

Framing Queer Climate Justice

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ABSTRACT Climate justice movements and scholars have established that marginalized communities, including people of color, Indigenous Peoples, women, and the Global South, are most vulnerable to climate change. Recently, scholars also have established that the climate crisis places LGBTQ+ communities in precarious positions. Yet, we know little about how LGBTQ+ activists practice climate justice and build political bridges between LGBTQ+ and climate justice movements. By analyzing queer climate activism, I find that bridging the US climate and LGBTQ+ movements share three elements: (1) vulnerability and intersectional analysis, (2) survival and resilience, and (3) play. In bridging the movements, activists “queer” climate justice by spatially shifting on what grounds or issues to fight, prefiguring worlds not yet in existence on a larger scale, and reimagining how to perform climate activism.

Queer and trans people face disproportionate climate burdens and, in figuring out how to survive, create frameworks for *all of us* to survive. Connecting the past and present of state violence and disinvestment—whether during the AIDS epidemic or the contemporary climate crisis—queer and trans climate activists present new narrative pathways for emerging from climate devastation. Building bridges between movements is not a new phenomenon, with several priors such as labor and gay/lesbian rights organizing coalescing (Heersink and Lacombe 2023). However, for climate justice studies, intersectional framing and constituency building is relatively recent (Mikulewicz et al. 2023). Responding to calls for realizing intersectional environmental justice (Malin and Ryder 2018), in which scholars contextually analyze vulnerabilities to the climate crisis and resistance to these impacts (Sultana 2022), this article asks, “How do queer and trans activists connect the LGBTQ+ and climate justice movements?”

I present examples of how queer and trans activists frame climate resistance that serve themselves and appeal to others. Queer and trans activists uniquely frame their climate activism—focusing on play, survival, and resilience—because of their qualitatively distinct experience of climate danger compared to straight and cisgender people. For example, disasters exacerbate

preexisting mental health conditions among queer and trans people who are predisposed to a high risk of suicide (Goldsmith, Raditz, and Méndez 2022, 952). Seeking to change this status quo, queer and trans activists frame climate justice as a queer issue. As they and I argue, queer climate justice framing is relevant for everyone—not solely queer and trans people—to survive the climate crisis.

FRAME BRIDGING AND QUEER AND TRANS CLIMATE CONNECTIONS

Social movement scholars offer insights into how climate justice movements “frame,” or interpret, the problems that their movements tackle and what solutions they propose (Snow and Benford 1988). Climate justice movements frame the cause of the climate crisis as rooted in a global capitalist system that depends on extracting fossil fuels and disproportionately harming people of color and those in the Global South (della Porta and Parks 2014). Although studies primarily focus on how race, class, and gender inform climate justice framing, more recent research analyzes bridging or linking similar frames from distinct movements (Benford and Snow 2000). For example, the “Just Transition” frame (Buzogány and Scherhauser 2022) connects the climate and labor movements by suggesting that transitioning away from the fossil-fuel economy also must be “just,” for example, by bringing better *and* cleaner jobs. However, social scientific studies of queer climate justice—focusing specifically on how LGBTQ+ and climate movements discursively come together—are relatively underdeveloped.

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Frames, especially bridging frames, bring together movements with different constituencies by naming new partners' unique stakes. There is no shortage of stakes for queer and trans people. According to an emerging literature, queer and trans people have distinct climate change vulnerabilities (Kilpatrick et al. 2023; Simmonds et al. 2022). Natural disasters that climate change makes worse exemplify how LGBTQ+ people are left behind, figuratively and physically. First, disasters destroy their neighborhoods (Gorman-Murray, McKinnon, and Dominey-Howes 2014); and second, "recovery" itself is fraught because emergency services are queer- and trans-phobic and discriminatory toward non-heterosexual family units (Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray, and McKinnon 2014; Gorman-Murray et al. 2018). These impacts are rooted in policy neglect and marginalization—in healthcare, housing, and employment—that make LGBTQ+ communities more vulnerable to climate disasters. In other words, outcomes of preexisting social marginalization among LGBTQ+ people—including higher rates of medical conditions (e.g., asthma) relative to non-LGBTQ+ people (Goldsmith, Raditz, and Méndez 2022; Mann, McKay, and Gonzales 2024)—create further susceptibility to climate impacts. For example, Goldsmith, Raditz, and Méndez (2022, 955–57) point to how excluding sexual orientation and gender identity in Section 308 of the Robert T. Stafford Emergency Management and Disaster Assistance Act—a nondiscrimination clause in federally supported disaster responses—leaves it to the discretion of state or local disaster programs to deny support to LGBTQ+ communities. Because governments increasingly rely on faith-based organizations or non-government organizations to provide disaster relief, legacies of homophobia and transphobia in religion drive queer and trans people away (King 2022; Parkinson et al. 2022).

Importantly, queer and trans communities are not homogeneous, and those "caught in the crosshairs" of multiple oppressions have qualitatively distinct experiences of climate danger (Goldsmith and Bell 2022; Goldsmith, Raditz, and Méndez 2022; Kilpatrick et al. 2023). For instance, Hurricane Katrina disproportionately impacted Black transgender women sex workers who faced both over-policing/criminalization and the weaponization of crime-against-nature policy (McTighe and Haywood 2017), the latter of which frequently is analyzed within queer ecologies literature as primarily a white queer issue (Hogan 2010).

In addition to the material reasons for connecting the fights for queer and trans liberation and climate justice, there is reason to believe that environmental and climate justice movements are *politically* predisposed to work with LGBTQ+ movements. First, scholars understand environmental justice as an amalgamation of other movements (Cole and Foster 2001). This aligns with social movement studies demonstrating that environmental movements share overlapping activists with LGBTQ+ movements (Carroll and Ratner 1996).

Second, studies of public opinion and political behavior reveal that LGBTQ+ people appear to be more likely to have pro-environment values or interests than cisgender and/or heterosexual people (Whitley and Bowers 2023) that are associated with increased participation in environmental protests (Swank 2018).

Third, queer ecologies scholars have identified the conceptual linkages between threats to nature and to LGBTQ+ people (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010)—pointing out how views of nature and the "natural" are embedded in discriminatory

policies (Hogan 2010). These studies *indirectly, as a matter of interpretation*, present how fights for environmental justice also are fights for sexual justice (Berila 2004). Despite these reasons why we might expect the two movements to have a preexisting history, environmental justice, queer ecologies, and social movement scholars give little attention to studying cases in which queer and trans people in climate movements successfully and *directly* connect them.

That said, some research that studies queer and trans climate or environmental activists provides clues about how LGBTQ+ people organize across movements (Gaard 2019, 2021; Grosse 2019; Pellow 2014; Seymour 2018a, 2018b; TallBear 2019; Whitworth 2019). For example, Gaard (2019, 97) wrote about several cases of queer climate justice organizing and described how the 2014 Fossil Fuel Divestment Convergence emphasized solidarity with allied movements and called for the increased visibility of queer and trans leaders within climate movements. Similarly, Grosse (2019, 191) pointed out that organizers with the climate group 350.org underscored intersectionality in their solidarity letter following the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shootings. Although these studies provide core insights about queer climate justice—pinpointing intersectionality and queer performativity (Gaard 2021, 530)—they focus on only a few examples and sometimes subsume their analysis under larger discussions of feminist climate justice.

Thus, we lack cross-case analyses of how queer and trans activists actively frame climate justice. My approach is to use social-movement studies framing analysis to systematically compare how different individuals, organizations, and protests in the United States align in queering climate justice.

METHODOLOGY

I used a grounded theory and frame analysis approach to guide the selection of data sources and their analysis. Because framing involves social-movement actors calibrating their framing according to distinct audiences (Johnston 1995, 223–24)—whether internally or to reach new adherents—I gathered a range of data sources that varied by the audience that activists were targeting. This led to the need for semi-structured interviews (Blee and Taylor 2002) and content analysis. I selected protests because they are sites of "issue bricolage" or "the process whereby movement issues become linked" (Jung, King, and Soule 2014, 188), where frame bridging—or merging narratives among movements (Snow et al. 1986)—is a key activity and relevant for this study's research question.

I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the entire study.¹ I obtained informed, written consent from respondents before the interviews. Respondents had the option to use a pseudonym, but all consented to the use of their real names—a practice approved by my university IRB. Although the general assumption within political science is to deidentify respondents—with the rationale of protecting vulnerable populations—commitments to social change, collaboration with interviewees, and power dynamics between the interviewee and interviewer challenge that logic (Guenther 2009). Respondents were willing to identify themselves because I am a scholar-activist dedicated to challenging power within and outside of the academy, and I view my and their choice as one way to amplify marginalized communities' voices. Heeding qualitative scholars' suggestions to treat consent as an iterative process beyond the initial signature (Lahman et al. 2015)—especially when using real names—I

confirmed with respondents that they still consented through my “member-check” procedures (described later in this section).

I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews with queer-identified climate activists who fell into three categories, divided by geographic scope—Washington, DC, versus New York City, versus across the United States.² The first category consisted of activists who organized a queer dance party for climate justice leading to Ivanka Trump’s house³ or the shutdown of Capital Pride blockading the police, Lockheed Martin, and Wells Fargo,⁴ both in Washington, DC, in 2017 (N=8). The second category consisted of activists who were a part of or involved with the Queer Bloc—composed of two groups called Queers for the Climate and Queer Planet—of the 2014 People’s Climate March in New York City, as well as March leaders and critics⁵ (N=9). The third category consisted of queer and trans climate activists organizing across the United States on several issues, such as the Green New Deal and abolitionist campaigns (N=5). I also completed a content analysis of hundreds of emails among activist members, social media posts (i.e., Tweets and Facebook event pages), blog posts, and external coverage of queer climate activism (e.g., from *Vice*) about the protests in the other two categories. See the Appendix for more information about the interviews and content analysis.

To select and interview respondents, I used “snowball sampling/respondent-driven sampling” (Gile and Handcock 2010).

Beginning in early 2021, I sent emails to activists whose names were publicly available as leaders of protests at the nexus of climate justice and LGBTQ+ movements to request interviews. Interviewees were younger people, typically in their mid- or late-20s to late-30s. Due to those who were leaders in organizing the protests under inquiry, I interviewed predominantly people of color and/or women, femmes, non-binary, and trans people for the DC actions; white gay men in the queer contingent for the 2014 People’s Climate March; and queer people of color for the third category of interviewees. Table 1 lists the date of each interview and the interviewee’s organizational affiliation.

Grounded-theory methodologies rely on a researcher working concurrently with data collection and analysis and letting data “ground” additional theory development (Charmaz 2006)—as opposed to predetermined hypotheses driving the inquiry. Therefore, I used initial data and analysis as the impetus for collecting further data, such as analyzing, for example, social media posts and emails from the groups that organized the protests described previously. I obtained the emails in two ways: (1) asking interviewees to send relevant correspondence that they had among themselves, and (2) accessing a publicly available Google Group email listserv that the Queer Bloc of the 2014 People’s Climate March used to organize, build their base, and make decisions. Because the first set of emails involved private correspondence, I

Table 1
Activist Interviews

Interview Number (Ordered Chronologically)	Name	Date	Location	Organizational Affiliation	Category
1	Gabrielle Mendelsohn	1/25/2021	Zoom	Sunrise Movement	Other
2	John Qua	2/3/2021		350 DC	DC Protests
3	Nathan Park	2/12/2021			
4	Anthony Torres	2/14/2021			
5	Paul Getsos	2/16/2021		2014 People’s Climate March	NYC Protest
6	Anthony Torres	2/19/2021		350 DC	DC Protests
7	Ntebo Mokuena	3/2/2021			
8	Ntebo Mokuena	3/7/2021			
9	Jeff Ordower	3/16/2021		GenderJUST, Acorn	Other
10	Leslie Cagan	3/22/2021		2014 People’s Climate March	NYC Protest
11	Rachel Schragis	4/1/2021			
12	Kei Williams	4/11/2021		Black Lives Matter Global Network	Other
13	Adrien Salazar	4/15/2021		Green New Deal Policy Nexus	
14	Quito Ziegler	4/29/2021		2014 People’s Climate March, Queer Bloc	NYC Protest
15	Cindy Wiesner	8/27/2021		2014 People’s Climate March, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance	
16	Joseph Huff–Hannon	10/27/2021		2014 People’s Climate March, Queer Bloc	
17	Patrick Robbins	11/29/2021			
18	Bizzy Barefoot	1/14/2022			
19	DeLesslin George–Warren	3/10/2022		No Justice No Pride	DC Protests
20	Ceci Pineda	3/18/2022	Telephone	Audre Lorde Project	NYC Protest
21	Firas Nasr	4/20/2022	Zoom	WERK for Peace	DC Protests
22	Jen Deerinwater	5/3/2022		No Justice No Pride, Crushing Colonialism	
N=22					

asked interviewees for their verbal consent to publish the content and then allowed them to withdraw their consent later in my member-check procedures. For the second set of emails, I received written consent from one of the leaders of the Queer Bloc to use the content of the listserv for my study.

Following common grounded-theory procedures, I began with initial coding and concurrently wrote analytic memos before recoding using focused coding strategies (Charmaz 2006; Saldaña 2009). I focused on three analytics relevant to social movement frame analysis: (1) the key issues, (2) the diagnostic (problem definition) and prognostic (solution), and (3) the symbols and historical reference points (Benford and Snow 2000). The analysis of diagnostic framing and key issues co-occurred across data sources and aligned under the element of what I describe as “Vulnerability to the Climate Crisis.” This included a diagnostic that preexisting social inequalities (e.g., increased rates of poverty) leave queer and trans people open to climate vulnerabilities. Similarly, in my analysis, I found alignment between prognostic framing and historical reference points and symbols. This included the belief that queer strategies of messaging and combatting government silence derived from movement “ancestors” such as ACT UP can help to solve the climate crisis. These analyses yielded the two elements I describe in the findings as “survival and resilience” and “play.”

Frame-alignment analyses also guided my approach because I specifically used the memo writing to see how queer climate activists were bridging and extending—that is, orienting one framework to reach new adherents using their values (Snow et al. 1986)—climate justice narratives. In other words, I wrote memos and short analytic documents in which I compared how different activists took concepts from queer liberation and related them to climate justice to establish connections across the data and codes. I also used the memos as a validity check to compare how activists framed the connections among the movements in different venues, such as on Facebook versus in their emails.

Finally, I conducted member checks by asking respondents for feedback on the initial draft manuscript (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Of 20 unique respondents, 10 responded within the requested time window. Respondents validated the results and supported the conclusions; some suggested minor edits to phrasing in quotes or errors in how I referred to them or their organization.

VULNERABILITY TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Extending a common climate justice diagnostic frame that social systems create disproportionate climate burdens on the already marginalized (della Porta and Parks 2014), queer and trans climate activists claim that they—as sexual and gender minorities—also are disproportionately burdened by climate change. Whereas climate justice frames predominantly rely on analyses that racism, classism, capitalism, and colonialism are at the root of climate injustice, queer climate justice activists engage in frame extension (Snow et al. 1986). Specifically, they shift climate justice frames to fit with analyses of homophobia and transphobia to appeal to potential queer and trans movement adherents. More than potentially mobilizing queer and trans people, the frame-extension choice brings attention to other issues that affect people with more relative privilege.

For example, common vulnerabilities mentioned include the high rates of homelessness among queer youth, disproportionate

policing, and less access to healthcare. In a blog post ahead of the 2014 People’s Climate March arguing that climate change is a queer issue, Patrick Robbins, organizer of the Queer Bloc, noted queer people’s disproportionate climate burden stemming from homophobia, transphobia, and structural inequality:

LGBTQ people are more vulnerable to these [climate] impacts than the general population because of structural inequality....If you are homeless, you are more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather events like heat waves. And if you are afraid of homophobic or transphobic violence in the shelter system, you are less likely to evacuate during a storm, which places your life at risk. Add this up and climate change looks like a matter of real concern for queer communities.

(Robbins 2014)

To reiterate, Robbins extended a core tenet of climate justice—that is, socially marginalized communities are disproportionately vulnerable to the climate crisis—with queer insights that queer and trans people also bear an unequal burden of climate disasters. Simultaneously, he and others expanded the fight for climate change beyond flood plains and spatially located it within shelters, for example. Similarly, in a statement provided to the site LGBTQ Nation, Director of GetEQUAL Angela Peoples, who was deeply involved in the shutdown of Capital Pride, stated the following about calling for LGBTQ+ organizations to divest from Wells Fargo:

Banks like Wells Fargo boost their billion-dollar bottom line on the backs of the most marginalized in our community. It is important that LGBTQ movement leaders stand up against these practices and not allow Wells and other corporations to hide under a rainbow blanket of “allyship” bought with prison and pipeline cash.

(Taylor 2017)

Both of these quotes implicitly bolster the point that, by queering climate justice vulnerability and bringing attention to issues that unevenly impact queer and trans people, solutions to these issues also could benefit other marginalized people and relatively privileged people.

Even as queer climate activists sought to draw connections among homophobia, transphobia, and climate injustice, they maintained in their frame extensions that climate change is an intersectional issue. Specifically, their strategy of “centering the most marginalized”—whereby strategy flows from the needs of the most vulnerable within the community—is common among US-based queer liberation organizations (DeFilippis and Anderson-Nathe 2017). Echoing insights and reflecting the influence of intersectionality, numerous interviewees and other documents addressed how oppressions are linked and that the fight against homophobia and transphobia is incomplete without dismantling racism, sexism, and classism, among other oppressions. In a press release explaining why a group of queer activists was targeting Ivanka Trump—and, more broadly, the Trump administration—for their queer dance party for climate justice, organizers noted the following:

The entire Trump administration has shown a blatant disregard for our planet and its inhabitants, like paving the way for the Dakota Access Pipeline displacing the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. The reality is that the people most affected by the administration’s bad climate decisions are our most vulnerable friends: our poor,

working class, native, trans, and POC siblings.
(WERK for Peace 2017)

Queer climate activists therefore were careful about describing the unique ways that queer and trans people are impacted by the climate crisis. As shown in their amplification of how Native people specifically are impacted, activists maintained that climate vulnerabilities are not created equal. To build on a previous point: the queer politics presented herein, with intersectional analyses of vulnerabilities, are crucial for climate justice insofar as they spatially reorient climate justice to think about—as this quote highlights—mapping out and practicing solidarity with all marginalized people.

SURVIVAL AND RESILIENCE

Even as climate justice frames seek to propose solutions that address the root causes of the climate crisis (Chatterton, Feath-

and Snow 2000) that their communities knew best. Responding to the 2014 People's Climate March and discussing queer climate justice, Ceci Pineda (2015)—who at the time organized with the Audre Lorde Project that represents queer and trans people of color—wrote the following:

When we work to make our communities more safe and resilient, we are preparing ourselves for the impacts of climate change. When we fight to create safety outside of police and carceral systems, we imagine and build a future based on collective care and accountability, rather than systems of state violence and control (which we know is how the state will opt to respond to climate crises).... In these actions and every time we fight to survive, we practice climate justice.

As this quote speaks to, queer and trans climate activists, especially queer and trans people of color, framed issues and fights—ostensibly unrelated to climate change—as creating both

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erstone, and Routledge 2013), they limit their potential without engaging dimensions of “crisis” and “survival” that queer climate activists emphasize, such as the interlocking experiences of crisis and the social and emotional dimensions of survival. These are the insights that queer and trans framings, based on survival of other crises, bring to the fight against climate change. Specifically, they model prefigurative intersectional climate justice, expand the time horizons of “crisis,” and denaturalize the concept of “crisis” itself.

Several interview participants articulated a theme of queer and trans survival developed from weathering prior crises that inform their contributions to the fight against climate change. Anthony Torres, an organizer with the queer dance party for climate justice, noted that queer climate activism is not merely about highlighting the impacts of climate change on the queer and trans community but also “actually centering the knowledge that LGBTQ+ people in our communities have to offer to this planet.”⁶ These epistemic contributions are rooted in the history of survival and resilience that members of the LGTBQ+ community developed by fighting against preexisting injustices.

As described in the previous discussion, queer climate activists suggested that queer and trans people experience disproportionate climate burdens. Because many of these climate impacts exacerbate the injustices that queer and trans people have long experienced, queer and trans people have a record of surviving and being resilient without state investment. More accurately, several activists aligned with the view that state practices of “resilience” actively harm their recovery from disasters and will never provide “safety” for their communities (de Onís 2018). Indeed, rather than relying on the state to solve or address these impacts, some queer climate activists—mostly queer and trans activists of color—noted in their prognostic framing or articulation of solutions (Benford

better worlds and practices that lend themselves to climate justice. This is an intersectional, prefigurative framing. Although the Safe OUTside the System Collective referenced previously emerged in response to disproportionate policing that targeted queer and trans people of color in New York City (The Audre Lorde Project, n.d.), the prognostic framing suggests that queer climate activists frame social systems developed elsewhere, from their intersectional positionalities, as an integral frame bridge for climate justice.

Similarly, in shutting down DC Capital Pride in 2017, the No Justice No Pride Coalition bridged a conventional climate issue in pipelines to queer and trans people of color survival. Led by trans women of color, the coalition centered on sex workers then and in the years since the blockade. Although the direct climate connection has faded for the coalition, a through line of survival connects the work: LGBTQ+ organizations threaten our survival just as much as harmful policies, policing, and pipelines.⁷ For instance, in an interview with *Office Magazine* published in 2019, core organizer Emmelia Talarico explained about their agenda as follows:

We've been a part of this coalition to decriminalize sex work for the past two and a half years....We definitely will still be trying to call out some of the bigger mainstream establishments within the LGBT movement who are still supporting the enemies that are trying to kill us.
(Brandon 2019)

This strategy of reframing, interpreting, and tying climate survival and resilience to previous and long-standing queer and trans political fights went beyond the contemporary era. Activists frequently referenced the US AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s and the ensuing resistance. Such a framing choice expanded the time horizons of the climate crisis by essentially telling a narrative:

"We've heard this story before." They identified the strategies and policy outcomes resulting from the activities of resistance groups during the AIDS crisis as an example and model of how LGBTQ+ people could contribute to fighting against climate change. For example, noting parallels among the crises—government inaction, the global scale, and the life-or-death stakes—the Queers for the Climate group wrote a signatory letter ahead of the People's Climate March in 2014 encouraging LGBTQ+ organizations, activists, and leaders to add their names to spur climate action among their community:

Today we are all facing the grave threat of an unstable climate. While governments and corporations refused to acknowledge the severity of the AIDS crisis—an eerie parallel to the response to date on climate change—we educated the masses, told our stories, harnessed the media, raised money, and in a very short time moved nations and industries to act on behalf of people living with HIV around the world. (Queers for the Climate 2014)

Finally, queer climate activists spoke about how LGBTQ+ people bring survival and resilience tools in the form of chosen families that bridge to the food and shelter emphasis within climate framing. They challenged seemingly fixed, or "naturalized," conceptualizations of crisis or survival. Rachel Schragis, an organizer with the People's Climate March of 2014 who worked with the Queer Bloc, asserted the following:

There's just very clear understanding, among any queer organizing that I've been part of, that part of survival is also about self-expression and it's about community and chosen family, and creativity and not just food and shelter. In the climate movement, the word "survival" means food and shelter, and it should. I think that the histories of queer organizing and queer lives bring to the table an idea of what it will take for us all to survive.⁸

As this quote shows, queer climate activists work to bridge common keywords within climate justice, including "crisis" and "survival," to LGBTQ+ movements while also expanding what they can mean.

PLAY

For queer climate justice organizers, play in activism is both instrumental and a solidary, world-making practice in motivational framing. Typical climate justice protests might be theatrical, where organizers have a prop resembling an oil pipeline and snake it through the streets. Through queer climate justice dance parties and drag-queen puppet props for the 2014 People's Climate March, however, climate activism becomes more than another

and resilience. Playing is for motivating others to join the climate movement and, simultaneously, about moving from the wreckage of crises that afflict queer and trans communities. By playing, queer climate justice activists expand climate politics' affective possibilities, turn colonial and heteronormative logic on its head, and honor the body at multiple scales.

There is evidence of this playful politics in advertising for the queer dance party for climate justice held in April 2017. Organizers targeted Ivanka Trump because they believed the media framed her as a moderating social and environmental force within the Trump administration. Through the dance protest, they amplified the narrative that climate justice and queer liberation were interlocking by naming how both movements had shared enemies in the Trump administration. Beyond simply connecting the movements, organizers had tongue-in-cheek messaging to motivate participation. The following is from the Facebook event page for the dance party:

[G]et ready to shake what your Mamma Earth gave ya and WERK it for climate justice! Thankfully, Ivanka Trump, "BFF of the gays," supposed climate czar, and brand new employee of the Trump administration, has invited us to come and party in her neighborhood, leaving behind biodegradable glitter that will sparkle in the moonlight (350 DC 2017).

In the vein of *queer* environmental performances that Seymour (2018a) has written about, queer framings and action widen the scope of how people can engage in climate activism. Activists do not have to *exclusively* perform dread and despair in acting on climate. The idea of shaking your butt for climate justice is playful—we might react incredulously—and yet that is what the protestors did. This irreverence stands in stark contrast to conventional images of environmental activism, which conjure images of death and catastrophe falling on us all without climate action.

There is a wider significance to activists' motivational framings: imbuing climate justice with a sense of play could appeal to people across divides. In an email describing why the Queer Bloc made 12-foot drag-queen elemental puppets—air, water, fire, and earth—among other props and costumes for their contingent in the 2014 People's Climate March, organizer Bizzy Barefoot wrote:

[W]e knew the colors and scale would be stunning in the March and hopefully bring joy to the hearts of young and old, gay or straight, republican or democrat. No one can frown at a beautiful puppet, and we hope to bring a lift to the spirit of the day.⁹

"Lifting the spirits of all" also subtly challenges understandings of climate politics by playfully flipping long-standing, harm-

The straights need our help: They're pouring so much CO₂ into the atmosphere that the planet could soon spin out of control and send us all off on a very unfabulous doom (well, LGBTs are maybe doing the same, but only ~10% as much).

protest to evolve into a celebration of queer and trans existence. The framing of the actions described in this section and the actions themselves inspire disbelief—the frivolousness of dancing for climate justice. Yet, a seriousness belies the quotes in this section that connects to the previous section regarding survival

ful cultural narratives on their head. To generate interest for the 2014 People's Climate March, the Queer Bloc created a #SaveTheStraights contingent to march in New York City's Pride parade that year. Their Facebook event page featured an image of a 1950s-style cartoon with a smiling white family—a man, a woman,

and a young child—ostensibly conjuring the prototypical “nuclear family.” In the body of the event, they wrote:

The straights need our help: They’re pouring so much CO₂ into the atmosphere that the planet could soon spin out of control and send us all off on a very unfabulous doom (well, LGBTs are maybe doing the same, but only ~10% as much).

(Huff-Hannon and Bichlbaum 2014)

Organizers did not intend for their imagery and text to be taken seriously. Seymour (2018a) argued that this irreverence operates as a double critique—environmentalists can have fun *and* queers care deeply about the environment. To build on this point, the proliferation of nuclear energy in the United States in the 1950s depended on a cultural and colonial narrative of the “nuclear” family of a white, heterosexual mother and father (Voyles 2015). What was striking then is the content of their message *and* their framing of playfully rejecting the value of this environmentally harmful, nuclear family. Queer and trans climate activists said let us queer the nuclear family (Gaard 2021; Krupar 2012) and framed their critique in a way that could be mobilizing for all through its playful nature.

However, it also is worth mentioning that these playful methods were a response to the violence that queer and trans communities have faced. Queer climate justice activists framed their actions as playing for others—insofar as playfulness could motivate others to action—and themselves as a healing process. Explaining why they organized a queer dance party for climate justice, core organizer Firas Nasr told me:

A lot of that [structural] violence gets etched into our bodies as well. Our bodies are ascribed by these political and social narratives that have come to oppress us and we use dance as a means of actively shifting those narratives that exist on our bodies. When I say sustainability, I think about the ways in which the body is the epicenter of violence. And I think about the ways in which our movements are about creating both self and collective care to preserve and honor our bodies. I think the same about Mother Earth as well.¹⁰

This quote suggests a similar experience for queer and trans bodies and the body that is Mother Earth¹¹—a bridging made

CONCLUSION

Queer and trans climate activists see the fight for climate justice as intertwined with queer and trans liberation. Underscoring the unique climate vulnerabilities that their communities confront, queer and trans climate activists extend climate justice to issues and spaces that uniquely afflict them and potentially appeal to other movement adherents. Generations of queer and trans activists have much to offer to climate justice. Against trends in politics of taking “crisis” as predetermined or a given (Strolovitch 2023), activists bridging the movements by connecting the contemporary climate crisis with the historical AIDS crisis challenge the logic that governments or movements do not know how to respond to climate change today. Activists’ framing from this study point to how queer climate activists do more than identify their vulnerability by positioning their healing—via play and dance—as beneficial for all. Future research could build on these insights by studying the role of bridge builders and framing in other inter-sectional convergences, such as disability justice and climate justice.

In a time of continued climate crisis, queer climate justice activists claim that queer and trans people are vulnerable, in alignment with scholarly research (Goldsmith, Raditz, and Méndez 2022), and that they bring several tools in the fight against climate change. Climate justice activists would do well to heed their calls by bridging to a relatively unorganized climate constituency in LGBTQ+ communities. In addition to the moral and ethical imperative for climate justice movements to protect the most vulnerable among us, queer and trans climate organizers bring unique framing and strategic interventions.

The existing literature places heavy stock on “queering” disaster or climate change vulnerability as incorporating LGBTQ+ experiences (Dominey-Howes, Gorman-Murray, and McKinnon 2014; Whitley and Bowers 2023). Yet, this study makes a broader point beyond LGBTQ+ identities or people: locating climate vulnerability within queer and trans communities refracts back or “trickles up” to inform climate justice for *all*. Interpreting activists’ use of “queer” radically—that is, groups’ relationship to power and positioning outside of normative society render them queer (Cohen 1997, 454)—their framing points to the need

Our bodies are ascribed by these political and social narratives that have come to oppress us and we use dance as a means of actively shifting those narratives that exist on our bodies....I think the same about Mother Earth.

possible through the concept of the “body”—and a need to heal and move from violence enacted on bodies to the honoring, preservation, and resilience of them. This body-politic framing—seeing the body as scarred—while also as a source of prefigurative politics is a radical vision of climate justice. It aligns with practices of “embodied ecological politics” (Di Chiro 2010, 200), in which queer and trans activists can reclaim their bodies as something that is to be desired and a source of beautiful pleasure (Clare 1999). Because we all have bodies and experience violence—albeit of different types—play, specifically dance, tells new stories about how we can move our bodies in climate justice activism and relationally orient them to Mother Earth.

for climate justice to stand for all non-normative people, who include sex workers and single mothers likewise facing challenges with prisons, healthcare, and houseless shelters. This is a call for action: let us queer climate justice by using the lessons described in this article to shift the boundaries of who belongs in climate activism and scholarship.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTES

1. University of California, Santa Barbara, Human Subjects Committee Protocol No. 24-21-0439.
2. For this article, I focused on the similarities in framing among these three categories. However, important differences among them (e.g., the extent to which people of color organize the protests) appear to lead to variation in framing. In forthcoming research, I analyze the differences and their implications.
3. Activists in Washington, DC, saw the Trump administration as threatening to their communities. They also perceived the media as portraying Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner as climate and LGBTQ+ advocates who would rein in Donald Trump's anti-environmental and LGBTQ+ policies. They believed that if the coverage continued, the Trump administration could use Ivanka and Jared's presence to obscure the worst of their policy decisions. The queer dance party for climate justice intended to challenge that narrative.
4. In the 2010s, not exclusively in Washington, DC, the US LGBTQ+ movement grappled with what activists perceived as an increased corporatization of Pride Parades, which reflected dangerous priorities such as the normalization of war via weapons manufacturers—Lockheed Martin in the DC case—sponsoring the parades. The climate connection for the action comes from the organizers targeting Wells Fargo because it supported the Dakota Access Pipeline. In groups of about six and on seeing their target float or contingent, protestors jumped from the sidewalk onto the street, sat down in front, and locked arms with PVC pipes.
5. The 2014 People's Climate March was meant to expand the constituency of the climate and environmental movement, which long had a privileged and white-centered reputation. Queer organizers thought that the March was a moment to reach LGBTQ+ people and drive them to climate action with more tongue-in-cheek messaging.
6. Anthony Torres, Zoom interview by author, February 15, 2021.
7. No Justice No Pride's Twitter (now X) account @NJNP_DC contains several Tweets speaking to survival sex work, and there is a long history of Black women, including transgender women, who leverage their survival strategies for climate and environmental justice (Ducre 2018; McTighe and Haywood 2017).
8. Rachel Schragis, Zoom interview by author, April 1, 2021.
9. Bizzy Barefoot, email message to Rachel Schragis, September 20, 2014.
10. Firas Nasr, Zoom interview by author, April 20, 2022.
11. Some ecofeminists have critiqued the archetypal imagery of "Mother Earth" within environmental movements as uncritically gendering the environment and essentializing women to cultural stereotypes (Stearney 1994). Although I understand the argument that gendering the Earth might justify continued exploitation, I find the use of "Mother Earth" to be more nuanced than simply dangerous essentialism. For instance, many Indigenous ontologies gender the Earth and conceive of it as part of their origin stories and lifeways (Goldtooth 2017). This is all to say that there is a decolonial and anticolonial orientation toward the use of concepts such as "Mother Earth," which does not provide fodder for the exploitation of Earth and women.

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APPENDIX

Interview Protocol

Theme 1: Introductions/General

- Tell me about how you got started in [climate] and/or [queer] activism or organizing.
- When and why did you start thinking about the connections between climate justice and queer liberation?
- How do you see the connections?
- What about [your organization] attracted you to them?

Theme 2: The Protest(s)

- Paint the scene for me, what was happening prior to the protest, and catalyzed its development [provide specifics and ask for clarification from background research]?
- Let's zoom into the protest, paint the scene for me and what you remember seeing, hearing, etc.

Theme 3: The Challenges and Conflicts

- What were the challenges of organizing the protest?
- Are there any conflicts that stand out to you in your memory?

Theme 4: The Aftermath

- What happened following the protest [provide specifics and ask for clarification from background research]?
- Do you consider the protest to be successful? Why?

Repeat Questions under Themes 2 to 4 if asking interviewee about multiple protests.

End

- Anything else you'd like to say?

Content Analysis Data

Data Source (N)	Category (N Subtotal)	Involvement
350 DC, @350_DC – Tweets, including Retweets, from January 9, 2017, to September 27, 2019 (826)	Social media – Tweets (4796)	Both D.C. Protests
WERK for Peace, @werkforpeace – Tweets, including Retweets, from June 27, 2016, to June 3, 2020 (351)		Queer Dance Party for Climate Justice (D.C.)
Trans Women of Color Collective, @TWOCCNYC – Tweets, including Retweets, from January 1, 2017, to September 27, 2019 (928)		Both D.C. Protests
Get EQUAL, @GetEQUAL – Tweets, including Retweets, from August 1, 2016, to March 31, 2018 (2691)		Shutdown of D.C. Capital Pride Parade
Queer Bloc – Facebook Events from June 29, 2014, to September 20, 2014 (4) • “A Queer Response to Climate Change” • “QUEEN/HOUSE/EFFECT – Queer Performance and Music Responds to Climate Change” • “Queer Climate Chautaugua + QUEER PLANET Installation Queer New York International Festival” • “This Sunday NYC Pride: SAVE THE STRAIGHTS! (Oh, and the planet too)”	Social media – Facebook events (10)	NYC Protest
Queer Dance Party for Climate Justice, Concerning dance party tactics in DC, Facebook Events from April 1, 2017, to September 23, 2019 (5) • “Queer Dance Party for Climate Justice at Ivanka Trump’s House!” • “Queer Bloc Art Build in DC!” • “Queer Bloc – People’s Climate March” • “Tour of #ResisDANCE” • “Climate Strike – join the ShutDown Action!”		Queer Dance Party for Climate Justice (D.C.)
Shutdown of Capital Pride Facebook Event on June 10, 2017– “No Justice No Pride – DC Day of Action” (1)		Shutdown of D.C. Capital Pride Parade
Queer Bloc Emails (33 unique email threads, with many containing several emails each)	Email Threads (34)	NYC Protest
WERK for Peace Email – “Massive Queer Dance Party at Ivanka Trump’s House for Climate Justice and LGBTQ rights!” (1)		Queer Dance Party for Climate Justice (D.C.)
Climate Stew Blog by Peterson Toscano – Tag: Queers for the Climate (1, with several posts) Huffington Post – “Heat Crime: LGBTQ Politics for a Changing Climate” (1)	Blogs and Press Releases (18)	NYC Protest
Various Blogs, e.g. Medium or within Organizational Sites (16) • “Emergency Rally, Dance Protest, and Collective Art Build to Resist the #LicenseToDiscriminate Executive Order” • “Giant Dance Protest at White House to Celebrate the Lives of Trans Youth and Trans People of Color” • “Massive Queer Dance Protest for Climate Justice at Ivanka Trump’s House!” • “Queer Dance Party for Healthcare at Mitch McConnell’s House!” • “Thousands of Local and National Queer and Trans Activists to Descend on Trump Hotel and #WERKforConsent” • “Tour of #ResisDANCE will Kick Off This Weekend’s National Marches!” • “5 reasons why LGBTQ Equality groups should divest from Wells Fargo” • “7 Awful Things the Human Rights Campaign Condone through its Partnership with Wells Fargo” • “After unfruitful Community Dialogue, No Justice No Pride vows to take back Pride” • “Break DC Capital Pride’s Ties with Police, Prisons and Pipelines!” • “DC Pride Protest Exposes Ugliness Still Within LGBTQ Community” • “Capital Pride Can and Must Do Better” • “Get Prisons Out of Pride! (2016 Petition)” • “BREAKING: ACTIVISTS SHUT DOWN CAPITAL PRIDE PARADE” • “Ten Myths About #NoJusticeNoPride” • “Why is the private prison industry funding LGBT organizations?”		Both D.C. Protests
Various Online Media Sites and Newspapers, e.g. VICE and Grist (3) • “‘Queers for the Climate’ Are Trying to Save Fire Island from Rising Seas” • “Gay rights activists ally with greens in the climate fight” • “The Dangerous Erasure of Queer and Trans* People of Color from the Climate Movement”	External Media Coverage (30)	NYC Protest
Various Online Media Sites and Newspapers, e.g. DCist and Teen Vogue (27) • “Activists hold gay dance party outside Ivanka Trump’s house” • “Activists threw a queer dance party outside of Ivanka Trump’s DC home” • “Ivanka Trump is Cordially Invited to a Huge Queer Dance Party Outside Her House” • “Ivanka Trump’s neighbor was the hit of the queer dance party outside of her home” • “LGBT Activists Plan Queer Dance Party at Ivanka Trump’s” • “LGBT dance group joins street-blocking climate protests” • “LGBTQ dance group joins ‘Shut Down D.C.’ protest, stops traffic with loud music, confetti and twerking” • “LGBTQ Dance Protest Happening Outside Ivanka Trump’s House” • “Queer Dance Parties Now Bringing Glitter to Ivanka And Her Needled Neighbors” • “Queer dance troupe shut down traffic at climate protest by twerking”		Both D.C. Protests

(Continued)

Data Source (N)	Category (N Subtotal)	Involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “The Queer Dance Party Protestors are Back – and They Have a New Target”• “This Queer Dance Party Is Actually a Climate Change Protest”• “Alt-Pride Group Will Host Separate Events The Weekend of Capital Pride”• “As Pride Returns, Fissures in the LGBTQ+ Community Remain”• “Capital Pride Producer Resigns Amid Outcry Over Trans Bathroom Article”• “Confronting racism in LGBT community”• “LGBTQ Activists Organize a ‘Zombie’ Protest Against HRC’s Wells Fargo Ties”• “LGBTQ Group Calls On Capital Pride To Drop Wells Fargo As Sponsor”• “No Justice No Pride” – Office Magazine• “No Justice No Pride protestors disrupt Capital Pride parade”• “No Justice No Pride Is the Revolutionary Spirit of the Stonewall Riots”• “‘No Justice, No Pride’ Protestors Block Capital Pride Parade Route”• “The LGBTQ community finally starts holding corporate ‘ally’ feet to the fire”• “Transgender activists Respond to Attacks, Demand City Bolster Protections”• “Trump’s Assault on LGBT Rights is an Even More Defiant Pride”• “We need to get corporate America and police units out of Pride marches”		
TOTAL N (4888)		