel discursively casts herself as an invaluable mother, and as someone who can be depended on (by her children and by the nation).

Aracelli (2011) echoes similar sentiments in her narrative when she described being arrested and placed in detention for 5 months. Explaining the difficulty of being away from her daughter, she states "I spent almost 5 months without my daughter, without my family. The mom is more, the most special thing about the family" (Tucson Mom Faces Detention). Using narratives of the family, Aracelli illustrates that many cultural strangers in these videos shift understandings of U.S national belonging to emphasize their dependability (as family members and as U.S. community members). Doing so distracts attention away from their lack of papered

citizenship (and the perceived overdependence on the nation that such status suggests) and discursively crafts national belonging, instead, as being about their familial participation and dependability—a feature repeatedly made visible in video participants’ narratives.

Labels such as *mother*, *father*, *husband* and *wife* carry with them very particular connotations about people’s identity as family members, reinforcing cultural strangers’ investment in traditional family structures, and, subsequently, their investment in the U.S. nation. Such labels reshape national understandings of (in)dependence, as identifying oneself in this way makes these cultural strangers simultaneously dependable *for* (intimate) others and *dependent* on (intimate) others, thereby, rejecting cultural stereotypes that suggest (some) migrant and LGBT/Q individuals are *overly dependent* on the nation. Demonstrating how cultural strangers reshape national discourses of (in)dependence to privilege the self-regulation that the neoliberal U.S. government privileges, Liliana Ramos (2011) discusses her fear that she will need to return to Mexico and leave her children in the United States, exclaiming, “I’ve tried to be a good mother for them. I’ve worked for them” (A Single Mother Threatened). Additionally, the Guzman (2011) family describes Pedro as “an amazing father, a wonderful husband” (Separated by Detention). In each case, these women feature how their families depend on a particular individual, illustrating their indispensability for their family and suggesting their indispensability for the nation. Similar sentiments are echoed by Julie and Sara (2011), when Sara states, “She’s not my partner, she’s not my girlfriend, like, she’s my wife. This is someone who I’m going spend the rest of my life with. She is the other mother of our kids” (Julie & Sara). Not only is one’s role as a mother or father significant but the *language* that people use to label themselves in relation to their partners is significant in discourses of belonging as it resistively

accommodates the nation's commitments to whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism and reveals the significance of (in)dependence as a national tension that conditions U.S. inclusion

Further evidence of the prevalence of this rhetorical strategy is demonstrated in Sunshine and Sunny's (2011) story, when the two women explain:

I knew I didn't want to get married unless it was legal. I never got into the "partner" kinds of terms, and "significant other" never rang true to me. She was my girlfriend, and when she wasn't my girlfriend, she was my wife. (Sunshine & Sunny)

Presenting themselves as family members, video participants shift public understanding of national belonging to prioritize the *family* as a means of authenticating their inclusion into the nation, a move that discursively downgrades the significance of papered citizenship or other culturally common discourses of sexual deviance that mark cultural strangers as outsiders.

The significance of the language used in these examples indicates that what people name someone has implications for social/cultural acknowledgement, and, consequently, alters people's material experience within the world by affecting how they interact with others and how people engage with them. Using specific relational terms, such as the ones highlighted above, cultural strangers resistively accommodate nationally significant institutions such as the traditional family, or Christian religious faith. In particular, video participants align themselves with these traditional family relationships by claiming a place for themselves as family members and/or devout adherents to the Christian faith, but nevertheless trouble these institutions as well, exposing their exclusivity as cultural myth.

How cultural strangers navigate such institutions, and, indeed, use them in their service when constructing discourses of belonging, introduces a new perspective for considering boundaries of belonging. As this analysis implies, discourses of belonging are comprised of a set

of dialectical tensions [(in)dependence, (in)visibility, and (in)valuability] that cultural strangers must work within as they resist and accommodate the nation's underlying commitments and expectations, subsequently, creating a material space for themselves within the nation.

Conclusion

As borders continue to structure the lives of U.S. national community members, as well as cultural strangers, it becomes increasingly important to explore discursive practices that erect those boundaries, so that they might be redrawn and/or torn down. Video participants demonstrate that cultural outsiders gain acceptance into the United States by crafting discourses of national belonging that affectively balance a set of tensions that protect the nation's fundamental investment in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism. Today, cultural strangers participating in the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America campaigns engage in this national tension of (in)dependence by deploying rhetorical strategies that, at once, suggest their docility to the nation and their independence as appropriately self-governing neoliberal subjects.

With the encouragement of neoliberalism, the role of personal responsibility, and the privatization of public services, the U.S. cultural capital of *independence* has grown stronger (see, e.g., Harvey, 2005; Ong, 1996), even as it requires U.S. cultural insiders to remain *dependent* on the nation, such that the United States retains its sense of authority. Cultural strangers craft their discourses of belonging to build upon common cultural narratives of (traditional) family values, and Christian religious faith, demonstrating their dependence on foundational U.S. institutions, as well as their independence to appropriately manage their bodies within the private sphere. As Puar and Rai (2002) explained, the United States has advocated the sanctity of the national body through policing of individual bodies. Cultural strangers, then, must discursively construct their

bodies to balance the national expectations of independence, dependence, and dependability in culturally meaningful ways if they are to find inclusion. Neither complete dependence nor independence are viable options for those seeking inclusion into the larger national group, but neither is understanding how these tensions are negotiated simple to deconstruct, for as this chapter demonstrates, these frameworks rely up complicated investments in Christianity and traditional family values.

Christian religious values have long served to structure the Western world's understanding of desirable and undesirable behavior (see, e.g., Foucault, 1978), and those values provide an influential framework for daily civic life within the U.S. neoliberal landscape. Continued evidence of this significance is apparent in the increasing influence of evangelical Christians in the nation. Medhurst (2009) explained that many of those Christians believe that the nation is “a Judeo-Christian nation, founded on those values, honoring those beliefs, and respecting the culture-defining role of Christian moral codes” (p. 200). Christianity and its value structures contribute significantly to the neoliberal logics that determine standards for contemporary U.S. national identity and belonging, framing contemporary attitudes about what constitutes good citizenship. Functioning in tandem with discourses of (in)visibility, discourses of (in)dependence contour cultural narratives of national identity and belonging to rely on performances of dependence, independence, and dependability, such that certain (rhetorical) acts are ideally visible, whereas others are invisible. Christianity, exercising both social and political influence, has contributed to a set of normative cultural practices that discursively and materially link religious devotion (dependence) to healthy citizens who are independently able to manage (through confession) their private lives—an act that, at once, engages discourses of (in)visibility and (in)dependence.

Video participants deploy their Christian religious values within their discourses of belonging as a rhetorical strategy to underscore both their *dependence* on the nation and, simultaneously, to exercise their *independence* in deciding to practice Christianity, revealing complicit ways in which the United States relies on independence and dependence to assert its authority. Such complicated narratives of (in)dependence further feature ways that U.S. national identity and belonging regularly are constituted by U.S. community members and cultural strangers' in seemingly mundane discourses of one's daily life and practices, suggesting the unexpected inroads for marginalized groups to access in their quest for inclusion.

Christian groups have long used politics as a vehicle to convey their messages of morality (Coe & Domke, 2006), and, thereby, they have significantly turned the tide of public and political debate in the United States. Such shifts in public opinion undoubtedly have had a profound impact on Christian religious practices, but they also have had significant command on social, cultural, and political values and norms, which contribute to U.S. cultural narratives of (in)dependence. Elaborating, Medhurst (2009) pointed out that

the Christian Right first gained influence within the Republican Party by rallying evangelical and fundamentalist Christians around issues such as abortion, infanticide, school prayer, religious displays in civic spaces, school-based health clinics, licensing requirements for private Christian academies, and homosexuality. (p. 202)

Deriving their platform from such broad social and cultural issues, Christian religious practitioners have suggested that these values are universal, extending far beyond the pulpit and into a broader public sphere. For those on the U.S. cultural margin, participation within this larger Christian religious discourse might provide an inroad to U.S. national identity and belonging, which is evidenced in the videos analyzed. It is not, however, a simple solution to

appropriate Christian discourses as a way to garner acceptance; instead, it is *how* cultural strangers use Christian narratives to resistively accommodate the contemporary logics of national belonging that is of consequence. Informing national neoliberal logics of good citizenship, Christianity, thus, establishes current national practices of dependence and independence, which, although contributing to understandings of civic life, use a language of religious freedom (independence) and the choice of spiritual devotion (dependence) to structure the national dialectical tension of (in)dependence that works to contour discourses U.S. national belonging.

In a similar fashion to how Christian religious faith participates in constructing a guiding ideological framework for U.S. national belonging, traditional family structures also shape cultural expectations for appropriate behavior. Scholarship about family values and their influence on understanding social relations and public policy (see, e.g., Cloud, 1998; Collins, 2000; Irvine, 2004; Jakobsen, 2002; Kahl, 2009; Scott, 2003) lays a foundation for how U.S. community members have come to privilege this set of social relationships. Evident throughout much of that scholarship is the rhetorical force of *family* and/or *family values*, indicating the ideological weight of the heteronormative nuclear family to contemporary understandings of (neoliberal) U.S. citizenship (see, e.g., Bell & Binnie, 2000; Berlant, 1997; Canaday, 2009; Chávez, 2010a; Duggan, 1995, 2003; Herman, 1994; Phelan, 2001; Richardson, 1998, 2000; Seidman, 2002; Warner, 1999; Weeks, 1998). Within contemporary neoliberal discourse, “the market and the family unit [are seen] as the crucial agents to solve the nation’s core cultural problems” (Dingo, 2004, p. 175), and, so, those institutions represent another consequential factor for how current notions of U.S. national belonging are construed.

At the core of both Christian and family values remains an interest in mandating acceptable forms of sexuality—a disciplinary measure with consequences for both migrant and

LGBT/Q individuals. Detailing the influence of pastoral power (a form of religious influence that references the type of control that the church has over its congregation), Foucault (1978) explained how religion has come to exercise authority over people's (sexual) lives, but only after individuals willingly subject themselves to such discipline and render themselves docile. As Foucault illustrated, the history of "normal" sexuality has been developing for centuries by virtue of a Christian religious command to confess one's innermost nature to be cleansed. In this way, religion has served as an overseer of individuals' behavior, both publicly and privately, demanding that sexual acts be put into language for the purpose of confession. Thus, cultural strangers in the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America campaigns resistively accommodate the nation's commitments in their discourses of belonging. Specifically, when video participants testify to their difference, they demonstrate their docility (dependence) on national moral structures and their self-control and personal responsibility to be able to govern themselves (independence), positioning them as good neoliberal subjects with U.S. national narratives of belonging. In that logic, the married, heterosexual family is *the* symbol of appropriate sexual behavior. Furthermore, good citizens' participation within such relationships adhere to the Christian moral codes that govern much of the nation's public policy and debate. As Carter (2007) noted:

To the extent that heterosexuality was discursively constructed as a new foundation for national stability, then, we can suggest that all modern men and women were solicited to shape their erotic and domestic lives according to these newly normative standards in order to gain access to social and political legitimacy as Americans. (p. 78)

Christian religious faith and heteronormative family relationships hold tremendous cultural value within the United States, demonstrating one's fitness for U.S. belonging, as well as one's

docility—both essential investments for the neoliberal U.S. nation.

Both traditional family values and Christianity inform larger cultural narratives of good (neoliberal) citizenship that I have outlined, and they are founded on the historical legacies of U.S. colonization. Tracing the historical influences of Christianity and the family in this way exposes the value of such institutions within the U.S. imaginary and, as I have suggested, contributes to the logics from which (in)dependence derives.

As cultural strangers engage in discourses of belonging that perform citizenship and counteract stereotypes that locate them as burdensome, they never fundamentally challenge the logics that cohere contemporary notions of neoliberal U.S. national identity and belonging. Instead, video participants introduce their material bodies into these categories and make (conditional) space for themselves (and possibly others) within this normative framework. Using the mediated form of video testimonials, cultural strangers use their material bodies and their discourse to do more than affiliate with certain (desirable) characteristics and reject (unacceptable) others; they move fluidly between dialectical tensions that, although always in flux, give rise to the currently influential U.S. citizenship structures that powerfully marginalize certain populations. Although for the purposes of this analysis, I separated each of these tensions, as the actual discussion of these discourses suggest, they are each deeply complicit—always pushing and pulling together to shape contemporary understandings of national belonging.

Although cultural strangers must move between competing expectations for dependence and independence, their participation in these discourses also is always already an engagement with discourses of (in)visibility as well, especially as video participants discursively and materially render independence and dependence visible or invisible in particular ways. Furthermore, the dialectical tension of (in)valuability also contours how cultural strangers are to

discursively and materially present themselves. As I argue in the next chapter, the discursive practices in which U.S. community members must engage to argue for their inclusion, in fact, are strategies that seek to ideologically whiten cultural strangers. Not only are cultural strangers' discursive efforts attempts to manage the national tensions of (in)visibility and (in)dependence but so too are they appeals for inclusion that constitute efforts to gain acceptance by appealing to whiteness as a foundational aspect of U.S. national identity and belonging.

CHAPTER 5

(IN)VALUABILITY: HOW CULTURAL STRANGERS CLAIM THEIR NATIONAL VALUE
AND PRESERVE THE NATIONAL INVALUABILITY OF WHITENESS

U.S. national belonging is informed by neoliberal logics of privatization, personal responsibility, and capitalism, and it relies on a variety of discursive tensions that are related indirectly to race, sexuality, and social class, to protect the privileges of a small (white) few. As I have theorized, (in)visibility and (in)dependence are two such tensions that give rise to contemporary understandings of U.S. national belonging, but discourses of (in)valuability also circulate in similar ways. Theorizing national identity and belonging as a set of tensions reveals how cultural narratives allow privilege to be negotiated on dialectical grounds that distract attention away from race. Within this queerly informed dialectical framework, not only are cultural insiders and outsiders meant to balance visibility and invisibility, and dependence and independence, but their management of those tensions concurrently contributes to the dialectical tension of (in)valuability that protects/privileges only certain neoliberal subjects.

For many, U.S. national belonging is a coveted status, something invaluable for which U.S. community members, and those desiring access, have and will sacrifice. Cultural strangers who desire acceptance within the folds of the nation help to imbue the United States with some of this value, illustrating its desirability and its authority in their petitions for inclusion. These discourses—which I term “discourses of (in)valuability”—negotiate a constant balance among race, gender, sexuality and social class, often tipping the scales so as to (silently) protect whiteness. To access U.S. national identity and belonging, cultural strangers participate in these

discourses by preserving the *invaluability* of whiteness—a construct that is performed, enacted, protected, and resisted through discourse (see, e.g., Moon & Nakayama, 2005; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Nakayama & Martin, 1998; Shome, 1996). Thus, within the United States, (in)valuability plays an important function, marking some identities as being worth more than are others, and generating and maintaining criteria for that worth along the lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality (to name a few). Those desiring inclusion draw on the logics of neoliberalism to engage in discourses of belonging, balancing the national tension of (in)valuability that protects whiteness and further entrenches the national significance of other tensions I have discussed [including discourses of (in)visibility and (in)dependence].

As I discussed in chapter 2, the United States is invested in whiteness (see e.g., Carrillo Rowe, 2004; Lipsitz, 2006; Ong, 1996), and the nation state's recent adoption of neoliberal governmentality works in the service of whiteness by downplaying the role of race within U.S. culture (see, e.g., Enck Wanzer, 2011a; Goldberg, 2009; Jones & Mukherjee, 2010). Cultural strangers' discourses of belonging must work to maintain the privilege of whiteness and to protect it in order to leverage inclusion. Ansell (1997) has tried to explain the relationship between race, governmentality, and capital, as *racial neoliberalism*, noting that this social ideology and practice is:

a form of racism that utilizes themes related to culture and nation as a replacement for now discredited biological references of the old racism. It is concerned less with notions of racial superiority in the narrow sense than with the alleged “threat” people of color pose—either because of their mere presence or because of their demand for “special privileges”—to economic, socio-political, and cultural vitality of the dominant (white) society. It is, in short, a new form of racism that operates with the category of “race.” It

is a new form of exclusionary politics that operates indirectly and in stealth via the rhetorical inclusion of people of color and the sanitized nature of its racist appeal. (p. 21)

Racial neoliberalism circulates within U.S. culture to prioritize and protect certain bodies—investing them with economic, political, and cultural capital, and, simultaneously, to divest others. In this chapter I attend to how whiteness and heterosexuality, in tandem with a host of other privileged social locations/categories, function together to designate the boundaries of U.S. national belonging and citizenship, exploring the implications of such territoriality for cultural strangers and their discourses of belonging.

If whiteness and heterosexuality have cultural value, it makes sense that some populations are invested in protecting these categories. In particular, the defense of these subject locations becomes a function of contemporary discourses of national belonging—a rhetorical move (in this project from the margins) that reinforces the invaluability of whiteness and heteronormativity. Cultural strangers' discourses of belonging resistively accommodate the nation's investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism by balancing national expectations for those who have accessed belonging to demonstrate their value to the nation, but not their invaluability.

This chapter first provides a brief discussion about what has given rise to contemporary logics of (in)valuability, suggesting that the turn toward neoliberalism discussed in chapter 2, as well as historically privileging whiteness, have worked to establish white, heteronormative, economically contributing bodies as being *invaluable* to the nation. That material is followed by a discussion of the video testimonials, focusing on particular ways in which migrant bodies adopt American dream discourses to demonstrate their national worth, and then addressing more nuanced claims of value that are exhibited by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/queer

(LGBT/Q) video participants. After arguing that each of these cultural groups must tactically participate in discourses of (in)valuability in different ways, I discuss implications for migrants and LGBT/Q individuals' explicit narratives of value, and I consider how both groups steer clear of claims of their invaluability to the nation.

The Dialectical Tension of (In)valuability

There is a difference between that which is valuable and that which is invaluable. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.-d) listed among its definitions of *value* something that has “considerable importance or worth,” is of “great benefit,” or, if referring to a person, references someone who is “entitled to consideration or distinction; worthy, estimable.” Concurrently, that which is *invaluable* is described as something “that cannot be valued; above and beyond valuation; of surpassing or transcendent worth or merit; priceless, inestimable,” as well as “too great to be estimated; incalculable” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d.-b). The variations in these definitions indicate that there are considerable differences between that which is *valuable* and *invaluable*, particularly with regard to the power and influence that is contained within each description.

As I have suggested, cultural beliefs about (in)valuability are predicated on the nation's investment in neoliberalism and intimately tether race, gender, and sexuality to notions of capital and worth. Seeing the nation's population as “living resources” (Ong, 2006, p. 6), neoliberalism marks certain identities and bodies to be more or less valuable—value that is (silently) assigned, among other things, by race, gender, sexuality, and economic contribution. Neoliberalism, embedded within discourses of colorblindness and multiculturalism (Duggan, 2003; Goldberg, 2009; Enck-Wanzer, 2011a; Jones & Mukherjee, 2010), influences national discourses of belonging by investing whiteness with *invaluability*—a social status that, historically, has been

privileged, but with new neoliberal impulses has garnered even more institutionalized protections. As this chapter demonstrates, citizens may be *valuable* to the nation—in fact, are expected to be within U.S. neoliberal logics of governmentality—but they may not be *invaluable*, for that status suggests a greater degree of power and authority that is reserved for white U.S. community members. For citizens to claim that they are *invaluable* national community members may threaten the control and authority of whiteness, for such a label intimates that the nation would not function without the presence and contribution of its *invaluable* citizens—citizens who are white. Both citizens and cultural strangers negotiate this tension between value and invaluability, and, thereby, they participate in national logics of neoliberalism that preserve whiteness.

As I discuss in chapter 2, I move beyond an understanding of whiteness that is tied exclusively to phenotypical characteristics, and, instead, I conceive of it to represent a privileged nexus of inclusion/belonging that calls on race, sexuality, gender performativity, geographic location, nation, and social class (among other things), to recognize that U.S. cultural capital is based on these categories (see, e.g., Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2007; Lipsitz, 2006; Puar, 2001). Whiteness, as a nexus of privileged social categories, distinguishes that which is culturally *invaluable* from what is *valuable*. It is the tension between both of these positions, value and invaluability, that comprises the third tension of U.S. national identity and belonging that I outline, for that tension requires those desiring belonging identify, contribute to, and protect that which is worth most to the nation—whiteness.

As I have explained, to theorize the complicit ways that subjectivity is constructed and functions within broad field of power within the United States, I adopt an intersectional understanding of whiteness. On a national scale, I argue that the United States, fundamentally, is invested in whiteness, as evidenced by a wealth of scholarship that traces historical protections

that the nation has put into place to maintain a particular racial order, with whiteness being dominant (see, e.g., Bailey, 2011; Carrillo Rowe, 2004; Chávez, 2010a; Enck-Wanzer, 2011a; Jacobson, 1998, 2001; Puar, 2007; Roediger, 2005, 2007; Shome, 2001). In this way, I use whiteness as a social analytic, and I understand *being white* as not just about “a certain range of phenotypes, but claims on culture and values” (Garner, 2007, p. 68).

Expanding my earlier discussion of whiteness in Chapter 2, I now articulate a more nuanced discussion of whiteness that carefully links this identity category to national invaluability. Theorizing whiteness as based on both phenotypical and cultural qualities, I rely on Dyer (1997) and Garner’s (2007) similar explanations about the multifaceted ways in which whiteness works within U.S. culture; namely, that whiteness has a material component (the phenotypical hue of skin), as well as an ideological component (the social capital and value that whiteness affords). Drawing on scholarship that has suggested the intimate relationship between class and whiteness (Wray, 2006), religion and whiteness (Goldstein, 2006), sexuality and whiteness (Barnard, 2003; Carter, 2007; Puar, 2001), and nation and whiteness (Puar, 2007; Shome, 2001), I argue that whiteness is a particularly conceived discursive and material status to which only a privileged few in the United States have access, and those that do are concurrently invaluable to the nation. In particular, this position leads me to understand whiteness as the privileged *nexus* of social categories, including white skin color, middle- or upper class status, Christian religious faith, and heterosexuality. Whiteness signifies the very privileged ways in which each of these identities collude, recognizing that there always already is fluidity in and among these categories that a simple term cannot adequately capture. Within that framework, a gay white man can claim whiteness, although others might not accept it, whereas a middle- or upper class Arab Christian cannot, even though there are particular elements of their identities

that taint their (white) membership. In this way, many, if not all, video participants in the We Are America and Testimony: Take a Stand campaigns are nonwhite, due to some degree of understood deviance that marks migrant and LGBT/Q individuals as cultural strangers.

Both whiteness and heterosexuality function to reinforce the other, and, in so doing, they bolster a specific cultural understanding of U.S. identity that carries cultural capital [or (in)valuability]—a complex identity that, recently, has been perceived as threatened by white U.S. citizens (Carrillo Rowe, 2004). As Goldberg (2009) explained:

From the 1970s on, the state increasingly came to be conceived as a set of institutions supporting the undeserving. . . . Fear of a black state is linked to worries about a black planet, of alien invasion and *alienation*, of a loss of the sort of local and global control and privilege long associated with whiteness. (p. 337)

Extending Goldberg's comments, I further assert that the privileged social location that whiteness occupies always already is a heterosexual construct as well, implicating the intersectional ways that certain bodies and identities come to be valued (and in this case, threatened).

In his discussion of U.S. identity at the turn of the 20th century, Carter (2007) explained that “aligning oneself with normal heterosexuality had the effect of performing one's alignment with ideal Whiteness. And so, the more 'heterosexuality' talked about itself, the less Whiteness needed to say” (p. 98). As Carter's quote suggests, for people to be considered either valuable or invaluable, they must align with whiteness and heterosexuality, reinforcing the cultural capital of both categories and the worth of the people who occupy them.

Recognizing that whiteness has value—indeed, as I argue, *(in)valuability*—by extension, it has been seen as something that individuals possess as private property (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1997; Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001; Harris, 1993). As Lipsitz (2006) wrote:

Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through the unequal educational opportunities available to children of different races, through the insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations. (p. vii)

To understand whiteness as a possession further instantiates the relationship between neoliberalism and whiteness, particularly as neoliberalism privileges privatization. In other words, just as U.S. vigilante groups, such as the Minutemen, coalesce around the emphatic privatization of the nation, as demonstrated in vocal claims such as “This is *my* America” (Goldberg, 2009, p. 336) other U.S. insiders might *indirectly* assert that “This is *my* whiteness,” further investing this identity category with invaluability and identifying it as something that requires protection—protection, I argue, that temporary affords cultural strangers a place in the U.S. nation as *protectors* of whiteness.

Claims such as the Minutemen’s about owning the nation are more discursively visible than are individuals’ claims about owning whiteness; however, by extension, neoliberalism’s emphasis on privatization can extend to attitudes about race, in similar ways to how it characterizes attitudes about nation. As Enck-Wanzer (2011a) wrote, “In this neoliberal world, then, racism as a public *topos* is driven underground, privatized and born again as something

different” (p. 25)—something like colorblindness (Jones & Mukerjee, 2010), which renders race (and whiteness) discursively and figuratively (in)visible. Indeed, discursive invisibility (silence), as discussed in chapter 3, functions to protect and maintain the coveted status of whiteness (Chidester, 2008; Covarrubias, 2008; Crenshaw, 1997; Duncan, 2004; Herakova, Jelača, Sibii, & Cooks, 2011). National discourses of (in)valuability, as well as the other foundational tensions that I have discussed, including discourses of (in)visibility and discourses of (in)dependence, coalesce around neoliberalism—a political, economic, and social system that contributes to contemporary understandings of worth and that affects how value is rhetorically and materially assessed and assigned in cultural strangers’ discourses of belonging.

For cultural strangers, whose material bodies have not or do not belong within the privileged national category of whiteness, however, the ways in which these video participants structure their discourses to resistively accommodate the nation’s investment in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism is influential. In particular, video participants resistively accommodate the invaluability of whiteness through balancing the national tension of (in)valuability—(silently) protecting it, and, in so doing, contribute their value to the nation. In particular, cultural strangers demonstrate their *material* value by talking about how they pay into U.S. systems and structures (such as businesses and homeownership, as well as the tax system), and they demonstrate their *ideological* value by talking about their white-collar goals/professional identities, college education, and, in some instances, their investment in traditional family values. Ultimately, cultural strangers’ discourse of belonging render them *valuable* to the nation, but they stop short of claiming their *invaluability*, a category of worth that is reserved for only white, heterosexual citizens of the U.S. nation.

U.S. community members and cultural strangers desiring access to the nation are important participants shaping (and shifting) understandings of (in)valuability, as well as revealing the underlying influence of these discourses for contemporary beliefs about U.S. national identity and belonging. Although value can be understood in terms of financial investment (material worth), value also can be understood in relation to one's social class and/or one's relationship status (ideological value). Cultural strangers engage in national discourses of (in)valuability in their quest for inclusion; however, based on examination of these testimonial campaigns, migrant participants in the We Are America campaign, more actively and overtly express their value to the nation than do LGBT/Q individuals participating in the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign. Although it is impossible to ascertain the meaning for this based on the video testimonials collected for analysis, I believe that the current rhetorical situation in the United States—marked by neoliberalism's fierce call for personal responsibility and privatization—has made it so that phenotypically nonwhite bodies must work harder to demonstrate their worth to the nation than do phenotypically white LGBT/Q individuals, whose national value is more culturally accepted [thanks in part to what Puar (2007) has called homonationalism]. This state of exception, occupied by white LGBT/Q individuals, has developed on the heels of 9/11 and increased fear/marginalization of foreign bodies (Puar, 2007), the consequences of which appear to necessitate differences in how nonwhite migrants and white LGBT/Q individuals claim their value to the nation. In particular, the ways in which video participants rhetorically work with whiteness in their discourses of belonging, exposes the nation's investment in whiteness and suggests cultural stranger's role in constructing and maintaining it, something to which I will now turn my attention.

The Nation's Possessive Investment in Whiteness

Whether through directly commenting on one's value to the nation (of the type witnessed in many of migrants' video testimonials) or more implicit suggestions about one's worth (of the type that were infrequently captured in LGBT/Q individuals' video testimonials), cultural strangers make the national tension between value and invaluability more transparent. As this chapter proceeds, I trace discourses that cultural strangers use to elevate their status in the United States to that of "community members"—a category implicitly tied to whiteness—and I suggest how that status has implications for whiteness and cultural understandings of invaluability. In particular, I explore how cultural strangers discuss their educational preparation, professional goals, and family values to reveal a complicated nexus of race, gender, sexuality, and citizenship that informs a sense of U.S. national identity and belonging that highlights how value is (discursively) constructed, (materially) treated, and (ideologically) measured. First I will look at the white-collar dreams and aspirations that are captured in video participants discourse of belonging, followed by an exploration of how migrants talk about ownership as an investment in the nation, and paying dues work to balance the national tensions of invisibility. Finally I discuss the ways phenotypically white bodies manage this tension as well, specifically discussing the invisibility of whiteness in video participants discourses of belonging.

White-collar Dreams

White-collar dreams are a common theme coursing through migrants' testimonials in the We Are America campaign. Repeatedly, migrants express their desire to work as engineers, physicians, architects, and other skilled and educated professionals whose occupational goals would allow them to rise through social class ranks and to demonstrate their elevated material value to the nation. Discursively highlighting these professional ambitions, migrants construct

discourses of belonging that locate themselves as individuals with *value* who can financially strengthen the nation. Such rhetorical claims help to unhinge migrant bodies from the stigma that they are a transient population (here to earn a living that they then send home only to be reinvested in their nations of origin) or that their major contribution to the nation is delivered through manual and low-paid labor (whose financial rewards are too insignificant to be invested in anything, lest these wage earners be unable to provide for their basic needs).

Migrant video participants, discursively privilege (and perform) *white*-collar aspirations, *lightening* themselves, and bringing them closer to the coveted U.S. status of whiteness. These efforts help them to demonstrate their national value, and, simultaneously, expose how national discourses of (in)valuability, although hinging upon notions of material worth, work to assemble complicated hierarchies of privilege by using vocabularies that mask the nation's possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006). As I have argued, these hierarchies are stitched together from neoliberal principals that afford cultural strangers access to logics of personal responsibility, privatization, and individual merit, and that distract attention away from race (Goldberg, 2009). As Jones and Mukherjee (2010) explained, "Efforts to privatize the social and articulate autonomous, privately culture-consuming, liberal subjects has led to skepticism about the continuing significance of race, enabling neoliberalism to assert a colorblind vision of social integration" (p. 408).

Even though all video participants from the We Are America campaign might be read as nonwhite based on their video appearances, their race never is mentioned; instead, migrants highlight their professional (and, by extension, social class) aspirations. In particular, migrants' material value is derived from (seeking to) populate middle- or upper class, *white*-collar professional categories that demonstrate a degree of material worth and value that lower income

(or stigmatized migrant bodies) do not (and cannot) provide. Discursively demonstrating their desire to occupy these cultural spaces, migrant video participants further express their desire to keep their talents and their (future) capital within the United States, and, thereby, entrench their material value in the United States.

Migrant video participants' expressed desire to remain in the United States and to pursue higher education showcases their potential value to the nation and their fitness within the category of whiteness. For example, Durham, North Carolina resident, Palma-Guifarro (facing deportation after recently being arrested trying to cross the border into Texas), discusses wanting to go to college and be a pediatrician (18 year-old Durham Resident). Similarly, Juan articulates his dream as also going to college, saying, "My dream has always been to become an aerospace engineer, to work for NASA one day. Design satellites and shuttles" (Juan's Story). In addition to these snippets, other migrants speak of owning businesses, becoming educated "professionals," or serving as U.S. Congresspersons. Each of those statements dispel culturally specific stigmas that mark migrant bodies as burdensome or as doing harm to the nation (Chávez, 2010a; Cisneros, 2008; Flores, 2003; Luibhéid, 2002; Phelan, 2001; Santa Ana, 2002), although they also reinforce the invaluability of whiteness, which is embodied in the *white*-collar professions, higher education, and American dream narratives (indirectly) that migrants invoke as being desirable.

To highlight their professional goals, and the consequent social class that such aspirations afford, migrants discursively suggest ways in which they can contribute value to the U.S. nation by investing in and protecting institutions that reflect the nation's investments in whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism. Efforts to frame themselves as bodies who labor (or desire to labor) on behalf of the nation redirects negative cultural attitudes about migrants' burden on

the nation to highlight how they are assets to the nation—a discourse that is made possible by neoliberalism. As Ong (2006) noted, “Citizenship elements such as entitlements and benefits are increasingly associated with neoliberal criteria, so that mobile individuals who possess human capital or expertise are highly valued and exercise citizenship-like claims in diverse locations” (p. 6).

The U.S. nation state’s investment in neoliberalism has opened a discursive space from which materially valuable nonwhite migrant bodies can make claims to whiteness (white U.S. national belonging), provided that they do so by claiming only *value* rather than *invaluability* to the nation. Practicing discursive (in)visibility with regard to race and whiteness is expected within neoliberal logics of a colorblind society that protects and privileges whiteness. When migrants participate in these discursive silences, they lighten their cultural associations both discursively and figuratively, demonstrating their commitment to the (white) U.S. nation and reinvesting it with authority, but, nevertheless, pervert the intended purity of its composition.

Migrants craft discourses of belonging that highlight their skilled and professional aspirations, showcasing how achieving such professional ambitions are a way for them to realize the American dream. Engaging in American dream discourses, migrants ideologically align themselves with foundational U.S. concepts; in particular, that people who work hard always will find success in the United States, and success, by extension, equates to access to (white) U.S. belonging. In migrants’ testimonials, cultural strangers who demonstrate their willingness to work hard, (and, subsequently following the nation’s logic), can gain entrance to (white) spaces of privilege and belonging. These discursive efforts create a situation whereby cultural insiders must acknowledge the legitimacy of migrants’ arguments, lest they acknowledge flaws in their social system and, potentially, the invisible privilege of whiteness.

Although the American dream is not explicitly a dream of whiteness, in many ways, historically, it stood to benefit only those who could access this privileged social category (Barrett & Roediger, 1997, 2005; Carter, 2007; Jacobson, 1998, 2001; Roediger, 2005). Migrants who adopt American dream narratives as part of their discourse of (in)valuability demonstrate that their value to the nation is inevitable if they work hard, and, subsequently, if they are successful, they reinforce the invaluability of the (white) nation as a resource upon which ambitious, motivated people can reach their full potential.

If migrants use American dream discourses to demonstrate that they (can) occupy culturally privileged categories, such as the middle- or upper class, and/or professional *white-collar* positions, they increase the cultural capital of such categories by demonstrating their desirability, but, nevertheless, they repopulate them with nonwhite bodies. For example, as Raul Zamora expresses:

I just want to stay here [in the United States]. I just want to reach for what I wanted to do since the time I was a little kid, which was attend UT. Finish my education, try to get a masters in architecture. I just want to give something back to Austin, in particular, and this great country that is America. (Raul Zamora)

Anguiano and Chávez (2011) explained, in a cultural and political climate that is hostile to immigrants, “it is not surprising then, that they [migrants] surrender to the pervasive, mainstream discourse, and the naturalization of the myth of the American dream” (p. 83), as doing so becomes a way for these individuals to identify with, and to engage in discourses of national belonging. Thus, by demonstrating their white-collar ambitions, their desire to contribute back to the nation through hard work, and their patriotism for the nation, migrants participate within

American dream discourses that reference the value of social class and the invaluableity of social class mobility that neoliberal U.S. logics extend.

Depending on cultural myths that fortify the possibility of individuals' mobility within the United States, migrants activate pervasive cultural logics about the nation's beneficence and reinforce the neoliberal notion that race is not a factor in U.S. conceptions of success and/or national belonging. As we see in the examples above, migrants' participation in discourses of (in)valuability augment the cultural capital of labor and shift attention away from race—a valuable service that protects the privileges of whiteness by allowing them to remain discursively invisible.

Further suggesting the significance of American dream narratives, Yves Gomes (2011), a young man who was brought to the United States as a child, shares his heart-wrenching story of watching his mother and father, at separate times, be deported back to India. Now, describing his current situation, he affirms his love for the United States and his desire to stay and pursue a *white-collar* career. Facing deportation himself, as Yves explains:

Whatever happens, I know it'll be difficult, but I'm going to have to keep doing what I'm doing. I'm going to have to keep pushing, do good in school, and, eventually, get to that point where I want to be which is to become a doctor. (Yves Gomes)

Yves engages in a discourse of belonging that showcases his desire to work hard to achieve his goals, highlighting particular personality traits that affirm his value to the nation: being hardworking, tenacious, and disciplined. In accordance with American dream discourses, each of these qualities should allow Yves' upward social class mobility—movement that emphasizes the degree of his personal responsibility and that does not reference his nonwhite status.

Subsequently, Yves contributes to discourses of (in)valuability by offering the possibility of his value to the nation (as a physician and as a protector of white U.S. privilege).

Many migrant video participants discursively foreground their drive to succeed—to work hard and to become educated—engaging in American dream discourses that naturalize this myth of a colorblind U.S. nation and that instead, emphasize the fluidity of social class status. As a result, migrants' efforts protect the value of whiteness with discursive invisibility (silence).

Ricardo Muñiz similarly describes his commitment and dedication:

Hi everybody. My name is Ricardo Muñiz. I am a current student of Fullerton Junior College. I have been attending there for 3 years and I am currently working on a degree, an Associates in science, and working on certifications, and working on my transfer classes to transfer for Cal State or, possibly, UC to possibly major, to double major in international business and international relations. (Ricardo Muñiz)

Although not directly arguing that his education and professional aspirations will benefit the United States, viewers can infer that is the case, due to the larger context in which this narrative is a part (that is, the larger set of migrant testimonials that make up this netroots' movement appeals for U.S. national belonging). In this way, migrants participate in larger national discourses of (in)valuability that demand cultural insiders (and those desiring this status) to demonstrate their worth to the nation; worth that must align with, and reinforce, the value of whiteness, but that do so by keeping whiteness invisible. Video participants who are able to protect whiteness by engaging in a neoliberal logic that encourages the discursive invisibility of race in favor of discursively promoting market forces, such as labor (materialized in these narratives as professional goals and ambitions and the social class status that they afford) are valuable. In turn, as these video testimonials suggest, migrants' efforts to participate within

American dream discourses do the work of maintaining the privilege of whiteness by keeping whiteness invisible and, instead, reinforcing the social class/professional characteristics that give rise to its (and the nation's) invaluableity.

Ownership as an Investment

Although previous examples highlight how white-collar dreams and aspirations locate migrants within the folds of neoliberal discourses of value, there are other instances where migrants narrate their value to/for the nation as business and/or homeowners. Narratives of ownership such as these demonstrate cultural strangers' investment in in the nation—an investment that can add worth to the United States and to whiteness. Thus, this investment in homeownership, essentially, is an investment in whiteness. As Crenshaw (1997) explained, “Whiteness functions ideologically when people employ it, consciously or unconsciously, as a framework to categorize people and understand their social locations. Within this framework, whiteness as a social position has value and has been treated legally as property” (p. 255). Understanding how whiteness might come to be understood as value, migrants' discourses of belonging must not threaten the social position of whites by claiming invaluableity; rather, they must demonstrate their value by protecting these social positions through investing in material and ideological structures that give rise to whiteness.

Discussing his success in business, Alberto's testimonial begins with a text over that reads, “In 1993, Alberto took over the ownership of Don Juan Restaurant in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood of Washington, DC.” Alberto continues, in Spanish (subtitled in English at the bottom of the screen), saying:

Things started going well; the business was making money. We started to invest more money in order to remodel and expand the restaurant, until we were able to buy the house

where now live. My children were growing up, and soon they started helping out at the restaurant, and such was the story of our family. Hard work to earn what we have now.

(Alberto)

In this excerpt, Alberto discursively frames himself as a U.S. cultural insider, someone who is invested in the United States and has reaped the benefits of the American dream. Emphasizing his middle- or upper class status through claims about home and business ownership, Alberto reinforces the value of ownership, engaging a larger neoliberal logic about privatization and personal responsibility that helps to protect whiteness. Crafting his testimonial to demonstrate his investment in the nation (and his subsequent value), Alberto's narrative (and actions) further imply that the nation has given him an invaluable opportunity to discover this potential—something that would have been impossible in the war-torn El Salvador that he fled.

Describing one's investment in the U.S. nation is a clear way that cultural strangers participate in larger national discourses of (in)valuability, demonstrating their *value* to that nation (as contributing community members who help to propagate the myth and worth of the American dream), and the concurrent *invaluability* of the (white) nation that has afforded them such opportunities. Expressing similar success in business, Atour Eyvazian discusses his meteoric rise up the management chain at the popular fast-food restaurant Jack in the Box. Transitioning from earning just \$3.35 an hour to owning more than 100 restaurants, Atour's story is the quintessential American dream story. By emphasizing personal responsibility for his success, and relying only on his efforts, Atour's narrative draws from neoliberal logics to craft a discourse of belonging that carefully manages the national tension of (in)valuability. Atour's narrative (which, actually, is a news segment) begins with a reporter explaining:

I recently met Atour Eyvazian at this Jack in the Box, which he owns. He worked his way up the corporate ladder, until he became the owner of this Jack in the Box, and this one, and in this one. In fact, Atour Eyvazian owns 117 Jack in the Boxes, more than anyone else in the country. (Atour Eyvazian)

As the extended video title indicates, Atour is Iranian, and, therefore, his material body presents itself as Middle-Eastern, a phenotypical appearance that is contrasted with his very white-collar performance as a U.S. business owner. Atour, a self-made man, begins his narrative by carefully describing opportunities that he took advantage of upon arriving in the United States, opportunities that later allowed him to invest in and to protect white neoliberal institutions that structure the United States.

Even though Atour's narrative is one of prideful professional growth, it also is a narrative of whiteness. Atour's exceptional rise up the management chain granted him access to privileged national spaces—white-collar spaces that, invaluable, fuel the nation's worth and that, ironically, phenotypically nonwhite bodies participate in reinforcing. In this way, migrants' nonwhite bodies, frequently cast as a threat to the nation, reposition themselves within white national spaces of ownership, as valuable protectors of whiteness. By rendering their nonwhiteness discursively invisible and their material investments in the nation visible, migrants affect national discourses of (in)valuability by reinforcing the invaluableity of whiteness. Discourses of national belonging are nuanced, such that inclusion into the nation is tiered by degrees of value, a hierarchal system of belonging that materializes as a consequence of the nation's investment in neoliberal ideologies. Hence, migrants assert their value to the nation (enough to grant them access), but not their invaluableity [as this remains an inaccessible (white) category].

Echoing similar experiences as Atour, Juan Manuel describes his challenges immigrating to Arkansas, and, at the age of 15 year, looking for a job. Unlike the previous example, Juan Manuel's professional experiences first were characterized by his perceived lack of value. He explains applying to many positions across the community in which he lived and not being hired at any of them. He notes his frustration, saying, "My dad one day told me, 'You wait, don't be sad. Don't be depressed. If they aren't willing to hire you, then you hire them.' So, at the age of 15, I started my own business" (Juan Manuel's story). Illustrating how he initially was perceived as lacking value to/for the local community (something illustrated in local businesses' reluctance to hire him), Manuel, unable to convince community members of his worth, nevertheless, asserted his value by opening up a restaurant.

Although Manuel's contribution to U.S. economic and cultural institutions is significant, citizens of the U.S. nation state have discursively constructed an understanding of the U.S. economy that suggests it will not rise or fall with the successes or failures of nonwhite migrants, as implying such admits the precariousness of whiteness to protect itself. Even though this is the case, nonwhite migrants cannot be seen as threatening the already tentative position that whiteness occupies (something that could be perceived if migrants claimed invaluability to the nation); instead, they prove their willingness to invest in (and, subsequently, protect) these white spaces—efforts that provide *valuable* labor for the nation.

Paying Dues

In addition to migrants' American dream discourses and in their comments of home and business ownership, another primary way in which national discourses of (in)valuability are engaged is through narratives that describe how cultural strangers pay dues to the nation—an action that directly reinforces the (white) privilege and authority of the United States. As

Harvey (2005) explained, “Evidence strongly suggests that the neoliberal turn is in some way and to some degree associated with the restoration or reconstruction of the power of economic elites” (p. 19). Expanding that point (as scholarship on racial neoliberalism has done) economic elites are those who also populate the social category of whiteness. As cultural strangers (re)iterate how they pay into the U.S. economic system (e.g., paying taxes), reinforces the power of (white) economic elites and the authority of the nation.

Paying one’s dues to the nation is something that cultural strangers argue provides them with a sense of belonging—belonging that appears to be *earned*. Migrants’ discourses of (in)valuability highlight that paying one’s dues to the nation communicates a degree of entitlement that other discourses of (in)valuability—those that utilize the American dream—do not. Liliana Ramos (2011), talking about recently being arrested by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) notes:

But you live a good life. One tries to live a peaceful life. You avoid trouble so as to not have run-ins with the law. You really feel humiliated because you know that you haven’t done anything. You know that you have tried to live a peaceful life. You’ve been working. You’ve paid your taxes. (Liliana Ramos)

As Liliana’s example illustrates, paying taxes directly increases the nation’s material value and, accordingly, reinscribes the value of (white) economic elites. It would appear that migrants’ comments about paying taxes (such as Liliana’s) participate in larger national discourses of (in)valuability by arguing that if people can demonstrate their material value to the nation (through actions such as paying taxes), they deserve access to the benefits of citizenship — benefits that, historically, have remained off-limits for many migrants (and citizens alike) due to their phenotypically nonwhite appearance (Jacobson 1998, 2001; Luibhéid, 2002; Ono & Sloop,

2002; Puar, 2007) For many migrants, it is this not-quite-white status that keeps them on the periphery of U.S. cultural inclusion, and even though that is the case, these cultural strangers do not try to remedy their circumstances by making discursive appeals that directly comment on the nation's racist and exclusionary practices; instead, they emphasize their material value—discursive acts that continue to eclipse the role that race plays in the United States, and, through their silence, maintain the *invaluability* of whiteness. These rhetorical efforts reveal the foundational role that whiteness plays in assigning value in the nation. Indeed, one's perceived relationship to whiteness contours possibilities for cultural strangers' discourses of belonging but limits video participants ability to directly engage the topic of race.

Cultural strangers' decision to prioritize their *material* value to the nation is a recurring theme across the We Are America narratives. In an additional example, Domingo, a young man who recently was deported back to Guatemala, left his family behind. In his absence, his wife (who is a white, U.S. citizen) describes, "He was already in the process [to earn legal permanent residence]. He works. He pays his taxes. He does everything. So we never thought we would end up going through this" (Domingo's Story). Thus, even though migrants commonly assert their economic value to the nation, they remain disciplined to ideological and material cultural margins. Understanding the influence that neoliberal logics of capitalism have on U.S. policies and attitudes, it might seem that migrants' discourse of worth would be enough to grant some degree of national access, but as is demonstrated, many migrants remain marginal—valuable to the nation (for their economic contribution and their investment in systems of white power), but not invaluable—due to the pervasive (and silent) influences of whiteness and the racial boundaries that it erects to contour the degrees of national inclusion.

Throughout these narratives, the complicated nexus of race, social class, sexuality, and gender identity (to name a few) inform cultural strangers' discourses of national belonging and affect the ways they manage national tensions of (in)valuability. Another news segment uploaded from the We Are America campaign tells the story of Ola's family. As her sister, interviewed by the local news, explains, "They have a business. They pay taxes. They contribute. They do everything that a citizen does" (Ola's Story). Award-winning journalist, Jose Antonio Vargas, echoes similar sentiments. Vargas explains his understanding of what it means to be "American," saying that an American is, "someone who works really hard, someone who's proud to be in this country and wants to contribute to it. I'm independent. I pay taxes. I'm self-sufficient. I am an American. I just don't have the right papers" (Jose Antonio Vargas). Ola and Vargas's narratives reveal how (white) U.S. national belonging are nuanced, allowing differing degrees of access to different bodies. The lines of separation appear arbitrary, marking Ola for removal, but not her sister and Vargas.

Both Ola's and Vargas's narratives invoke neoliberally informed logics to argue for inclusion, suggesting, accordingly, the material investment that both Ola and Vargas have made to the nation. However, as the full versions of both these segments imply, the primary difference remains in the interpersonal connections that both Ola and Vargas were able to call on for assistance. Their narratives illustrate that Ola's family did not have any (white) U.S. community members to assist her or her family in their appeal for inclusion; in contrast, Vargas had an entire network of (white) teachers and other people (white school administrators and neighbors to assist him). As Vargas noted, Ms. Denny, his choir teacher, was the first member of his "underground railroad," a comment that discursively invokes a historical legacy of slavery and the specific (white) individuals who risked their lives and security to provide for the safety and security of

nonwhite individuals. Vargas's reference to the underground railroad emphasizes the assistance that he received from (white) U.S. citizens in his struggle to gain access to the United States, access that led to his Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism career and subsequent financial success in the United States. Vargas appears able to access greater degrees of U.S. national belonging by virtue of the (white) U.S. citizens who protected him, belonging that Ola, unable to call on such connections, remains unable to access. Even though Vargas has been able to stay in the United States and to build a productive life, he still does not have access to the coveted status of whiteness, in part, because he is phenotypically read as nonwhite, and, in part, because he is discursively represented as always already owing a debt to whiteness (by virtue of the white U.S. citizens who had to sacrifice themselves for him).

Although most migrants who engage in larger national discourses of (in)valuability assert their value to/for the nation, far fewer migrants critique the United States for how they have been *devalued*. In an extensive example, Chris, a gay man whose partner was not issued a U.S. Green Card, explains the complicated ways that the United States understands the relationship between national identity, race and value:

From the start of this country, where it was limited to white men in origin to become a citizen in its early years, it was expanded. You know, over and over again, but at the same time, there have also been occasions, like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1870 [sic], which followed on the heels of the Gold Rush, in which Chinese immigrants were very welcome in this country, until the gold market flattened out, and all of the sudden, there wasn't enough work, and all of the sudden, the immigrants were demonized, and all of the sudden, they were not allowed to come to this country and were sent out for the country, and we keep repeating the same mistake over and over again. The fact of the

matter is our economy depends on it, the soul of the country is derived from immigrant history, and I would like to see the country come face-to-face with that and see the importance of immigrants. (Chris's Story)

Chris's testimonial details a history of U.S. immigration in which phenotypically nonwhite populations have been marginalized or excluded, calling the United State to task for its racist and xenophobic history. His concern that the United States does not recognize the value of immigrants momentarily makes visible the relationship between race and value in this nation. In particular, when Chris notes that he would like the United States to "see the importance of immigrants to the nation," he directly correlates immigrant, nonwhite bodies with national value—value derived from neoliberal conception of worth to the nation as laboring bodies. In his critique of U.S. immigration history, Chris makes transparent the difficulty (if not impossibility) that migrants (many already conceived of as being nonwhite) experience in this country as they attempt to build a home in the United States, an impossibility that most migrants' narratives leave discursively invisible through their silence. In this fleeting moment of visibility, Chris's narrative exposes complicit ways that whiteness, neoliberalism and the United States coconstitute discourses of (in)valuability and, subsequently, the contemporary understanding of an (in)valuable citizen. Nevertheless, exposing this relationship among national identity, race, and value sheds light on some of the other narratives that have been examined in this chapter, demonstrating the nation's preoccupation with discourses of (in)valuability and the ways in which worth is constructed and maintained.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender/Queer Value

At this juncture, it is important to point out that although self-identified migrants in the We Are America campaign capitalize on discourses that highlight their white-collar dreams and

aspirations, LGBT/Q video participants in the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign do not do the same. In all of the videos collected from the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign, there are no direct claims made about how LGBT/Q bodies currently, or in the future, would add material value of this type (i.e., labor, property ownership, and/or taxes) to the nation. Although it is possible, across all LGBT/Q members' video testimonials, that their professional occupations, social class status, varying of forms of ownership or the dues that they pay to the nation, might build a case for why and how this community contributes value to the nation, LGBT/Q individuals remain silent. Even though this is the case, I do not mean to suggest that LGBT/Q individuals do not engage in larger national discourse of (in)valuability but, rather, they do so differently than migrants, by being *indirect*.

LGBT/Q video participants demonstrate that in addition to *material* worth (derived from one's economic contributions) and *ideological* worth (derived from one's participation within American dream logics), there is an additional way in which worth is derived, increasing the breadth of understanding about (in)valuability within the United States. In particular, LGBT/Q individuals, many of whom, according to Puar (2007), have been temporarily included in the nation, participate in larger national discourses of (in)valuability by showing their worth to the nation as loving and committed partners, engaged in marriage, and committed to traditional family values, something discussed at length in the chapter 4. Fittingly, as members of the LGBT/Q community recently have begun to assert themselves, and/or be identified with ideas of life (such as gay marriage and families; Crimp, 2002; Puar, 2007), I argue that their engagement with discourse of (in)valuability uses their subjectivities (that already have begun to be valued)—, by capitalizing on their commitment to traditional family values. Thus, even though LGBT/Q members' narratives differ from those of migrants, they still activate neoliberal logics as their

foundation—specifically, neoliberalism’s commitment to privatization and personal responsibility.

In one thread of videos collected for analysis, a group of recently married gay partners and/or allies testified about the value of marriage in an online community, called “The Wedding Matters,” organized within the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign. Throughout the Wedding Matters narratives, partners repeatedly expressed the value of the marriage ceremony, ways in which it legitimated their relationship, and the devotion that it communicated to their children (elements of which were discussed in chapter 4). Discussing their commitment to family values in this way is directly correlated to ideas of permanence and stability, made possible by LGBT/Q community members taking *personal responsibility* for their families and *privatizing* their politics, and, in the process, “promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2003, p. 50). For example, as Ashley (2011) explains, “My mom really caught me off guard, and she was very happy to know that we had made the steps to become a *permanent* family” (my stress) (Ashley and Rene). In another instance, Carmen and Rose (2011) say:

It made sense to get married; it provides a sense of security. For us, it was being able to show our kids that we have professed to each other, and to everyone that we know we’re sticking together . . . through everything, and to believe in marriage lasting a lifetime”
(Carmen and Rose)

In a contemporary moment that has reported increasingly high divorce rates, growing numbers of unmarried adults, and more instances of single parenthood (Halberstam, 2012), LGBT/Q narratives emphasizing the permanence of marriage do important discursive work to frame these committed family relationships as (in)valuable frameworks that structure national insiders’ lives

(and the U.S. nation, more broadly). Thus, LGBT/Q members' narratives, albeit more *indirectly* engaging in national discourses of (in)valuability, nevertheless, participate in such conversations by virtue of their (neoliberal) claims about the cultural importance of marriage and family. Subsequently, these LGBT/Q video participants, discussing marriage and family in this way, assert their value to the nation (as community members invested in upholding such structures), but they also, concurrently, proclaim the invaluability of these categories in providing their lives with meaning, and, thereby, affirm the United States as a stable, permanent nation that is built on stable, permanent (heteronormative) families.

Further illustrating the (in)valuability of marriage and traditional family structures, Jim Graham, talking about his gay male friends' wedding, notes:

The important thing is the fact that they declared their love and made it legal, and this is a testament and example that we do want to make commitments to each other, and we want to be married to each other, and we want to be part of society, like everyone else. (Jim Graham).

In perhaps the most overt example of LGBT/Q video participants discussing value, this video demonstrates the commitment of marriage (and participating in larger society *as* a married committed couple) as a way to "be a part of society." Although many LGBT/Q individuals speak from positions of privilege (something evidenced in the visual cues that are apparent in their video testimonials), these social class positions are not discursively leveraged in these testimonials as a reason for their inclusion. Even though social class status may remain discursively unmarked, nevertheless, it circulates throughout these narratives, indirectly suggesting the material value that LGBT/Q community members contribute to the nation. Thus, differences between migrant and LGBT/Q testimonials reveal nuanced ways in which (white)

U.S. national belonging is contoured both around race and social class, features whose significance have shifted with the advent of neoliberalism. As Duggan (2003) articulated, “The valorized concepts of privatization and personal responsibility travel widely across the rhetorics of contemporary policy debates, joining economic goals with cultural values while obscuring the identity politics and upwardly redistributive impetus of neoliberalism” (p. 14).

LGBT/Q discourses of belonging that call upon marriage cannot be extrapolated from the suggestion that they inherently make about whiteness and its value. When LGBT/Q individuals communicate the value of marriage and family values in their lives (in spite of their same-sex desire), they reaffirm the category of the “traditional (heteronormative) family” as an *invaluable* national category, privatizing their political interests and demonstrating valuable ways in which they uphold these foundational (white) U.S. institutions.

As these video participants’ discourses of belonging reveal, the work that cultural strangers must do to balance the national tensions of (in)valuability occurs on both material and ideological grounds that are established within the logics of neoliberalism—grounds that prioritize one’s economic contribution to the nation, as well as one’s cultural contribution to whiteness. It seems that the LGBT/Q individuals who participated in the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign assert their (homo)normativity as a way to access (white) U.S. national belonging—an outcome made *more* possible for them (than for nonwhite immigrants) as a result of their phenotypical appearance. Both their physical appearance (as whites) and their financial capital (as apparent members of the middle- or upper classes) are possessions *owned* by LGBT/Q community members (Crenshaw, 1997; Harris, 1993), and although they may not quite be worth enough to access full U.S. national belonging, they are worth enough to secure their permanence within the nation. Ultimately, their phenotypical whiteness implies the invaluableity of white

skin as a badge of inclusion and implies that (homo)sexuality, perhaps, is not as threatening to whiteness as are (nonwhite) foreign bodies—a suggestion made apparent in migrants continued struggle for access into the nation.

When Whiteness is Discursively Visible.

Although value oftentimes is understood as being derived from material worth, it less often is understood as being derived from whiteness. In spite of this less familiar association (indeed, its invisibility), as I have shown, whiteness remains an integral component in how (in)valuability is conceived within the United States. There are many examples across both the Testimony: Take a Stand, and We Are America campaigns where, by virtue of video, viewers might identify video participants as white or nonwhite, but it is very infrequent for these individuals to discursively reference their race, an observation that was discussed at greater length in chapter 3 on discourses of (in)visibility. In *only three instances* across the 143 videos sampled for analysis is the value of whiteness or the challenges presented by one's race explicitly referenced.

When whiteness *is* discursively visible in these testimonials, it often is commented on in negative ways that suggest how, to be influential, whiteness must construct a nonwhite other, who often is demonized (Carrillo Rowe, 2004, Dyer, 1997; Ong, 1996). Such discourses lead to dominant cultural narratives about difficulties that migrant bodies bring on the nation, and the invasive and troubling ways that LGBT/Q individuals might threaten the nation, variously linking the stigma of these groups with *burden* (which might be seen as the opposite of *value*). For instance, Muhammed Zahid Chaudry, a wounded vet who appeared in two separate testimonials sponsored by the We Are America campaign, comments about his nonwhite racial appearance:

In 2001, I became a legal permanent resident, but since then, every possible barrier has been erected between me and my dream to achieve U.S. citizenship. In fact, instead of stepping closer to citizenship, I am now fighting deportation. Because my name is South Asian, “Muhammad” background name checks have been indeterminable. The suspicion around a South-Asian man living, primarily in agricultural area of Eastern Washington, has been overwhelming. (Muhammad Zahid Chaudhry)

In one of the only examples evidenced in the video testimonials collected, Chaudry articulated particular challenges that he, as a phenotypically nonwhite, South-Asian man has experienced. Although he references his dream to become an U.S. citizen, his faithful military service to the nation, and his resulting paralysis, Muhammad breaks the calm and dutiful demeanor that he presents in his other testimonial to momentarily critique the nation’s racism. The isolated nature of his comment, as well as the critique that he levels against the nation that he, concurrently, claims to love and admire is an important moment where viewers might begin to understand the powerful ways that whiteness operates as a condition of belonging—in particular, the way that whiteness, although normally invisible, is exposed as a U.S. insider status, and, subsequently, as a privileged (and invaluable) U.S. identity category within cultural strangers’ discourses of belonging.

Expressing similar frustrations, another group of migrants reference race and its construction. The video testimonial from which this excerpt is extracted communicates the frustration that day laborers feel over a new piece of immigration legislation that targets undocumented workers. As a man explains in Spanish with English subtitles:

I’ve personally been affected by the law. Those who used to hire me are now afraid to.

They are trying to get rid of us. Since 285G was passed, for the last 2 years, I’ve had no

work. Companies don't want to lose their licenses. They now prefer to hire somebody white or with papers, even if their work isn't good. (Voices of Day Laborers)

Of interest in this example is how the speaker identifies the privilege of whiteness as being *able to work* (however, to not work as hard and not be as valuable as a laborer). Furthermore, the manner in which value and race are narrated in this example suggests that when people are read as white, opportunities present themselves that nonwhite bodies in the United States do not experience. In particular, opportunities that allow white-identified individuals to be recognized as *valuable*, productive, contributing community members, whereas nonwhite migrants who desire the same things are not afforded equivalent opportunities for recognition. We might then read these day laborers' discourses of belonging to suggest how the nation understands nonwhite migrant bodies as being disposable (without *value*), and phenotypically white bodies (even LGBT/Q ones) are marked as *valuable*.

In a final example, a woman, instead of critiquing racial structures that exist within the United States, talks about how she might use whiteness to her advantage, a rhetorical effort that directly implies the invaluability of whiteness within neoliberal U.S. logics of belonging. In this particular instance, a young girl describes her experiences of migrating to the United States:

At 4, my family came to East L.A., the first place I called home, hoping to find the American dream. According to my mother, I had an advantage because I was smart and I looked American. "The only good thing the Spanish ever left us," she said. (No Place)

Stressing the value of her phenotypical appearance, Maria's narrative implies that whiteness operates as cultural capital in the United States, affording her opportunities to access the American dream and inferring that her ability to pass within the category of whiteness has made accessing U.S. national belonging easier. Fundamentally, (in)valuability, and ways in which it is

discursively managed to afford or to limit inclusion, are predicated on a complicated nexus of race, social class, labor, and, subsequently, value, such that the intersecting ways that these social statuses align have profound implications for understanding U.S. identity and belonging, as well as the nation's possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006).

Conducting a rhetorical analysis that focuses on the silence surrounding race is challenging as there is little text to examine; however, rhetorical scholars have traced careful arguments between whiteness and silence, suggesting the complicit ways in which silence functions to protect and preserve privileges afforded by whiteness (see, e.g., Chidester, 2008; Covarrubias, 2008; Crenshaw, 1997). In spite of this silence—this discursive invisibility—race echoes loudly in the video images of participants and in the isolated examples where one's (racialized) social status is discursively rendered visible. Extending the argument introduced by other whiteness scholars (see, e.g., Covarrubias, 2008; Crenshaw, 1997; Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2007; Nakayama & Krizek, 1999; Rasumussen, Klinenberg, Nexica & Wray, 2001), silence is what allows whiteness to remain (in)valuable to/for the nation. As with anything that people cherish most, many people remain silent about it, tucking life savings underneath mattresses, secretly storing that which means the most to them under lock and key, lest they risk making themselves vulnerable to its potential loss. Whiteness, a social category in which U.S. community members are invested, operates in a similarly silent way, exercising its privilege in many unspoken ways that maintain its (in)valuability to/for the nation. The invaluability of whiteness is evidenced in video participants' careful demonstration about their value to the nation and their virtual silence about race, a silence that upholds and reinforces the cultural (in)valuability of whiteness. Indeed, instead of overtly discussing race, cultural strangers highlight neoliberally informed logics of privatization, personal responsibility, and/or their

contribution as laboring bodies, discursive moves that contribute to the (in)valuability of whiteness in the United States by silently protecting it. As explained below, observations such as these point to some important implications about the nature of U.S. national identity and belonging.

Conclusion

Neoliberal practices and policies influentially shape current cultural attitudes and discourses about U.S. national belonging; these logics of (racial) neoliberalism that contribute to national structures of valuation have important implications that contour the national dialectical tension of (in)valuability. As scholars seek to understand these precarious points of relation between insiders and outsiders, and between the center and the margins, many view U.S. neoliberal politics and policies as an initial explanation for how certain types of citizenship have been constructed and made desirable (see, e.g., Chávez, 2010a; Duggan, 2003; Ong, 2006; Puar, 2007; Richardson, 2004, 2005). In recent decades, neoliberalism has been a primary framework. As Ong (2006) explained:

Neoliberal governmentality results from the infiltration of market-driven truths and calculations into the domain of politics. In contemporary times, neoliberal rationality informs actions by many regimes and furnishes the concepts that inform the government of free individuals who are then induced to self-manage according to market principles, discipline, efficiency and competitiveness. (p. 4)

Important shifts have occurred between public and private space in recent decades, altering people's understandings of the State, individual citizens, and roles and value assigned to each. Although docile and abiding citizens who appropriately self-govern their visibility and invisibility are identified as valuable U.S. community members, nevertheless, they may be kept

apart from the category of invaluability, for the latter status is reserved only for those whose bodies, identities, and interests are protected by/within the nation's investments in whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberalism.

Recent shifts in governmental policies that place greater responsibility on the capabilities of the private sector and private citizens to discipline themselves *into* proper citizenship relocates responsibilities of the U.S. government to *assign* value rather than to *protect* it, with the defense of that which is valuable being seen as good citizens' responsibility. As Richardson (2004) offered:

The emphasis on neoliberal approaches is on individual freedom and rights, and the importance of self-surveillance and regulation over direct state control and intervention.

Central to neoliberal modes of governance is normalization, the means by which norms of behavior are identified, encouraged and reproduced within populations. (p. 393)

These influential changes in governmentality mean greater inclusion for those who can accommodate the new neoliberal standards. Those subjects who are most valuable within this neoliberal context are productive bodies who can contribute to the prosperity of the nation and can adequately perform this new normalized citizenship and patriotism; in other words, those who add both material and ideological value to the nation, such as migrant laborers, reproductive heterosexual couples, or appropriately visible civil servants.

Cultural strangers, whose presence in the nation always is in question, use their narrative testimonials as an opportunity to dispel marginalizing stereotypes and to strategically engage in U.S. discourses of national belonging. Migrant video participants describe their desire to participate in professional white-collar occupations through their appropriation of American dream discourses, reinforcing the invaluability of whiteness in the nation and exposing

complicated ways in which (in)valuability is discursively constructed to reflect the nation's prioritization of neoliberal social, cultural, and economic logics. LGBT/Q individuals, using similar testimonial efforts, highlight the nation's investment in privatization and personal responsibility, with their commitment reflected in the institution of marriage and subsequent traditional family values that it implies. In each of these cases, cultural strangers illustrate that the United States conditions identity and belonging upon a larger national tension of (in)valuability; at once, requiring community members to be *valuable* but not *invaluable*, and, instead, demanding that cultural strangers reinforce the *invaluability* of the nation and the categories of social organization in which it is invested (whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism).

As I have argued, these discourses of (in)valuability are complicated, especially for how they intersect with, protect, and prioritize whiteness. A consequence of these influences appears to be how cultural strangers stop short of arguing for their invaluability to the U.S. nation. There are abundant examples of migrants and LGBT/Q video participants asserting their worth to the nation [and subsequent ways that such efforts do the valuable work of investing in and protecting the (white) nation], but there is far less evidence that they take these claims a step further and assert their invaluability to the nation, something I have argued oversteps their social role and position and threatens whiteness.

(White) individuals are able to gain the greatest degrees of national acceptance, especially if they contribute to the economic goals and objectives of the neoliberal nation in (material) ways (Bell & Binnie, 2000), and, simultaneously, because they contribute social and cultural value to the nation as a result of their whiteness (ideological value). Migrants in the United States always have needed to demonstrate their value to the worth to the nation, and

LGBT/Q community members, although, technically, citizens, have long struggled against cultural stigmas that racialized them or that mark their bodies and their desires as being dangerous. In this way, the bodies and identities of both of these groups have been identified as nonwhite, interfering with the possibility for them to be seen as productive, valuable, U.S. community members. As this analysis demonstrates, nonwhite bodies (understood as the conglomeration of intersecting identity categories that keep individuals beyond whiteness—including, but not limited to lower social class, non-Christian religious faith, non-English speaking etc.) are unable to contribute to the ideological value of the nation (whiteness) and must compensate by providing material value (labor and/or economic contribution). On the contrary, white bodies (again, understood as a conglomeration of intersecting identity categories that work together to privilege particular individuals), are already coded as valuable, and presumably, have less to prove. Although I do not mean to suggest that all white bodies carry the same degree of value, some white bodies, in conjunction with their material contributions, have the potential to climb to the status of cultural invaluability.

Even though both migrant and LGBT/Q individuals, historically, have been marginalized from the nation, there have been recent shifts in how the United States has recognized their social location. Puar (2007), for instance, explained how some members of the LGBT/Q community have been afforded (temporary) access because of their value:

There is a transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families). The politics of recognition and incorporation entail that certain—but certainly not most—homosexual, gay, and queer bodies may be the temporary recipients of “measures of

benevolence” that are afforded by neoliberal discourse of multicultural tolerance and diversity. (p. xii)

Experiencing greater degrees of inclusion, albeit at the expense of foreign nonwhite bodies, who, as Puar (2007) argued, are being newly queered within contemporary U.S. discourses, I assert that members of the LGBT/Q community (and video participants, in particular) recently have come to be valued by the nation in new ways, shifting how they engage in larger national discourse of belonging and the ways they manage the U.S. tension of (in)valuability. Extending this argument, LGBT/Q video participants, many of whom are not-quite-white, nevertheless, negotiate a social location that is closer to invaluability than to value—an option that is made possible by recent cultural narratives of neoliberalism that help to secure the privileges and social locations of whiteness, and heteronormativity (and arguably, by extension, homonormativity).

Although nonwhite migrant bodies proclaim their value to the nation by depending on discourses that, simultaneously, reinforce the invaluability of the nation (and of whiteness), white LGBT/Q bodies appear able to side-step this dilemma. In other words, although there are many examples of migrants asserting their *value* to the nation, as I have commented, there is far less evidence of members of the LGBT/Q community doing the same. This difference implies varying ways in which race and sexuality are regarded in the nation, and it might point to some pertinent implications for how U.S. national identity and belonging currently are conceived. Impinging on the discursive terrain of invaluability appears off-limits for many marginalized cultural groups, something that implies a deep-seeded national investment in constructing and maintaining exclusionary notions of value. Indeed, the invaluability of whiteness is something to be protected, and it could be threatened by outsiders who make claims of their invaluability to the nation.

Understanding that larger national discourses of (in)valuability are about more than one's financial contribution—indeed, that there is a racial component to ways in which the United States assigns value—implies the significance of *(in)valuability* as a fundamental material and ideological framework that lays foundations for U.S. national identity and belonging. To equate whiteness with value in discourses of U.S. national belonging is to locate one's (perceived or proclaimed) racial identity as something that translates to one's worth as a citizen; worth that, in many instances, trumps cultural strangers' efforts to invest in, labor for, and materially contribute to the nation.

When language serves to repeatedly position certain subjects as normal and natural—an argument taken up by many whiteness scholars (e.g., Dyer, 1997; Garner, 2007; Lipsitz, 2006; Roediger, 2005)—those (newly naturalized) identities begin to leverage a profound type of privilege. Within the United States, as I have argued, this privilege (which, indeed, is invaluable) is constituted in tandem with whiteness and heterosexuality, imbuing individuals with varying degrees of (in)valuability. Indeed, differently racialized bodies must engage in this national dialectic of (in)valuability in different ways, at once working to combat culturally specific stigmas that keep them from the category of whiteness. Ultimately, discourses of belonging, addressing economic capital, racial composition, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation, rhetorically balance a set of national tensions that each contour the margins of U.S. community membership in nuanced ways, that resist and accommodate the nation's most precious investments. Such efforts make it so that marginal bodies, in their quest for inclusion, participate in the architecture of U.S. citizenship—albeit, as I demonstrate, maybe through resistive accommodation rather than complete assimilation to such blueprints. Although needing to discursively prove their value to the nation—indeed, to prove their fitness for joining the

category of whiteness—cultural strangers must carefully manage their perceived difference lest they suggest that their nonwhite status—a status with less cultural capital—in fact, is invaluable.

As I have suggested, whiteness is a foundational element of U.S. identity that works in concert with other cultural ideologies that recognize community members in terms of their (in)valuability to the nation. In particular, whiteness (and its contingent categories of heterosexuality, Christianity, and middle- and upper class status) has incredible value within the United States, positioning those who can claim membership within each of these categories at increasing levels of advantage within U.S. social, cultural, and governmental institutions. Extending this logic, if cultural outsiders, within the United States, must demonstrate their value to the nation in order to be accepted, and if value within the United States is equated with whiteness, cultural strangers must appeal to, or participate within, discourses of whiteness as a way to demonstrate their worth. Importantly, then, migrant and LGBT/Q video participants resistively accommodate these tensions of (in)valuability in such a way that they manage their ideological value (in relation to whiteness), as well as their material value (in relation to the neoliberal logics that cohere the nation's social, governmental, and economic policies). Engaging in such discursive efforts consequently, allows cultural strangers to potentially affect ways that power is located and exercised within U.S. national spaces, and the nature by which U.S. national identity and belonging are construed.

A close examination of video participants discourses of belonging exposes the concomitant tensions that exist among (in)valuability, (in)visibility, and (in)dependence that have been discussed throughout each of the analysis chapters. Each of these discourses, functioning independently and together, render the material conditions for U.S. citizenship and belonging with which citizens and strangers must contend. Having explored these in detail, I

next outline possible opportunities that may exist for cultural strangers and those seeking social change to communicate their interests more effectively.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS: USING DIALECTICAL TENSIONS TO UNPACK, CHALLENGE, AND
CONSTRUCT DISCOURSES OF U.S. NATIONAL BELONGING

Discourses of belonging circulate across the airwaves, narrating the cultural stories that give rise to contemporary understandings of U.S. inclusion and exclusion. Just since ringing in the year 2013, countless acts of violence have been committed against individuals who are marked as different by/within those national discourse of belonging, acts that are a symptom of much broader structural inequalities that perpetuate enduring violence against marginalized communities. Jadin Bell, an Oregon teenager, died after hanging himself on a local elementary school playground because of being bullied. Jabbar Campbell, who hosted a party with his guests including transsexuals and transvestites, was attacked by police in New York City. Fernando Garnica was beaten and robbed in Florida, and may have survived had he not been afraid that going to the hospital might reveal his undocumented status. Within this violent landscape, social movement groups and others fighting for social justice engage in discourses of belonging to shift the logics upon which such violence is predicated. Cultural strangers participate in these discourses in a number of ways, some rallying for national policy change in the form of immigration reform or gay marriage, with others tackling localized battles that might allow an ill gay man's partner to remain with him in the hospital, or arguing for a mother's or father's ability to stay with her or his U.S.-born children instead of being deported. As these video testimonials demonstrate, their efforts both play by the rules and yet subvert them.

As social movement groups speak out about such acts of violence and exclusion they intervene in national discourses of belonging that have, in some ways, marked nonwhite, nonheteronormative bodies as targets for expulsion, shifting the conversation such that these individuals might be able to claim belonging as well. For example, for years, the Human Rights Campaign has, advanced arguments in favor of gay marriage, and, in so doing, participates in a discourse of belonging that locates members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/queer (LGBT/Q) community as rightful community members who desire to uphold the nation's investment to heteronormativity by engaging in a monogamous, civically/religiously sanctioned union. DREAM activists rally for passage of the DREAM Act, legislation that would allow young people (under the age of 16) who were brought to the United States illegally by their parents, to stay in the United States and "give back" to the communities that they identify as home; by doing so, they participate in a discourse of belonging that demonstrates how and why migrant youth can and should be included into the folds of the nation. The Testimony: Take a Stand and the We Are America campaigns use vernacular voices to engage those discourses of belonging, showcasing, in cultural strangers' words, reasons why they can and should be included.

These discourses of belonging make the argument that marginalized individuals should be included into current cultural, social and political structures/institutions, but they do not suggest serious reforms to the existing systems. The Human Rights Campaign, the Courage Campaign, DREAM activists, and the We Are America campaign are not challenging the institution of marriage or the need for immigration control; instead, they seek admission into those structures, but in those appeals, they alter the composition of those categories, quietly troubling them with the infiltration of their nonnormative bodies. Although their efforts might

be seen as assimilationist attempts to access inclusion and not subversive at all, what this dissertation demonstrates is that such discourses can be seen in more fluid terms. Indeed, the efforts of many social movement groups might benefit from being seen as simultaneously assimilationist and subversive—as acts of resistive accommodation that might allow scholars to better comprehend the rhetorical force of those groups' appeals.

The same fluidity that informs my understanding of cultural strangers' discourses of belonging additionally influences my analysis of the set of carefully mediated tensions, whose balance, I argue, shifts based on changing political, economic, and social influences that prevail. Although other scholars have suggested that the boundaries of inclusion always are shifting (see, e.g., Berlant, 1997; Garner, 2007; Luibhéid, 2011), calling on a queer approach to dialectical tensions highlights the influence that marginalized individuals have in coconstructing national conditions of belonging. Each of these tensions, although independent in the sense that they operate as distinct interests, nevertheless, are intertwined as well, with each implicating the others. The nation's investment in neoliberalism locates race, sexuality, and citizenship at the crux of these negotiations, contouring the discursive and material management of one's identity and belonging, and exposing the nation's investment in making those who fall beyond the nation's discourses of belonging value more governable. Even though these national investments influence how cultural strangers construct their discourses of belonging, the dialectical tensions that comprise national identity always already flex in response to cultural strangers' (and others) efforts to find balance within them. In particular, scholars and activists alike might benefit from lingering within this gray area—these spaces between—where the possibilities for subjectivity and action remain indeterminate, and, thus, are loaded with opportunity.

These implications are discussed in further detail in the pages that follow. Specifically, this final chapter first discusses the significance of this research study for communication scholarship, exploring how adopting a queer dialectical framework offers new insight for understanding U.S. national belonging. That material is followed by suggestions for future research and a discussion about the current state of both the Testimony: Take a Stand and We Are America Campaigns.

Adopting a (Queer) Framework to Examine Tensions of U.S. National Belonging

I used a queer approach to dialectical tensions to study U.S. national belonging, constructing an analytic approach to deliberately focus on the gray area in between categories (insider–outsider, citizen–foreigner, and/or resistance–assimilation) to trouble them and to focus, specifically, on the power that normativity exerts in the formation of these distinctions. Through deploying this queer orientation toward dialectical tensions, the metaphor of a *boundary* (something that needs to be crossed to access inclusion) shifts to suggest, instead, something more like *thresholds*—saturation points in one’s discursive performance of inbetweenness: (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability.

The terms insider and outsider often have been theorized as statuses that are assigned to different individuals; statuses that, if changed, allow people to cross borders that have excluded them. As Ono (2012) suggested, “Depending on one’s stance, a border may mean a boundary needing to be crossed, or alternatively it might mean a dividing line that, if crossed becomes an act of moral, ethical, and political trespass” (p. 21). Although this is a productive way to demarcate the isolation that comes from social and cultural exclusion, it remains a difficult metaphor for conceiving of the murky territory citizens without full citizenship rights experience, or the persistent institutional and social discrimination with which nonnormative individuals in

the United States contend. A queer approach to dialectical tensions that understands inclusion as being more about the balance of competing interests (and subsequent thresholds of acceptability imposed by dominant culture) provides a compelling way to think about these not-quite-citizens.

Identity is messy, reflecting the interlocking commitments and consequences of a variety of subject locations and how they cohere in and on a body to produce unique limitations and opportunities. Cultural strangers' discourses of belonging suggest that within a U.S. neoliberal context, marginalized individuals are differently figured (and located) in relation to (white) U.S. spaces. Within video participants' discourses of belonging, this means that many participants in the We Are America campaign demonstrate their value by talking about their labor for the (white) nation, and that participants in the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign assert their value by privatizing their sexual desire and publicizing their traditional family values. As I have argued, differences in cultural strangers' rhetorical efforts to balance the dialectical tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability imply that the various social locations these individuals occupy reflect, and are influenced by, one's closeness to, or inclusion within, the category of whiteness (a category that is comprised of a nexus of identities and circumstances, including social class).

Working within a queer framework of queer dialectical tensions, a number of opportunities to theorize how belonging is constructed, maintained, and altered present themselves. In particular, this research demonstrates that a queer conceptual framework that calls on dialectical tensions (a) prioritizes the movement between categories, (b) can emphasize the role of (discursive) behavior rather than (material) status, (c) creates alternate subject locations to and in relation to the (normative) U.S. nation, and (d) challenges the binary framework of resistance and accommodation. Examining these outcomes in more detail below

implies that this approach not only illuminates ways in which larger cultural narratives of U.S. national identity and belonging work and whose interests they serve but also shows how calling on these tensions within other communication contexts might provide a productive lens through which to view other discourses of belonging. To demonstrate, I first explore below how this framework offers an especially dynamic way to approach the study of U.S. citizenship.

Tensions as Dynamic

A queer model of dialectical tensions contributes to scholarship theorizing rhetorical boundaries by providing a set of analytic tools for thinking about unique circumstances that are experienced by those who walk within dominant cultural spaces but who never quite belong—cultural strangers. Adding to scholarly efforts to adequately conceptualize this ambiguity as racial inbetweenness (see, e.g., Jacobson, 2001, 2002; Roediger, 2005, 2007), cultural citizenship (see, e.g., Anguiano & Chávez, 2011; Rosaldo, 1998; Roque Ramirez, 2005) or strangerhood (see, e.g., Bauman, 1988; Chávez, 2010a; Marciniak, 2006), this analysis suggests that it might be productive to move beyond the framework of the border to, instead, adopt an orientation of saturation points (and, subsequently, thresholds). Such a shift could have profound benefits for those who study critical issues of race, gender, sexuality, and nation (to name a few). For example, queer U.S. citizens, who, technically, are (legally) members of the U.S. community by virtue of their citizenship status, nevertheless, lack the same legal rights; and nonwhite citizens in the nation, who, technically, are “insiders” remain institutionally and socially discriminated against. In these examples, individuals who, technically, might be considered insiders (by virtue of their status), nevertheless, remain othered—inside the nation’s borders, but not quite integrated. Certainly, the border exists as more than simply a metaphorical concept and has material consequences for those who dangerously cross it and/or who are deported over it each

day, however, the term “border,” implies a relationship between insiders and outsiders that I wish to interrogate.

Rhetorical research on borders has offered a crucial vocabulary for discussing how contemporary understandings of belonging and marginalization circulate within U.S. culture. Contouring public, political, and popular discussions, as DeChaine (2012) explained, “Border symbolism constitutes a powerful form of social sense-making—a public *doxa*, or structure of belief that informs cultural values, shapes public attitudes, and prescribes individual and collective actions” (p. 2). Indeed, this metaphor exists both physically (as a boundary line that demarcates the perimeter of the United States) and discursively (in treaties, public reports, and vernacular conversations), marking national spaces and identities. Lucaites (2012) noted, “National and cultural borders, of course, rarely exist without borderlands, zones of liminality that straddle what purportedly is bounded in and out and thus complicate, if not altogether confound, the impulse to rigid logics of inclusion and exclusion” (p. 229). Emerging from these video testimonials (in spite of this productive theorizing of the border) is a narrative about identity and belonging that requires an analytic framework that can account for the in-between of identity and belonging—the spaces when and where individuals do not quite fit. This framework would need to move beyond the logic of borders and borderlands that see inclusion and exclusion as conditioned by physical spaces or ideological boundaries to think of belonging in different ways.

The border, as a conceptual framework, has provided a lot of traction for scholars and activists who desire to make sense of the variety of subject locations that people occupy in relation to the U.S. nation, and it has been a productive framework in this dissertation as well. In particular, it is difficult, if not impossible, to locate video participants from the We Are America

and Testimony: Take a Stand campaigns in relation to the United States using narratives that *don't* somehow reinforce the logic of the border. In my writing, I refer to them as “marginal,” “peripheral,” “liminal,” and “excluded,” and with each reference, the imagery of a boundary is reinforced; however I believe that a queer dialectical model may hold promise. In particular, as this dissertation begins to demonstrate, such an approach focuses on cultural strangers’ discursive practices, recognizing the influence that they have in shaping the conditions of belonging that isolate them.

Informed by queer of color and queer migration scholarship that prioritizes the fluidity between and interconnectedness of race, class, sexuality, gender, and nationality, I push beyond this logic of the border to, instead, imagine belonging as being about managing saturation points. As Ferguson (2004) explained:

Queer of color analysis has to debunk the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality are discrete formations, apparently insulated from one another. As queer of color critique challenges ideologies of discreteness, it attempts to disturb the idea that racial and national formations are obviously disconnected. (p. 4)

Considering belonging as being comprised of a series of tensions opens up the possibility to explore belonging in an abstract way. When belonging is seen as being comprised of a series of tensions, there is a *relationship* suggested between the interests captured within that dialectical tension. Individuals who desire belonging must somehow participate in that relationship if they are to be recognized as U.S. national community members. That relationship requires individuals to balance the push and pull of each dialectic in nationally expected ways, and, if successful, they might (contingently) claim inclusion into the privileged category of U.S. national belonging.

Some bodies are worth more than others within the United States, and, consequently, not everyone approaches these national tensions from the same social location; nevertheless, if they are to access national belonging, they must enter into a relationship among (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability in appropriate ways. The relational and contextual dynamics that this model suggests provide a way for theorists to think differently about discursive practices and engagements of citizens and strangers; indeed, to consider belonging as comprised of a delicate discursive chemistry that must carefully balance nationally valuable elements or else their combination results in failure. Just as successful chemistry requires a sophisticated knowledge about ways that chemicals react to one another, managing national discourses of belonging requires an understanding of U.S. ideological investments. Cultural strangers' must, in some way, be familiar with these investments to delicately stabilize ideological components of U.S. national belonging, for it is when these tensions are in balance that cultural strangers might be in visibility, in dependence, or in valuability. Indeed, the (discursive) behaviors that cultural strangers engage in can impact their status in relation to the nation.

(Discursive) Behavior and (Material) Status

Cultural strangers in the We Are America and Testimony: Take a Stand campaigns engage in discursive efforts that stabilize the national tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability, and that resistively accommodate U.S. investments in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism that give rise to them. When cultural strangers behave in ways that balance these dialectical tensions, it grants them contingent belonging into the nation and overrides their status (as undocumented migrants or an LGBT/Q-identifying individuals). To emphasize the role of *behavior* and, simultaneously, to eclipse one's *status* holds significant possibility for theorizing one's relationship to the nation, because behaviors are actions that

people can engage in (successfully), whereas status, largely, is a marker of identity that is placed on people by others, and which they have less ability to alter.

Suggesting that U.S. national identity and belonging are comprised of the tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability frames thinking about belonging differently, emphasizing *behaviors* that one can perform to gain national recognition rather than the *status* that one has been assigned that might mark that person as (permanently or temporarily) marginal. A queer theoretical approach to dialectical tensions implies that all groups (insiders, outsiders, citizens, and strangers) must participate in certain discursive behaviors to be recognized by the nation as legitimate subjects, opening up the opportunity to see commonalities that exist across cultural groups, and revealing the normative national influences that shape contemporary understandings of U.S. national belonging.

Although people must balance these national tensions differently (based on their race, sexual orientation, social class status, etc.), nevertheless, it is the case that, regardless of these differences, all individuals might find common ground and purpose in understanding their tasks as being fundamentally similar; that is, in the service of balancing the national tensions that have been outlined. Working from the assumption that belonging is about the discursive chemistry of balancing a series of tensions, rather than about crossing a border, presupposes that all groups, regardless of difference, must engage in similar efforts/behaviors to balance the nation's competing interest of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability to access inclusion. Indeed, identifying the tensions that shape U.S. national belonging is something that all people affiliated with the United States must engage, and doing so makes it easier to see how marginal cultural groups might share something in common.

Approaching belonging as a balance of competing tensions that all people desiring inclusion must discursively manage moves away from models that label people with different identity tags or statuses that suggest proximity or distance to a privileged center. This realization makes it possible to see coalitional possibilities that might exist, and, indeed, potentially foster the emergence of coalitional subjectivities. As Carrillo Rowe (2008) explained, coalitional subjectivity is an orientation that understands agency, experience, and consciousness as being collective and interrelated, highlighting how people are connected to one another through a politics of relation rather than through unique social locations that they occupy. Understanding similar discursive efforts that all groups must engage to productively stabilize the nation's dialectical tensions might productively align these groups' interest in ways that could more effectively begin to alter the composition of U.S. national identity and belonging.

Cultural strangers who engage in behaviors that lead them to balance the national tensions outlined create the possibility for coalitional subjectivity to emerge, but it also may work in the service of protecting whiteness. Belonging cannot be conceived simply as a matter of ingroup or outgroup status but, rather, it must be theorized to account for the fluctuation that occurs materially and ideologically between those two poles. Cultural strangers' discursive efforts, then, could be understood for both their lightening effects and for their coalitional possibilities, consequences that, at once, advance and stifle the interests of social justice.

Recognizing the dialectics that exists in video participants' efforts to balance the broader tensions of U.S. national identity and belonging complicates understanding of the communication strategies of marginalized groups and/or social movement groups. As this dissertation suggests, cultural strangers' discursive efforts might be productively conceptualized as *lightening strategies*, discourses that do important rhetorical and material work for

marginalized individuals, who, in their quest for belonging, need to manage dialectical tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability. Video participants' discourses of belonging are rhetorical moves that inherently serve the interests of whiteness, and they can be understood as lightening strategies.

Although it is problematic that these discourses can work in the service of whiteness, video participants' efforts are not entirely supportive and protective of this privilege. As I have argued, cultural strangers engage in resistive accommodation, simultaneously, within and against these categorizations by virtue of coalitional subjectivities that they have the potential to foster, and ways in which their efforts allow marginal bodies to trouble the categories of whiteness and/or national belonging. The simultaneous resistance and accommodation that video participants engage in complicates understandings of the rhetorical force of discourses of belonging. The implications for seeing dialectical effects of those discourses are important and are explored in the following section.

Resistive Accommodation

Just as U.S. national identity and belonging can be viewed as being comprised of a series of tensions that must be balanced, communication efforts used by cultural strangers also can be considered as rhetorical moves that must strike a balance between resistance and accommodation. Some scholars have explained that marginalized groups engage in radical acts when they behave in ways that subvert or resist dominant social structures in some way (e.g., Moreman & McIntosh, 2010; Muñoz, 1999), whereas other scholars have attended, instead, to how marginalized groups struggle to fit in to accommodate broader social structures (e.g., Avila-Saavedra, 2011; Dorjee, Giles, & Barker, 2011; Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, & Coupland, 1988; Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota, 1995; Giles, 2008; Giles, Linz, Bonilla, & Gomez,

2012; Imamura, Zhang, & Harwood, 2011; Prentice, 2008; Rawswitsch, 2011; Ray, 2002; Rodriguez & Clair, 1999). Depending on a group's desired outcomes, either of these widely explored communication efforts might be beneficial, but, as I argue, they need not be seen as mutually exclusive.

Instead of reinforcing a dichotomy between the radical potential of many social change efforts and the conventionality of those outsiders who desire a community in which they can feel at ease, this dissertation has attempted to blur that distinction. Although initially preoccupied with testimonial examples that might suggest the radical politics of migrant and LGBT/Q communities, I quickly realized that in doing so, I was missing the careful (and, I would argue, more interesting) ways in which these narratives, into which all people are interpellated, are conceived and influenced both by cultural insiders but also, importantly, by cultural outsiders. Instead of imagining marginalized groups' efforts as being *either* radical *or* conventional, it is more constructive to consider ways in which a single discursive act both resists and accommodates dominant cultural narratives, as doing so might introduce the possibility for understanding and constructing alternate rhetorical strategies.

Video participants' efforts to balance dialectical tensions of U.S. national belonging serve as examples of resistive accommodation and introduce new ways of thinking about social justice efforts, providing a different approach to measuring success and creating a space for the implementation of different goals. Exploring the testimonies provided by video participants, it was unduly limiting to categorize their discourses as being either resistive or accommodationist, and after casting such a binary framework aside, I identified and explored unique ways in which their behaviors, at once, were supportive and subversive of dominant cultural norms. Cultural strangers in these video testimonials, although accommodating larger neoliberal citizenship

structures that have given rise to the dialectical tensions identified, nevertheless, in performing good citizenship, resist those same categories, subtly altering their composition, such that their nonwhite bodies become a part of the larger U.S. narrative of national identity and belonging.

Resistive accommodation is similar to arguments offered by Butler (1990) Muñoz (1999) and Moreman and McIntosh (2010) about the values of performativity and/or disidentification; however, it differs in the way that its outcomes are understood. In particular, as Muñoz (1999) explained:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machination and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. (p. 31).

As Morrissey (2013) pointed out, Muñoz's (1999) theory sees disidentification as producing powerful, critical, and political practice—radical efforts to subvert hegemonic identity categories but that still work within dominant logics that have created an uneven hierarchy of privilege. Although similar to disidentification, the resistive accommodation that was outlined in this dissertation differs in that video participants' discursive acts are not understood to be radical, nor are they conventional (Carter, 2009; Morrissey, 2013); rather, cultural strangers' discourses of belonging fluidly negotiate a space between nationally influential tensions, rather than between radical and conventional outcomes. The significance of that distinction plays further into the queer model of dialectical tensions that I have outlined that depends on one's ability to balance competing characteristics and proposes another way to think about how marginalized group rhetorically engage normative systems of oppression.

Seeing marginalized groups' communication acts, at once, as resistive and accommodationist provides scholars with a tool to produce nuanced understandings of how communication works differently from one context to the next, one group to the next, and one audience to the next. The fragmented and mediated nature of contemporary communication guarantees that those video narratives likely will be received by a variety of audiences and interpreted differently from one situation to the next—at once, being seen as resistive by some communities and as accommodationist by others. A framework that allows scholars to account for this variety of impacts is reflective of the current cultural contexts in which such narratives circulate.

Recognizing the potential and implied benefits of cultural strangers' testimonials as instances of resistive accommodation might be a beneficial way for other marginalized communities to understand their communicative practices. At the very least, resistive accommodation can be leveraged as a framework that scholars can use to explore other social movement groups' rhetorical efforts. Derived from scholarship that prioritizes the fluidity between categories and the need to trouble normative influences (see, e.g., Bailey, 2011; Chávez, 2010a; Ferguson, 2004; Luibhéid, 2008; Manalansan, 2006; Muñoz, 1999; Rivero, 2003), this analysis contributes to the breadth of scholarship that already is invested in understanding the blurriness of identity and belonging, but it also expands current knowledge about how those characteristics and categories always already are shifting.

Migrant and LGBT/Q individuals in both the We Are America and Testimony: Take a Stand campaigns have crafted careful appeals for inclusion that must account for their discursive and material subjectivities, and the demands of U.S. national belonging. Although some members of these groups have been able to enter into visibility, dependence, and visibility in

ways that appropriately stabilize the nation's competing tensions, a more complex understanding of how this becomes possible (or not) is necessary. Hence, the next section offers suggestions for future research.

Moving Forward

There are several ways that this research can be productively expanded in the future, both for communication scholars and for marginalized groups and/or social movement activists. Specifically, I hope that *my* future work, and the work of others interested in the discursive constructs of belonging, (a) tries to apply this queer approach to dialectical tensions to more contexts, (b) continues to push for new conceptualizations of communicative practices that explore how identity and belonging are crafted and managed, (c), encourages additional interest and exploration of online social movement groups' efforts, and (d) pushes to expose ways in which whiteness is privileged and protected within contemporary U.S. culture. Discourses of belonging circulate extensively and a closer look at ways in which such narratives function in relation to power has the potential to expose (and to trouble) the grammars on which inclusion and exclusion are based.

A queer approach to dialectical tensions expands current knowledge about how tensions can be used to theorize the workings of power as they manifest in discourses of national belonging. A close, critical analysis of video participants' testimonials revealed that these cultural strangers worked to balance tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability, but, I do not think these three tensions are exhaustive of all the competing national interests that push and pull on those seeking inclusion. Cultural groups, located at varying intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, religious affiliation, and/or geographic location, are oriented toward dominant culture norms in diverse ways. The discourses of belonging that

individuals engage in to access inclusion, in theory, must manage different considerations in relation to the groups to which they desire to belong. In this way, the queer migrant youth or affluent Arab business persons' discourse of belonging, although both seeking the same thing (to balance the competing tensions that structure each of their lives), nevertheless, manage a different set of national considerations that, upon closer investigation may reveal additional discursive tensions that comprise national belonging. Exploring a variety of these marginalized groups' efforts has the potential to build a greater critical understanding of belonging and inclusion, and to catalogue more national tensions that work to protect the nation's investment in whiteness, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism.

Analyses that characterize communicative efforts in singular, discrete ways (e.g., as subversive or assimilationist) do a disservice to the rich and nuanced ways in which rhetorical appeals are crafted and employed, which offers another avenue of scholarship that could be productively explored. Scholarship that works within this tension between resistance and accommodation (by revealing national tensions that structure belonging) might expose a variety of other similarly fluid rhetorical strategies that have been (or could be) used in the quest by marginalized groups and/or social movement groups to establish a more equitable social landscape. A conceptual framework that characterizes the communication efforts of marginalized groups as either subversive or assimilationist is unnecessarily restricting, and future research that resists such binary ways of thinking allows for imaginative theorizing about communicative practices.

In addition to exploring ways in which a framework of dialectical tensions might be productively expanded to address other contexts, and how critical exploration of fluid rhetorical efforts might advance the interests of social justice, this research additionally implies the benefit

of using critical rhetoric to study (online) social movement group communication. Critical rhetoric is an effective tool for examining (unequal) power relationships that exist across and throughout culture, but it also is particularly valuable in the study of online communication. Given the ability of critical rhetoric to engage fragmented texts, multiple contexts, and a variety of audiences, it is especially well suited to explore online communication. Because contemporary online activism places the role of persuasion within the hands of vernacular communities, a methodological orientation that allows for critical examination of how power circulates to stifle or celebrate various voices is essential.

The vernacular communities that successfully use online communication can reach much broader audiences than those who do not utilize mediated forms of communication and the rhetorical tools that they use, and impacts of their efforts, deserve critical attention. As Ono and Sloop (1995) explained:

Unless critical attention is given to vernacular discourse, no new concepts of how community relations are interwoven and how communities are contingent is possible.

Without a critical framework description occurs without self-reflection; hence, ideological presuppositions unconsciously may be reproduced. (p. 21)

As I have indicated, the online nature of much vernacular discourse introduces a new consideration for studies of vernacular communities, especially as it provides an additional set of communication tools with which to work.

Many marginal groups and/or social movement organizations use the internet as a way to disseminate their messages. As Warnick (2001) noted, "Communication on internet sites gives play to many voices without assimilating them into a single voice" (p. 62). The implications for this usage are extensive for vernacular communities, whose concerns, in part, remain liminal due

to the difficulty that group members have in widely sharing their messages. Although scholarship has broached the new challenges and opportunities that online communication presents for vernacular communities (e.g., Anguiano & Chávez, 2011; Burgess, 2006; Howard, 2008, 2010; Light, Griffiths, & Lincoln, 2012; Warnick, 2001), additional scholarship that complicates the relationship between these elements will remain relevant in a cultural landscape that increasingly relies on mediated forms of communication.

As this project has suggested, a complicated nexus of neoliberal logics that inform contemporary U.S. narratives of identity and belonging protect and preserve whiteness by framing U.S. national identity and belonging as a series of tensions that emphasize the balance that must be struck between contradictory cultural characteristics that direct attention away from whiteness. Further scholarship addressing how economic, political, and social systems work together to set expectations for belonging is essential for demonstrating the pervasiveness of institutional forms of oppression and for challenging the larger cultural narratives of a postracial U.S. state. Antiracist scholarship, produced by analytic orientations, such as queer migration scholarship, queer of color critique, and/or critical whiteness studies, is necessary for undertaking complex analyses of systems of power, as it, ultimately, may participate in the deconstruction of such enterprises—a social justice orientation that can and should guide the work of contemporary rhetorical scholars.

Influenced by a commitment to social justice, my intention for this project always has been to make the analysis that I conducted relevant to the communities whose discursive practices I examined. For this reason, I reached out to the media campaign organizers for both the Center for Community Change and Courage Campaign, asking questions to contextualize their videos within the broader social movement efforts of each group, and investigated reasons

that each organization had for promoting storytelling to advance their interests, and soliciting feedback from both groups about the perceived impact of their campaigns.

The insights gleaned from these conversations enriched my rhetorical analysis of each groups' video testimonials and more firmly located this project as an example of observational applied communication research (Frey & Carragee, 2007), in that this project did not intervene in or affect the discourses of belonging in which video participants engaged but, instead, observed and reported on those discourses. Although it was my intention to conclude this project by offering suggestions to each organization about how it might become more effective in its social justice efforts (a component of an applied, observational orientation), it has been beyond the scope of this dissertation to do so (primarily because my analysis has not attempted a viewer effects study). For that reason, it is my hope that future projects might conduct a structured assessment of the effects of these videos on viewers, such that more targeted suggestions may be provided to each organization. Even though one of the limitations of this project is not being able to provide targeted feedback to the social movement groups whose videos were analyzed, I have communicated with each organization and plan to provide it with copies of this completed dissertation, as per its request. I now turn toward the conversations I had with representatives of the Courage Campaign and Testimony: Take a Stand to contextualize the observations that I made and to discuss implications of these netroots groups' social movement efforts.

Following up with Courage Campaign and the Center for Community Change

Human experience is shaped by the narratives that people tell, which both the Center for Community Change and Courage Campaign appear to recognize as they have invested in the collection and dissemination of member's stories. Personal narratives are one form of what I argue are a larger genre of rhetorical appeals called "discourses of belonging." From an

academic perspective, such narratives represent valuable cultural texts that have the potential to reveal otherwise unattended discourses of power that circulate to advantage some and disadvantage others, but that is only a portion of why and how these testimonials are significant. Turning attention to the netroots groups that organized these efforts provides additional insight into the ways that vernacular communities conceive of the role of storytelling and demonstrates various strategic ends to which discourses of belonging might work.

During an interview conducted with Paul, a media campaign organizer from the Center for Community Change about the We Are America campaign, he noted that there is a unique value in storytelling that shapes how people see the world. As he explained, storytelling, fundamentally, is what drove the Center for Community Change to orchestrate its testimonial-gathering campaign and what has led the organization to continue its support and development. Although conceived with similar interests, Andy, a Courage Campaign spokesperson, described more instrumental goals for the collection and use of its testimonials, expressing dissatisfaction with the effects that the campaign had and the organization's recent move away from testimonial gathering efforts. In both instances, the idea of archiving vernacular voices of marginalized individuals who tell their personal stories of exclusion drove these organizations to launch similar efforts to alter the legal and social structures that exclude their membership, even though the effects of these efforts were seen as being very different by these groups.

Although the Center for Community Change's project has undergone a recent transformation (shifting its name to "Keeping Families Together," the particularity of its focus, and, now, more actively pursuing testimonial participants through the use a national bus tour), Paul explained his organization's continued commitment to, and investment in, the value of personal narratives. Acknowledging that storytelling is both encouraged (because of its

confessional potential) and punished (because it could lead to serious disciplining, such as deportation), Paul emphasized that there was tremendous value in this effort, for it made other undocumented migrants less afraid to share their stories. Stressing that the goal of the Center for Community Change was to provide an opportunity for members of migrant communities to empower themselves by participating within broader U.S. culture, Paul emphasized the collaborative relationship between the organization and the migrant communities with which it was working. The platform provided by the Center for Community Change framed undocumented migrants' narratives as part of the rhetorical patchwork that makes up the United States. Naming the archive "We Are America," this organization located migrants' stories as discourses of belonging that cultural insiders might relate to in ways that invoke their relationship to the nation (as diverse individuals *collectively* forming the fabric of the nation).

According to Paul, the Center for Community Change strives to offer opportunities for undocumented migrants across the United States to empower themselves by investing in vernacular narratives that it collects and curates, an effort that stands in contrast to Courage Campaign's sense of its project. Andy, intimately familiar with media campaigns organized by this netroots group, explained that Courage Campaign no longer actively was supporting or soliciting the Testimony: Take a Stand videos because it did not get the "buy in" that it wanted from the larger gay rights community. When pressed about what he meant, Andy indicated that many gay rights groups are "propriety" insofar as when they find a source (for a news story or for lobbying efforts), they do not like to share that source with other groups. In my conversation with him, Andy quickly dismissed my questions about the Testimony: Take a Stand Campaign, highlighting, instead, other efforts in which Courage Campaign had successfully engaged. Stressing that the organization's current and future interests lie in changing California State

policy and/or national legislation regarding LGBT/Q issues, I perceived him as unenthusiastic about the Testimony: Take a Stand campaign.

In my conversations with him, it appeared that Andy's desire to emphasize the role of lobbying for political and/or legislative efforts indicated that the organization perceived its social change efforts to be most effective in this arena, a decision that does not prioritize the role of storytelling in the same way as does the Center for Community Change. Although lobbying and storytelling are not mutually exclusive, it appeared that Andy saw them that way, dismissing the value of group members' personal narratives and, instead, prioritizing a more prepared, strategic and argumentative rhetoric to advance the group's interests.

Both migrant and LGBT/Q social movement groups continue to break ground, slowly chipping away at the national discourses that have interpellated them into the role of "cultural stranger," but as those interviews demonstrated, the variety of communicative practices that can be deployed in that service are vast, and, at once, they both resist the interpellations that hail them at the same time that they accommodate them. Speaking with representatives from both the Courage Campaign and the Center for Community Change revealed some interesting differences in the ways that narrative testimonials (and storytelling, more broadly) function in the interest of producing social change.

Different groups require different strategies, even if their ultimate goals are similar (in the sense that they seek to increase equality for their group members). As this dissertation implies, however, similarity between groups is not enough upon which to build coalitional subjectivity, and, indeed, the Courage Campaign and the Center for Community Change do not appear to share a mutual interest in working together. Paul, at the Center for Community Change, already was aware of the Courage Campaign's Testimony: Take a Stand project, noting that he knew that

his organization had a lot to learn from other social movement efforts. He also acknowledged that it would be helpful to share ideas and innovations with those other social movement groups. In contrast, Andy, from the Courage Campaign, expressed no knowledge of the Center for Community Change's campaign, nor any interest in future collaboration.

In spite of the Center for Community Change, and Courage Campaign's divergent courses, the testimonials archived on their respective websites remain a valuable cultural artifact. Taken as a snapshot, these narratives help to portray the current state of U.S. national belonging. Just as a single subject can be photographed from a variety of angles, this dissertation concludes by presenting one perspective—a vision that brings clarity to certain aspects of belonging and marginalization. In particular, cultural strangers, resistively accommodating the dialectical tensions of (in)visibility, (in)dependence, and (in)valuability, spotlight the contested nature of U.S. national belonging and allow me to analyze how vernacular communities rhetorically engage national narratives of inclusion—narratives that continue to shape experiences and opportunities that individuals encounter in the world.

Conclusion

Reflecting back on Amina's testimonial, the story that originally drew me to these texts, I am reminded of the rhetorical force of personal narratives. In the time since we knew each other in Greensboro, North Carolina, our paths have converged again. Years later, we both find ourselves in graduate school, working with similar theories and scholars, thinking about similar questions of intersectionality and power relationships. I realize that what motivates my scholarship is personal—an effort to theorize my privileges and insecurities, and I wonder if this is what motivates Amina as well. To understand these national narratives of belonging we both have turned toward critical scholarship that interrogates normativity, power, and privilege,

looking for knowledge within the pages of academic articles and books, but, it was Amina's story that reminded me to return to the vernacular as a way of knowing.

Writing this analysis, I constantly struggled with the language that was available to me, and, as a rhetorical critic, it is my task to be both reflexive and intentional about my discursive choices. As a white, queer woman, privileged by my social class status and my education, I have been careful not to adopt terms that generalize others, and to be reflective about ways in which those choices reflect my subject location and identity, and those of others. As previously discussed, this dissertation's vocabulary of "cultural strangers," "resistive accommodation," "(in)visibility, "(in)dependence" and "(in)valuability" is imperfect, but, nevertheless, those terms are mindful attempts to capture video participants' communicative practices. Certainly, those terms circulate within webs of pretexting meaning; however, as I deploy them in these pages, it is my hope that they inspire new connotations and become meaningful for more people, both for those who are culturally privileged and for those who are not.

Because of *my* privilege, I live a comfortable life with or without the benefits of gay marriage, the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act, or the passage of comprehensive immigration reform. This privilege inherently places me in a different position than that of the video participants whose narratives I studied—as someone who has nothing to lose if those reforms fail to come to fruition. I was disappointed when I did not find video participants challenging normative structures and systems that oppressed them, and it took several weeks for me to set aside my politics to truly engage with and understand those testimonials on their terms. Such awareness led me to reflect on how privilege influences my analytic lens and to think about the implications of my advantages. In particular, I tried diligently not to impose a vocabulary or an analytic framework on the video participants that risked further marginalizing them, and,

instead, my analysis and discussion emerged organically from the organizations and participants themselves. Because of these insights, I have been mindful of choices that I made (to represent people and their communicative efforts accurately, and to continue checking my biases throughout the process).

As this project concludes, I am satisfied that it productively speaks to some of the systemic forms of power that circulate within U.S. culture, exposing and challenging the value that they hold within the U.S. nation. In particular, cultural strangers' (and cultural insiders') efforts both challenge and reinforce the value of these national institutions; recognizing this process is an essential contribution of this research, as it shows that lingering inside of these tensions to try to experience their grip leads communication scholars to better understand that which contours marginalized communities' rhetorical efforts, and ways in which such efforts contribute to larger national narratives of identity and belonging.

Throughout this dissertation I have discussed belonging in a number of ways: (a) as a system of meaning, (b) as an experience or relationship, (c) as a rhetorical construct, (d) as a (contested) performance, (e) as an enforceable set of norms, (f) as a form of materiality, (g) as a desire, (h) and as an accomplishment or outcome. Although I have foregrounded the discursive construction of belonging, nevertheless, I explored its material implications, crafting an orientation to understand insider and outsider status that attempts to account for the myriad of ways in which belonging is constructed, circulates, and is meaningful in people's lives. It is my hope that this dissertation, as a rhetorical appeal itself, adds to the larger national discourses of belonging, bringing the vernacular voices of people who shape these larger discourses, and who daily engage these tensions, into academic conversations of citizenship in important ways.

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