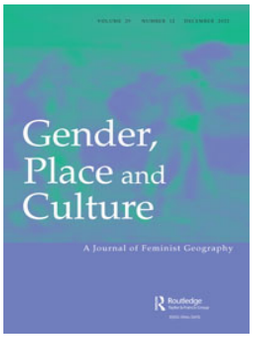

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Corporate India after Section 377: haphazardness and strategy in LGBTQ diversity and inclusion advocacy

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ABSTRACT

It is increasingly common for advocates for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) workspace benefits and protections to argue for equitable treatment by utilizing the 'business case', or the argument that fostering a diverse and inclusive workspace promotes positive economic outcomes for multinational corporations (MNCs). Utilizing this discourse is particularly important in countries like India, where LGBTQ workers in the private sector have few to no legal protections. As such, a discourse that sutures human rights to business imperatives becomes a primary means of articulating LGBTQ precarity. In this contribution to the 'Queer Precarities' themed section, this article seeks to hold in tandem a critical analysis of this arguably neoliberal discourse of LGBTQ precarity with an ethnographic account of 'following' the business case into the diverse spacetimes in which it is performed. Drawing from ten-months of fieldwork primarily among MNCs in Bengaluru's offshore information technologies (IT) industry beginning hours before the Indian Supreme Court read-down the colonial-era anti-sodomy law Section 377, this article describes how corporate organizations responded to the ruling and how these responses, often haphazard and experimental, provided moments for various LGBTQ diversity and inclusion (D&I) advocates to make claims on global capital. In placing criticism of queer liberalism into dialogue with geographic and anthropologic inquiries into globalizing business knowledge and practice, this article argues for moving beyond queer theoretical concerns of normativity to consider moments of maneuver available to actors otherwise unequally incorporated into the global distribution of labor.

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'No way back for corporate India'

On 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court read-down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that prohibited 'carnal acts against the order of nature', which included various non-procreative acts and came to be symbolically invested as the law that criminalized homosexuality (Puri 2016). The 2018 decision was the result of decades of activism there (Narrain and Gupta 2011; Dave 2012; khanna 2016). Advocates for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) workspace benefits and protections hoped the ruling would void a significant alibi used to deny equitable benefits and protections to workers in India's private sector.

Many multinational corporations (MNCs) immediately responded to the 2018 decision by rebranding company logos with rainbows and publishing statements in support of their LGBTQ workers. In corporate events I attended after the ruling, like human resources (HR) trade conferences, speakers would state unequivocally that 'corporate India has come out of the closet'. Business journalism similarly declared there was 'No way back for corporate India' (*Financial Times*, October 25, 2018), a reference to the popular slogan 'No going back' that emerged after the 2013 Supreme Court decision that nullified a Delhi High Court's decision to decriminalized sodomy in 2009. If the anti-sodomy law had negative health effects on some gender non-normative subjects in India like hijras (see Bhattacharya and Ghosh 2020, 8) it was also understood to exacerbate the potential for discrimination of middle-class LGBTQ workers in workspace as well (see Palo and Jha 2020).

Against the optimism of LGBTQ workspace advocates after the 2018 Supreme Court ruling, India's corporate business community at large was more ambivalent. The ruling seemed a tremendous financial opportunity, as companies raced to market themselves as 'LGBTQ-friendly' through advertising campaigns and public relations activities. Yet the 2018 ruling also seemed to mark a change in public opinion entailing greater scrutiny of organizational practices. This was made obvious only three-days after the ruling, when Gaurav Probir Pramanik, former HR employee of Tech Mahindra, accused his manager, Richa Gautam, of homophobia on Twitter. Vowing to retaliate against Gautam 'the day after Section 377 was repealed', his tweet went viral and caught the attention of Tech Mahindra chief executive officer C. P. Gurnani. Gurnani initiated an internal investigation into Gautam, which swiftly resulted in her firing. The exact reason for Gautam's dismissal remains unclear, as Twitter users began to excavate her social media history which included anti-Muslim statements and her advocacy for the killing of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of the Aam Aadmi Party. Without reference to these findings, Gurnani tweeted directly to Pramanik foregrounding the information technology (IT) giant's 'broader commitment' to 'diversity and inclusion' (*First Post*, September 17, 2018).

This moment sent shockwaves through the Indian business community as I would come to hear it anxiously referenced in countless HR and corporate social responsibility (CSR) conferences and training workshops. An admixture of sympathy for Pramanik and skepticism of his motives were interwoven with anxiety and cynicism of Gurnani's response, pre-empting any consensus on how Indian HR and CSR managers could interpret the event. What all agreed on, however, was that the Supreme Court ruling provided both opportunity and hazard: if the abolition of the anti-sodomy provision could be mobilized to brand companies as LGBTQ-friendly places to work, so too did many find themselves compelled to produce the corporation as LGBTQ-friendly space.

It was in the aftermath of the 2018 ruling that advocates for LGBTQ workspace diversity and inclusion (D&I) found opportunities to promote their work. Chief among their strategies was to frame the adoption of D&I as a matter of economic rationality. Referred to as the 'business case', this discourse argues that the implementation of LGBTQ workspace benefits and protections offers positive economic outcomes to organizations. A range of experts, from scholars of economics (Badgett et al. 2013; Badgett 2014) and urban studies (Florida 2002) to corporate consultancy firms (Stonewall UK n.d.), argue that the adoption of LGBTQ-inclusive policies, such as gender-neutral sexual harassment policies, gender-neutral office facilities, and same-sex partner benefits, stimulate employee commitment while promoting the organization as modern and progressive, thus able to cater to a youthful, globally-oriented, highly-skilled talent pool (for critiques of this discourse, see Priola et al. 2018; Kirton and Greene 2019; Arciniega 2021).

What Rahul Rao (2020, 151) terms 'global homocapitalism' describes how this discourse is expanding to diverse regions and increasingly includes international financial institutions now mandating adoption of the LGBTQ business case in aid distribution, which in effect cleaves 'potentially productive from unproductive queers'. As organizations seek to produce their workspace as friendly to gender and sexual minorities (Raeburn 2004; Sender 2004; Ghosh 2020; Bonner-Thompson, Mearns, and Hopkins 2021), in contexts like India's where there are no legal protections for LGBTQ workers in the private sector, D&I advocates rely on a discourse that sutures human rights to business imperatives to articulate precarity.

In this article, I illustrate how carefully attending to enactments of the business case for LGBTQ D&I in corporate India betrays not only the neoliberal effort to control and valuate LGBTQ culture and labor, but also how the haphazardness that often accompanies initiatives in the name of D&I offers opportunities for LGBTQ actors to make claims on global capital. The aim of this article is to provide an 'open-ended ethnographic exploration into systems of power' that discursively analyzes the normative tendencies of the business case while refusing to 'reconfirm neoliberalism's triumph

[and] its conquest of hearts and minds everywhere' (Welker 2014, 130). This article takes its cue from studies like Jain and DasGupta (2021), whose examination of human rights discourses (e.g. the Yogyakarta Principles) promising recognition of transgender subjects across South Asia normatively include them as medicalized subjects while noting that, in practice, such discourses clear ground for coalitions locally.

To make this argument, I focus on one of LGBTQ D&I's most important activities, anti-bias training workshops known as 'sensitizations', to showcase the experimental and haphazard character that such events take. I draw from the experiences of three categories of actors involved in 'sensitizing' workers: HR managers, LGBTQ-identified white-collar employees, and non-governmental organization (NGO) activists.

Queer liberalism and the study of globalized workspaces

Queer theoretical engagements with political projects seeking inclusion in and recognition by institutions have foregrounded the inevitable normativity accompanying such efforts (Duggan 2003; Puar 2007, 2013; Ward 2008; Eng 2010; Drucker 2015). With reference to greater representation of LGBTQ folk in marketing, Jasbir Puar argues that by tying 'recognition and incorporation' to one's ability to be serviceable to it involves the simultaneous 'folding in' of (primarily respectable, gay, white, middle-class) privileged queers and the 'folding out of life, out toward death' those subjects who cannot or will not adhere to the disciplinary demands of those institutions (Puar 2007, xx). What David Eng (2010) refers to as 'queer liberalism' summarizes the political demand, and affective desire, for inclusion in institutions like the family and various organizations that ultimately exclude LGBTQ minorities, whether Eng's racial other or, as Jane Ward (2008, 40) found in relation to race-based affirmative action hiring among Los Angeles NGOs, the classed other.

Criticism of so-called LGBTQ-friendly workspaces has extended similarly Foucauldian analyses focusing on discipline and normativity (Fleming 2007; Hearn 2014; Rumens 2017). If D&I generally entrenches the demands of 'high commitment' office cultures (Kunda 1992) in which workspace becomes a theater where one performs the truth of the self (Rose 1999), efforts to promote the 'authentic self' are understood to enlist 'the private dimensions of the individual as a corporate resource' because it provides management a technology by which to appraise an employee's 'fit' and commitment, a form of recognition that practically benefits those of relative socioeconomic privilege, namely gay, white, cisgendered men (Fleming 2007, 251). Reflecting studies of 'diversity work' that show how employees are made responsible for their own inclusion (Ahmed 2012), non-human resources LGBTQ staff become tasked with LGBTQ recruitment and anti-bias

training responsibilities (Burchiellaro 2021), while non-marketing LGBTQ staff are made responsible for providing information about the pink market (Sender 2004).

While indebted to this scholarship, I argue that attending to the practicalities of LGBTQ D&I can provide more nuanced conclusions to the invariably expert execution of institutional disciplining when placed in dialogue with ethnographically informed geographic studies of global management discourse, rather than (primarily Western) queer theoretical concerns of normativity. Such studies contend not with the successful 'infiltration' of Western discourse in the non-West (Ong 2006, 219), but foreground the 'gaps and hesitations, excesses and remainders' that interfere with capitalism (Thrift 2005, 2).

Ethnographies that have documented how neoliberal managerial discourse circulates globally, such as studies of 'culture experts' (Ong 2006) and 'management gurus' (Thrift 2005), have argued that business 'best practices' are often premised on the need to reform Asian workers to become Western, if not US, entrepreneurial subjects to remain relevant in global production networks (see Chong 2018). However, such projects often remain 'strongly oriented to the local' to grapple with significant losses of information and issues of ambiguity in complex global divisions of labor (Thrift 2005, 46). And while some Asian workers are themselves excluded from adopting cosmopolitan cultures due to economic constraints that tie them to wider familial obligations (Ong 2006, 235), others attempt to control and domesticate it for their own self-advancement (231). As such, the neoliberal disciplining of Asian workers attempts to elicit their consent in part because reception of such practices is never without hesitation or tension (Upadhya 2016, 170).

Efforts at changing employee and organizational culture, such as 'soft skills' trainings, are crucial sites for understanding the practicalities of how business expertise globalizes and how such knowledge is received by workers themselves. While a neoliberal impulse to improve the self holds the promise of participating in the global market for some (Gupta 2019), others often maintain a cynical distance from such efforts (Gooptu 2013; Upadhya 2016; Sarkar 2018). Carol Upadhya's (2016) study of initiatives by IT MNCs in Bengaluru to impart US-styles of communication, including 'fun' and 'new age' social activities, demonstrates how such efforts are sometimes met with enthusiasm but are often met with confusion, ambivalence, or derision from the workers themselves. This points not toward the successful colonization of the global market's racialized other, but the inability of corporations to easily cultivate neoliberal subjects in their own self-image.

In the context of the emergence of the LGBTQ-friendly corporation in India, I consider what might be illuminated from ethnographic inquiry that does not begin by assuming the corporation's professionalism and power

to create reality in its own image. I consider instead how organizations and their employees might be characterized as fumbling, haphazard, or even patently *un*professional. In so doing, this article aims to consider how LGBTQ actors challenge prevailing representational norms within the business case discourse to flesh out the means by which LGBTQ actors seek to strategically engage with this discourse in order to advance their own personal and political aims.

Methodology: 'following' the business case for LGBTQ D&I

This article emerges from a larger project that considers experiences of marginalization and discrimination of LGBTQ workers in India's IT sector. I chose the IT sector because it is among India's most visible proponents of LGBTQ D&I, perhaps owing to the business case's focus on 'merit' and the acquisition of 'talent', which are chief among IT's values (Upadhya 2016; Subramanian 2019). As such, I conducted research in Bengaluru, India's premier IT hub and because LGBTQ D&I advocates imagine the city as more than 'ordinary' (Robinson 2006; see also Banerjea 2015), conceptualizing Bengaluru as an exceptionally LGBTQ-friendly city (see Miller and Parker 2018).

This project seeks to understand the experiences of those actors who perform diversity work, such as drafting D&I policies and performing sensitizations. Given that it was difficult to locate many LGBTQ-identified employees in a single office as well as the ad hoc, short-term, and experimental nature of diversity work, the project demanded a multi-sited approach in which I 'followed' the discourse of the business case into diverse spacetimes in order to 'posit their relationships' to understand the 'social grounds' that produce it (Marcus 1995, 100).

Understood as a form of business knowledge, I followed the business case into all those spacetimes in which it was discussed, which roughly included two domains; the first included what Thrift (2005) terms the 'cultural circuit of capital', such as HR and CSR trade conferences, the launch events for a management guru's latest book, and professional networking meetings; the second were two NGOs whose expertise and labor were regularly marshalled to perform sensitizations and draft D&I policies by corporations convinced of the business case. I met interlocutors through snowballing, making close contacts from participating in the activities of these two NGOs as well as those I met in the cultural circuit of capital.

While IT workspaces in India can be difficult to penetrate (see Upadhya 2016; Shakthi 2020), given security restrictions employed to safeguard proprietary research, D&I spacetimes were relatively accessible to me for at least three reasons: first, events like trade conferences are often open to the public; second, efforts at showcasing a company's LGBTQ-friendliness are themselves marketing strategies, and so sensitizations were open to the

public in the hope that potential talent would take the opportunity to scout out the facilities; and third, being a queer-identified white cisman researcher in India undoubtedly suggested my sexual similitude with D&I advocates and class similitude with white-collar managers.

I snowballed interlocutors and gained access to D&I spacetimes as I followed the discourse. The white-collar MNC employees I discuss below are D&I advocates who hold non-HR roles (i.e. primarily software engineering) and their HR managers. The interlocutors whose experiences I draw from below identified using the globally circulating idioms encompassed by LGBTQ, with a disproportionate number being gay-, bisexual-, and queer-identified cismen. All were middle-class, held university qualifications, and most were dominant caste Hindu or Christian South Indians. As such, I utilize the relatively abbreviated acronym 'LGBTQ' to reflect the preferred terminology of interlocutors quoted here and that which is most often used in corporate organizational advocacy (see Shahani 2020). Thus this article does not claim to speak to the experiences of the many Indian subjectivities not included in LGBTQ, including hijras and kothis.

I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews during a ten-month visit in 2018–2019. I obtained consent to document semi-structured interviews. I recorded audio for some of these interviews, which I later transcribed. Others were recorded only by simultaneous notetaking per interlocutor request. In addition, I draw from hundreds of hours conducting participant observation. For such findings, I relied on my memory to reconstruct dialogue later in fieldnotes. I include both transcribed dialogue and reconstructed dialogue below. I utilized discourse analysis for interpreting transcripts and field notes, looking for recurring themes in the meaning and significance of work, career, and identity.

Despite the inherent lack of precision reconstruction of dialogue may present, I include it because important information regarding company activities was often relayed to me only in fleeting encounters within the cultural circuit of capital. To ensure the privacy and safety of my interlocutors, I anonymize the names of all interlocutors and organizations. Material presented here thus gestures toward the 'many-many' (Browne et al. 2017, 1137) of a spatiotemporally dispersed field rather than providing a representative mapping of LGBTQ experience working in the IT sector.

On managerial unknowing about 'this rainbow stuff'

In October 2018, I attended a multitude of D&I events through which I came to understand how the economic pressure for corporations in India to promote LGBTQ D&I became manifest. I began attending sensitizations, which included panel discussions by activists and D&I consultants, often coupled with lavish catering and entertainment. It was during one of these that I

first began to realize the haphazard and experimental nature of attempts at branding a company as LGBTQ-friendly.

Inside the office of a London-based IT company, the vice president (VP) of HR approached me in the 'networking' session after a sensitization. I had been invited by a panelist to attend the event and so the VP, who had organized and funded it, did not know me and was curious about my presence there. When I mentioned I was conducting research on LGBTQ D&I, I was surprised at how candidly he dismissed the event. He said, 'Oh, this stuff? I don't know much about this rainbow stuff. I just know they like it London'. Guggling cups of popcorn and ice cream I was handed by caterers, I pressed him further, asking what he meant while also praising the relatively high attendance of 30 staff members. He shrugged indifferently: 'We just need to look good for the head office. They are flying in from London next week, so we are doing this to show we are doing something here in India'. Against the polished defense of the business case I would hear in conferences, his straightforward dismissiveness of LGBTQ D&I programing was provocative against the office's rainbow decorations appointing the meeting room and catering hall. For him, an LGBTQ D&I event like a sensitization was more a performance for his managers onshore who were coming to inspect the activities of the Indian office.

The VP's desire to produce events favorable to onshore staff can be understood within a context of the unequal cultural politics of transnational production. As A. Aneesh (2015) notes in reference to IT work in India, the offshoring model unequally distributes labor along lines of 'creativity', centralizing value-added tasks like product design in the global North. Within this model of labor arbitrage, Indian workers are understood as 'cost-saving', performing routine but necessary 'back-end' services, like customer service and system maintenance. This economic inequality becomes a question of cultural politics as staff onshore not only administer and surveil tasks distributed to offshore staff but also because offshore staff are expected to adhere to the cultural norms of those onshore (Upadhya 2016).

Assessment of Indian workspace culture, like communication styles and distribution of responsibilities, against norms onshore naturalizes the economic inequality of labor arbitrage. Under these circumstances, as Upadhya (2016, 259) demonstrates, some Indian workers host 'soft skills' training sessions not necessarily for their intrinsic value – of enculturing Indian workers into the norms onshore as a wholistic good – but because, as one of her interlocutors notes, they 'need to be seen to be providing soft skills training' to evidence adherence to purportedly global business culture. The VP I met articulated his interest in producing the D&I event not for the intrinsic value of ethicizing the corporation or producing workspace as a site of equitable inclusion, but strategically to 'look good' to his onshore supervisors about to arrive from the United Kingdom to evaluate his

performance who, he suggests, might be predisposed to thinking India is not 'doing' anything.

Throughout fieldwork it became clear that many managers attempting to organize LGBTQ sensitizations were not familiar with this demographic. Another VP of HR for a Silicon Valley-based IT company had approved funding for a sensitization I attended that included entertainment by a Mumbai-based film director in conversation with office employees. It was the MNC's first foray into LGBTQ D&I. The VP did not know much about LGBTQ issues, an event he nevertheless funded, because 'We need to be competitive and attract the best talent'. This publicly open event was intended as much to build external relations with potential employees and business observers as it was geared toward its current employees. In speaking with him, he went on to detail how the event would help attract young, cosmopolitan talent that are more interested in LGBTQ issues. This, he reasoned, was necessary because the repealing of Section 377 in 2018 meant that India was changing and 'finally opening up its thinking'. This was also an opportunity, because the then-recent ruling meant the company was well-placed in what the HR executive assumed would be an increasingly competitive labor market.

Specifically invoking the business case, the VP of the Silicon Valley company indicates the power that business knowledge holds in affecting the world (Thrift 2005). The business case is able to unlock capital for LGBTQ purposes, even if such expenditure is largely intended as a branding exercise for talent acquisition. The VP, who suggested that the repealing of Section 377 placed India in step with global best practice, understood an LGBTQ sensitization as an opportunity to advance the standing of the company for which he worked by literally appealing to a purportedly young, modern talent pool. Like the other VP of HR at the British company, he too presumably sought to advance his own career.

Strategically maneuvering managerial unknowing

Much of my research was spent attending conferences where business knowledge was performed during which I would come to hear stories like that of John's, a user experience designer in his late-20s working for a US IT giant. In conversation with a panel of LGBTQ D&I advocates, John framed his career as one of mobility and success, describing a trajectory of an awkward recent graduate of a selective engineering university in his early-twenties to his present confidence as an LGBTQ D&I advocate on stage. Like so many white-collar IT workers, he came from a financially secure, dominant caste family in a Tier-2 (medium-size) North Indian city. Having scored well on exams at his prestigious university, he was scouted by a US company in Bengaluru, a job he took because of its prestige and promise of prosperity.

Like Bengaluru's many transplanted IT workers (see Upadhya 2016), John could not separate his social life from his personal life and sought to make workspace more LGBTQ-friendly. If in his youth he was isolated as a gay-identified transplanted worker, he found himself distracted at work by his sense of difference and nonacceptance at the office. He finally negotiated with his HR manager, gaining approval to implement policies that would help to develop a network of LGBTQ-identified employees at his company's office, or an 'employee resource group' (ERG). It was in this ERG that he met other LGBTQ employees, mostly GBQ men, and together the group would organize events like sensitizations. His mental health improved considerably owing to his managers who allowed him to be his 'authentic self' at the office, which allowed him to devote even more of his time to work, something he had always wanted. Without mincing words, he stated he was living proof of the business case.

John's story of ostracism culminating in the eventual acceptance of his authentic self was not unique but the dominant narrative in LGBTQ D&I advocacy utilizing the business case. While mental health crises are pressing issues, many D&I advocates would criticize how 'D&I space' was dominated by stories of GBQ cismen. Like John, many of India's most visible – and successful – LGBTQ D&I advocates are cismen who hold prestigious educational qualifications, speak English (and Hindi) fluently, and are of a dominant caste, which together work to promote forms of mobility not otherwise available to women, trans and non-binary folk, and subordinate caste workers. If IT already perpetuates existing socioeconomic inequalities in the Indian labor market in terms of class, caste, and gender (Radhakrishnan 2011; Upadhya 2016; Subramanian 2019), so many LGBTQ advocates criticized D&I for its lack of addressing intersecting marginalities.

Yet in the immediate aftermath of Section 377, there was a rush by corporate managers and D&I advocates alike to mobilize around the ruling, often reducing the need, desire, and capacity for much oversight. This worked to the advantage of LGBTQ D&I advocates who sought to challenge the dominance of GBQ cismen's experience within D&I. I had met Srinivas, a flirty, quietly confident, and masculine non-binary employee of a large MNC in their late-30s at a sensitization in which they were one of the main speakers. The event included a panel discussion by a gay man and longtime LGBTQ D&I advocate alongside a human rights activist from a local NGO. Like many sensitizations I would see in Bengaluru, it was the company employee's experience that took center stage and framed discussions of the event. But unlike other sensitizations, this day focused on the experience of non-binarism framed within a historical exclusion of non-binary and trans experience.

I later interviewed Srinivas about their activism and their experience working in corporate Bengaluru. They grew up in Bengaluru and had

described their career as largely successful but nevertheless marred by discrimination and isolation. They had earlier identified as lesbian but eventually began identifying as non-binary with a desire for women. This made life at work difficult because they experienced relentless taunting and harassment as they began to wear men's formal office attire and tried to use the men's washroom. Having been violently ejected from the men's washroom, they alternated between going entire days without food and walking long distances to a washroom on a different floor of their office building.

A crucial difficulty for Srinivas was the ambivalence of their immediate HR manager, who was unresponsive to complaints of harassment and to requests for gender-neutral facilities. 'After Section 377, I hoped people would take my issues more seriously', they told me. This not only translated to more positive comments from their colleagues, but also opened opportunities for them to negotiate with an otherwise reticent HR manager: 'He never approved any of my requests before. Now with Section 377 read-down, I was able to convince him that having some event would make him look good to the onshore team'. They were able to argue that a sensitization, photographed and including rainbow banners in the office, would appeal to the head office in Europe. In light of the Supreme Court decision, Srinivas recounted to me, they convinced their HR manager that it would look like India was 'doing something' to 'stay ahead of the times', knowing that the head office already had extensive LGBTQ anti-bias programing, non-discrimination policies, and gender-neutral washrooms. Although they were unsure whether the sensitization would have long-term or substantive impact, it provided a forum to discuss and challenge HR's ambivalence: 'After the event, they know that I am serious. And you were there, right? The audience was mostly okay with everything'.

If khanna (2016) notes that activists often grapple with reducing messages down to their most understandable, this often takes the form of focusing on GBQ cismen and transwomen as the relatively more visible figures in Indian LGBTQ activism at large. As Srinivas described, it was their HR manager's general lack of knowledge that actually allowed for the production of an event on Srinivas's terms. The manager, convinced of the business case nevertheless knew little else about LGBTQ culture or politics. Thus, this event can be understood as a moment of 'making space' for experiences that depart from the staid presumptions that link queerness with the gay male (Brown and Borisa 2021). It was in this moment that the business case was mobilized to challenge existing norms within Indian LGBTQ activism, in general, and D&I advocacy in particular.

Haphazard production of LGBTQ-friendly workspace

The haphazard attempts to produce the MNC as LGBTQ-friendly extend to transactions between corporate actors and the many NGOs on whose

expertise and labor they rely. Management may approve funding for D&I efforts in advance of understanding their 'how' or even their 'what'. NGOs then become crucial resources in performing events and drafting policies in this context of unknowing. Critique of CSR has pointed to how the economic inequality between (corporate) donors and (NGO) recipients renders the latter beholden to the financial and ideological imperatives of the former (see Rajak 2011). Yet while the exercise of power in LGBTQ D&I can be broadly described this way, what I found in practice were opportunities for NGO actors to strategically maneuver this political economic inequality.

The disciplinary potential of MNCs is exemplified in the case of Rohan, a local NGO activist regularly asked to speak at MNCs on LGBTQ issues. A well-known and longtime director of a sexual health NGO as well as a certified mental health practitioner, he is a desirable candidate for such work. I knew him because I regularly attended a weekly self-help group for LGBTQ folk he moderated at this NGO. These meetings, largely attended by middle-class GBQ cismen holding white-collar IT jobs, often included discussions of corporate LGBTQ D&I campaigns, usually with an insider employee present to support or defame a campaign against his own experiences; meetings also included discussions of isolation and anti-queer discrimination in workspace.

Despite such pessimism, Rohan moderated by inserting his unwavering commitment to hope by countering attendee despair with examples of what he considered queer lives worth living in Bengaluru and opportunities to educate audiences on queer possibilities. This was dramatized for us as he recounted interactions with MNCs that solicited his expertise. As we sat huddled together on the floor, he described how he was asked by an HR employee to speak at his office in preparation for a transgender hiring program. He was startled when on arrival the event organizer said, 'You will be the first to talk. You just have to tell the senior managers about all the difficulties you've faced'. Thinking he would be one among several panelists, he was shocked to hear how they had organized an event around the presumption of his experience of anti-queer discrimination.

This exchange can be read as an example of corporate staff seeking to ethicize the organization in a way that discursively regulates the parameters by which affect becomes intelligible (Rajak 2011), in this instance Indian queerness as suffering (Horton 2019). The case of Rohan's exchange with HR can be situated within a longer history of international organizations that have the ability to define the terms by which queer experience is made legible, well-documented within epidemiological categorization of sexual behaviors in terms of 'riskiness' employed in HIV/AIDS interventions (Cohen 2006; Boyce 2007; khanna 2011; Dutta 2012). For Rohan, the problem was that in its efforts to justify funding the transgender hiring program, the MNC staff presumed his experience was one of suffering. According to Rohan, his

speech included reference to the presumption of suffering he was asked to provide. In effect, the MNC relying on Rohan's expertise also produced the condition for Rohan to use the autobiographical format to assert his political vision of queer possibility while nevertheless promoting the philanthropic effort.

If moments like this one recounted by Rohan outline the limited frames by which LGBTQ folk gain recognition in corporate India, other intimacies between the corporation and NGOs did not entail such specific demands or even much oversight. The potential for D&I to normalize actors presumes careful attention to the execution and outcomes of the distribution of funding. But in many cases HR staff simply needed an LGBTQ event, and quickly. This became obvious over the months I spent in the office of another NGO whose activism focused on economically empowering working-class, non-English-speaking LGBTQ folk and sex workers through initiatives including job upskilling and placements.

I had already been circulating in D&I spaces when I heard the NGO's office phone ring with a request from an HR manager from a Canadian consulting firm who asked if the NGO could provide a day's worth of LGBTQ programing in forty-eight-hours' time. The request responded to the employee's need to produce an event that would appeal to her managers onshore. In management culture, to respond quickly to major events, like a Supreme Court ruling, signals awareness of trends but also an interest in maintaining competitive advantage (Thrift 2005; Chong 2018). In the small world of corporate Indian D&I, I had met this person several times at various conferences and workshops, hearing her speak of her HR work on women but who saw in the reading-down of Section 377 both an ethical and financial opportunity to mainstream LGBTQ issues.

Her request changed the atmosphere of the NGO for the next two-days, whose staff of five began to rapidly update PowerPoint presentations, create numerous games to entertain employees, and attempted to find speakers to participate in the event. Though the NGO did not receive funding to perform such sensitizations, the NGO director later described how such events were crucial not only to enact the NGO's mission of promoting workspace equality but also because such events provided opportunities to create new funding connections and observe whether an organization would be appropriate for a job placement. In this case, they had started a new project that specifically focused on transmen and in their work had attempted to find opportunities to facilitate a job placement for them. Because the corporate funder had little knowledge of LGBTQ culture, and needed the event quickly, the NGO was able to produce an event focusing specifically on transmasculinity that functioned to cross-promote their current need to place transmen.

It was in these moments of political and economic inequality, in which NGO activists are otherwise compelled to take opportunities for visibility

and networking, that the effort to produce a manageable form of difference was not absolute. Although the terms by which actors were promised inclusion were resolutely neoliberal, in practice these same actors found means by which to negotiate the normative impulse of the business case, whether by taking these moments to challenge prevailing frames of intelligibility, like queerness as suffering, or through cross-promotional efforts strategically highlighting underrepresented subjects within LGBTQ D&I, like transmen.

Conclusion

I have sought not to reproduce the presumption of the effectiveness of organizations as much queer theory does, but instead to foreground incongruities between discourse and practice, moving away from the assumption that corporations hold the capacities to govern space according to their own interests. If 'global homocapitalism' seeks to include LGBTQ actors by rendering that inclusion contingent on their productivity (Rao 2020), I have outlined how the structural motivations prompting corporate management to advance D&I are often accompanied by haphazardness and hesitation that can afford opportunities for maneuver for LGBTQ workers as the business case is put into practice.

This article in no way seeks to disregard the negative effects of suturing rights and recognition to productivity. In interviews, I consistently raised the prospect that the business case was exclusionary to those who cannot make a case for their ability to add-value to organizations, like IT's many auxiliary workers, to which few interlocutors disagreed. But between a neoliberal discourse and all that it makes possible offshore, I have sought to provide a complicated picture into both how an MNC attempts to become 'LGBTQ-friendly' in India and how various actors seek to make claims on corporations as they attempt to do so.

As organizations attempting to produce themselves as LGBTQ-friendly gain traction globally, it becomes important to hold together the disciplining effects of the business case arguing for these changes has alongside the means by which various actors seek to extract resources from those same organizations. In the case of LGBTQ D&I in India, it becomes critical to consider this discourse within larger structural inequalities in which Indian workers are subject to cultural disciplining and inequality to render the globalization of business knowledge with greater complexity.

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