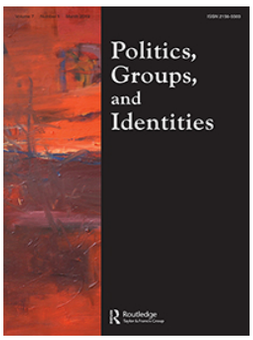

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The political distinctiveness of gays and lesbians: explaining protest actions across sexual identities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between people's sexual identities and their tendencies to join political protests. When analyzing American National Election surveys from 2012 (n = 3813), gays and lesbians were more than twice as likely to protest as heterosexuals. To explain the increased activism of gays and lesbians, this study applied Patrick Egan's theories of political distinctiveness to the ANES data. After running a set of hierarchal logistic regressions, the link between sexualities and protesting became insignificant when issues of age, education levels, friendships circles, group memberships, and political ideologies were introduced into regressions. This suggests that gays and lesbians protested more often because they are younger, more educated, integrated into political networks, and are more likely to notice the negative consequences of social inequalities than heterosexuals.

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Activism; gays and lesbians; political participation; protest movements

Introduction

Protest movements are typically created by groups of people who seek major social transformations. In contesting institutionalized forms of discrimination, women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities have created three of the biggest social movements in the second part of the twentieth century. The reasons for oppressed people to protest are multiple and complex. At an individual level, one would expect people to join movements in which they can receive social and material benefits (e.g., unionization seems better to laborers than company executives). But protest participation is not merely a matter of self-interest as issues of power structures, social inequalities, and social agency (Tarrow 1996) all contribute to a person's protest inclinations. Due to institutionalized forms of discrimination, members of disenfranchised groups often have to deal with hostile social climates, restrictions on their legal rights, and limited socio-political resources (Katz-Wise and Hyde 2012). In response to disadvantages in electoral avenues, members of stigmatized populations often rely on the "outsider" tactics of community organizing, boycotting, protesting, and civil disobedience when striving for political and social change.

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Explaining the sexuality gap in protesting

There is an extensive literature on how political grievances and protest attendance are patterned along gender, class, and racial cleavages (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Schussman and Soule 2005; Dalton, Van Sickle, and Weldon 2010). A smaller group of studies have explored the links of sexual identities to protest behaviors. For example, gays and lesbians join more protests than bisexuals, and bisexuals join more protests than heterosexuals (Duncan 1999; Smith and Haider-Markel 2002; White 2006; Andersen and Jennings 2010; Battle and Harris 2013; Friedman and Ayres 2013; Gray and Desmarais 2014; Swank and Fahs 2016). While there seems to be a small sexuality gap in protest engagement, most of this evidence comes from studies with small convenience samples of protesters from a single social movement. For example, protesters for AIDS funding were overwhelmingly sexual minorities (Rollins and Hirsch 2003; Andersen and Jennings 2010) and gays and lesbians were more likely to attend feminist protests than were heterosexuals (Duncan 1999; Szymanski 2004; White 2006; Andersen and Jennings 2010; Friedman and Ayres 2013). Finally, a study on "new left" and liberal activism found that lesbians were likely to attend more civil rights and antiwar events than were heterosexual women (Andersen and Jennings 2010).

As early studies generally contend that gay and lesbians protest more than heterosexuals, there is still an absence of studies that explain why lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (LGB) join more protests than heterosexuals. Swank and Fahs (2016) recently addressed protesting tendencies across sexual identities in a random sample, but this study was restricted to young adults who completed a survey in 2001. This study builds on that work by identifying the mechanisms behind a likely sexuality protest gap in a recent national sample of American adults. In doing so, this quantitative study asked two questions: (1) Do sexual minorities generally protest more than heterosexuals, and if so, (2) why does this protest disparity between sexual identities exist?

Literature review

To explore how protest actions can vary across sexualities, I drew upon the political science theories on "political distinctiveness" (Egan 2008, 2012; Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011). The political distinctiveness theories began by Egan (2008) and modified by others (Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Grollman 2017; Swank and Fahs 2016) suggest that greater LGB liberalism could be due to issues of essentialism (something intrinsically unique and special for people of different sexualities), selection (the characteristics that cause people to adopt an LGB identity increase their likelihood of going to protests), embeddedness (involvement in the LGB community leads to more protests), and conversion (the process of choosing an LGB identity may be so life-altering that it causes major changes in political outlooks and actions). The following sections elaborate on why essentialist, selection, embeddedness, and conversion variables could predict greater protesting among sexual minorities.

Essentialism and the protest gap

Essentialist arguments see sexual orientations as innate and fixed identities that determine a person's outlooks, habits, and preferences (DeLamater and Hyde 1998). In applying this

concept to political engagement, an essentialist position would claim that a person's sexual identity will inherently determine a person's sexual politics. That is, this concept would suggest that all people of a similar sexual orientation will share certain perspectives on sexual norms, the legitimacy of social hierarchies, and the necessity of social change.

In operationalizing the concept of essentialism, Haslam and Levy (2006) identify eight key features: (1) discreteness: boundaries between sexual minorities and heterosexuals are sharp and clear-cut, not fuzzy, vague, and indefinite; (2) uniformity: people in the same sexuality are and remarkably similar to one another; (3) informativeness: knowing someone's sexuality imparts a good deal of facts about that person; (4) reification: sexual identities are objective realities that exist outside of subjective interpretations of the world; (5) naturalness: sexual identities exists as natural or biological entities; (6) stability: sexual orientation have always existed and their attributes remain constant over time; (7) necessity: there are fundamental characteristics that distinguish people of different sexual orientations; and (8) exclusivity: everyone belongs to only one sexual orientation at a given time.

While an essentialist understanding of sexualities is popular among many citizens (Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2008), most social scientific theories and studies are skeptical of essentialist assumptions. Essentialism ignores the idea of the self as a social product (Huddy 2001), that behaviors are based on probabilities rather than deterministic relationships (Van Evera 1997), and that the definitions and practices of human sexualities change across cultures, time frames, and an individual's lifetime (Diamond 2008). Essentialism also ignores that people experience the social order with multiple social identities and the intersections of sexual identities with race, class, and gender backgrounds often create different experiences, loyalties, and socio-political outlooks among heterosexuals and LGBs (Ward 2008; Ghaziani 2011; Harris and Battle 2013; Swank and Fahs 2013; Terriquez 2015; Harnois 2015; Grollman 2017). With such dubious premise that gays and lesbians are essentially different on matters of politics, Egan's theory of political distinctiveness also offers other types of explanations for sexuality differences in politics.

Selection factors and protesting: being younger and more educated

Certain familial and demographic factors seem to be more common among sexual minorities and people who protest. Egan (2008) notes that out lesbians and gays are more likely to have liberal parents than are people who conceal their same-sex attractions. In turn, the general liberalism of many LGB families of origins can partially explain their greater participation in liberal social movements. LGBs also tend to be younger than heterosexuals (Bailey 1999; Black et al. 2000; Schaffner and Senic 2006; Herek et al. 2010) and this general youthfulness can translate into greater protesting among sexual minorities. Similarly, educational attainment seems to increase political activism across sexualities (Jennings and Andersen 2003; Rollins and Hirsch 2003; Taylor et al. 2009; Dalton, Van Sickle, and Weldon 2010; Swank and Fahs 2011) and some studies suggest that lesbians and gays are generally better educated than heterosexuals (Fine 2015; Mollborn and Everett 2015).

Social networks and protesting: being embedded in LGB communities

Social contexts and group membership are often related to the political activism of individuals (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Dalton, Van Sickle, and Weldon 2010). Aspects of

LGB communities can inspire a commitment to social justice and a desire to protest. When integrated into the LGB community, sexual minorities often hear messages that affirm an otherwise stigmatized identity. Conversations with other sexual minorities can also sensitize LGBs into shared grievances, enhance group solidarity, and increase access to other activists who recruit people into joining political demonstrations (Bailey 1999; Hertzog 1996). Conversely, aspects of heterosexual communities often display less of the qualities that inspire liberal activism (things such as the rejection of compulsory heterosexuality and/or traditional gender roles, or the recognition of heterosexual privilege).

Early studies have confirmed the importance of social embedding in LGB activism. Having emotional connections with other sexual minorities can be equally crucial to political activism (Battle and Harris 2013) as can routinely talking with gays and lesbians in person (Barth, Overby, and Huffmon 2009; Fingerhut 2011; Swank, Woodford, and Lim 2013) and through social media (Becker and Copeland 2016). Simply joining a gay athletic club or a gay-friendly church often leads to greater activism among sexual minorities (Duncan 1999; Smith and Haider-Markel 2002; Swank and Fahs 2011; Swank, Woodford, and Lim 2013) and the tendency of gays and lesbians to join more political groups than heterosexuals seems related to greater activism among LGB young adults (Swank and Fahs 2016). Membership in gay and lesbian community centers seems especially important to activism because other members of the center convey the expectation that sexual minorities should attend LGB pride marches (McClendon 2014) as well as feminist, environmental, peace, and antiracism political events (Carroll and Ratner 1996).

Protest and conversion: seeing injustice in many social systems

Conversion theories connect perceptions of social injustices to their location in social hierarchies. When discussing heteronormativity, heterosexuals are often oblivious to privileges granted to their sexual identities. This acceptance or inattentiveness to their social advantages partially explains why heterosexuals are less likely to protest against heterosexism[1] than gays and lesbians (Fingerhut 2011; Montgomery and Stewart 2012; Swank and Fahs 2012). Conversion theories also see heterosexist encounters as a possible impetus for demanding social change in many social arenas. Common identity theories suggest that gays and lesbians may more be sensitive and empathetic to the plight of other disadvantaged groups than heterosexuals (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000). This means the being oppressed because of a sexual identity can translate into a general distrust of other race, class, and gender hierarchies. This increased empathy and solidarity with other disenfranchised groups can in turn lead to greater involvement in many progressive social movements (e.g., feminist, antiracist, disability rights, and labor). As Egan (2008) puts it, adopting "a 'stigmatized' or 'outsider' status [may] lead gay people to sympathize with those who belong to other marginalized groups and thus support politicians and policies that they believe help these groups" (14–15).

Elements of common identity theories have been supported by public opinion studies. Studies suggest that LGBs are far more liberal than heterosexuals on affirmative action, the death penalty, legalization of marijuana, defense and domestic spending, gender roles, inter-racial marriage, and the war in Iraq (Bailey 1999; Szymanski 2004; Egan, Edelman, and Sherrill 2008; Haywood and Swank. 2008; Meier, Hull, and Ortyl 2009; Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Worthen, Sharp, and Rodgers 2012; Grollman 2017).

Studies also suggest that sexual minorities are more aware of racial and gender biases than heterosexuals (Swank, Woodford, and Lim 2013; Kleiman, Spanierman, and Smith. 2015; Grollman 2017; Swank and Fahs 2016), feel more warmth toward women and Black Americans (Grollman 2017), and that gays and lesbians generally feel more compelled to "act for the rights of others" or "do social justice" than heterosexuals (Longerbeam et al. 2007; Gray and Desmarais 2014).

This tendency for gays and lesbians to see more social problems than heterosexuals can in turn explain the increased level of protesting among gays and lesbians. Perceptions of social injustice often increases an interest in protesting (Miller et al. 1981; Benford and Snow 2000; Huddy 2001) and liberal individuals often protest more than conservatives (Dalton, Van Sickle, and Weldon 2010). Accordingly, some studies have found that greater liberalism and recognition of institutionalized racism among sexual minorities is partially behind their tendency to desire more activism or join more social movements than heterosexuals (Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Swank and Fahs 2016).

Research hypotheses

Members of oppressed populations often rely on protest movements to create social change. Early studies that suggest that sexual minorities protest more than heterosexuals (Duncan 1999; White 2006; Andersen and Jennings 2010; Swank and Fahs 2011; Friedman and Ayres 2013). While these studies are informative, they have mostly been bivariate studies of small-scale convenience samples. Swank and Fahs (2016) have recently used "political distinctiveness" theories to address the sexuality protest gap among young adults, but these data are a bit dated 2001 and may not be representative of middle-aged and older adults. I improve upon these studies by exploring a recent random sample of US adults (American National Election Surveys 2012). Moreover, I offer new analytical insights as I identify some of underlying causes of greater protesting tendencies among sexual minorities.

Political distinctiveness theories suggest several possible reasons for increased protesting among gays and lesbians (Egan 2008; Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011). The essentialist argument suggests that gays and lesbians are inherently more inclined than heterosexuals to protest. Skeptical of essentialist arguments, Egan argues that variations in protesting between LGBs and heterosexuals could be a result of (1) different family backgrounds and demographic profiles that are related to both sexual identities and protest behaviors (selection hypothesis); (2) adult socialization within the LGB community increases liberalism and a willingness to base political behavior on the interests of LGBs (embeddedness hypothesis); and/or (3) the exposure to heterosexist discrimination makes LGBs more egalitarian and supportive of liberal social movements than heterosexuals (conversion hypothesis).

With Egan's theories in mind, this study offers the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals are more likely to protest than heterosexuals.

Hypothesis 2: The variables of age, education, and income explains the tendency of sexual minorities to protest more than heterosexuals (selection hypothesis).

Hypothesis 3: Greater contact with sexual minorities and participation in civic organizations are the reasons why sexual minorities protest more than heterosexuals (embeddedness hypothesis).
Hypothesis 4: Greater liberalism and the rejection of gender, race, and sexuality hierarchies motivates more sexual minorities into protesting than heterosexuals (conversion hypothesis).

Sampling

Data for this study came from the Time Series Study of the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES). While this random biannual survey is several decades old, I have restricted to 2012 data because it was the only year that sexuality and protest items were asked at the same time (Cassese et al. 2013). As a multisplit research design, ANES constantly modified its survey items and data gathering modes throughout its 2012 sample. Although I wanted to use information from the face-to-face interviews, the questions of protesting and sexual identities were limited to the web version of ANES (3813 people took the web version of the 2012 ANES survey).

The web version of ANES draws upon Knowledge Networks (KN) for respondents. KN, currently known as GfK Custom Research, maintains a panel of people who have agreed to regularly complete on-line surveys. When building a list of 40,000 US households, KN recruited people through random-digit dialing and address-based approaches. Although issues of race, gender, and education selection biases are found in KN samples, their selection biases seem no worse than random telephone surveys (Chang and Krosnick 2009) and they have much better response rates than the face-to-face interviews of ANES (Weinberg, Freese, and McElhattan 2014). To address issues of selection biases, the analysis is based on weighted data which accounts for a cross-classification of race/ethnicity and educational attainment, a cross-classification of age and sex, metropolitan status, household internet access, income, marital status, and home ownership (ANES 2015).

Measures

The web version of ANES 2012 survey provided enough measures to adequately test my hypotheses. To explore essentialist, selection, immersion, and conversion factors, I constructed 14 variables that dealt with sexual identities, protest actions, demographic factors, exposure to social networks, and liberal political beliefs. These close-ended items included a combination of responses to single-item questions and six-point Likert scales.

Protest behaviors

Boycotts, strikes, demonstrations, vigils, and civil disobedience are "protest tactics" that publicly challenge unresponsive elites in a collective fashion. ANES had many items on electoral political behaviors, but only a single item that asked if a person "joined a protest march" in the last four years. This item traces recent participation in a collective protest but it did not address the cause or goals behind the demonstration. Answers for this measure were coded in a binary fashion (was the action in the last four years = 1, was the action never done in that time span = 0).

Sexual identity

When addressing personal sexualities, ANES asked people to classify their sexual identity: "Do you consider yourself?" The three answers of heterosexual, bisexual, and gay or lesbian were transformed into one dichotomous variable (LGB = 1, other = 0). With this classification system, 95.5% of the sample was considered heterosexual and 4.5% was labeled lesbian, gay, or bisexual. While this measure traces three sexual identities, it does not indicate if people based their sexual classifications on actions, desires, or any other criteria. Egan (2008) does argue that the acceptance of a sexual identity is the best way to test his theories since people who embrace a stigmatized identity are more likely to come from liberal families and be embedded in LGB communities than people who do not embrace such identities.

Selection variables

Three demographic factors serve as selection variables: young adulthood, educational level, and family income (similar to Grollman 2017; Swank and Fahs 2016). Unfortunately, I could not explore the role of liberalism among a person's family of origins since ANES lack measures for this construct.

Young adulthood was ascertained through a question about age groups. After asking participants their age during the survey, ANES created a list of 13 age groups that ranged from 17 to 75 years old. Because early adulthood is often the peak of protest actions for individuals, I created a dummy variable that separated the 17–24-year olds apart from the people over 24 years old (17–24 years old = 1, 25 plus = 0). This range for early adulthood was set at these ages because 17 is the youngest age in ANES and correlational analysis suggests that protest tendencies generally shrink after respondents reached 25 years old (data not reported here).

Educational attainment was recorded through a question about their highest level of education. Responses of less than a first grade to doctoral degree were collapsed into five categories (less than high school = 1, high school degree = 2, some college but no bachelor's degree = 3, bachelor's degree = 4, graduate degree = 5).

Family income was measured by asking, "What was the total income in 2011 of all your family members living here?" After participants were advised to include salaries, pensions, Social Security, dividends, and interest, the responses were separated into four categories (1 = under $5,000, 2 = $5,000–22,499, 3 = $22,500–69,999, 4 = over 70,000).

Embeddedness

Contextual predictors of activism were addressed through two variables (Knowing an LGB person and belonging to political groups). Respondents were asked if they knew any lesbian, gay, and bisexual family members, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, or close friends. ANES created a dummy variable for either knowing or not knowing an LGB person in any of these social roles. Knowing a gay or lesbian person seems connected to voting practices (Barth, Overby, and Huffmon 2009; Swank, Woodford, and Lim 2013) and sexual minorities seem to know more gays and lesbians than heterosexuals (Galupo and Gonzalez 2013).

The consequences of group membership were handled through an indication if they were active in an issue-oriented political group, neighborhood association, a racial/ethnic interest group, and/or a women's group. Number of group associations was tallied through the addition of a single point for every time a person indicated that they were active in each of these types of groups (range 0–4). I would have preferred questions about joining a group that is specific for sexual minorities, but studies do suggest membership in political and neighborhood groups does vary by sexuality and can inspire political activism (Dalton, Van Sickle, and Weldon 2010; Swank and Fahs 2016).

Conversion

ANES had four variables on the acceptance and recognition of social biases against different stigmatized groups in the United States. Some variables focused on a commitment to liberal identities and egalitarian values while others addressed perceptions of widespread gender and race inequalities.

Our 5-item egalitarianism scale explores a universal desire for greater social equality ($\acute{\alpha} = .79$). With ANES asking participants to condone social hierarchies, the strongest agrees to statements like "society should make sure everyone has equal opportunity" were coded in affirmative direction (strongly agree = 5, strongly disagree = 1) while rejections to statements like "we would be better off if we worried less about inequality" were coded in reverse direction (strongly disagree = 5; strongly agree = 1). With liberal identities generally reflecting the support of expanding the rights and resources of disenfranchised populations, I explored how participants placed themselves on a 7-point scale that started with extremely liberal and went to liberal, slightly liberal, middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely conservative (extremely liberal = 7).

Other conversion factors addressed gender and racial norms that grant greater power and privileges for men and whites. In addressing modern sexism, or the denial of contemporary forms of sexual discrimination (Swim and Cohen 1997), one item asked: "How serious a problem is discrimination against women in the United States?" Participants who suggested that discrimination against women was "an extremely serious problem" received a 1, while people who hinted that the gender discrimination was a moderate, minor, or nor problem all received a 0. For matters of perceived racial discrimination, ANES had items on the recognition of systematic racial disparities in the broader society (Kleiman, Spanierman, and Smith. 2015). I created two-item scale that in which participants replied to question: "How much discrimination is there in the United States today against each of the following groups?" The additive scale combined the separate responses for blacks and Hispanics into one index that ranged from 2 to 6 (responses in each item was coded a great deal = 3, a lot = 2, all others = 1). Questions of modern racism and sexism were utilized since these are the sort of variables that often differ by sexual identity (Grollman 2017) and modern racism mediated the sexuality gap in protesting in an earlier study (Swank and Fahs 2016).

Analytical plan

I examined the data through a combination of statistical procedures. One-way univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-squares looked for significant differences between

sexual minorities and heterosexuals for all of the variables. I then turned to logistic regressions to assess the relationship of sexualities to protesting when controlling for the selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. Logistic regressions are well suited at analyzing dichotomous dependent variables and they are not confined by many of the strict requirements other sorts of regressions (e.g., a normal distribution in the dependent variable or no problems of homoscedasticity). Finally, I added the control variables of race and gender into all of the regressions since these factors can influence the political participation of sexual minorities (Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Battle and Harris 2013; Swank and Fahs 2013) and heterosexuals (Klandermans 1997; Schussman and Soule 2005).

Findings

Bivariate analysis

In a simple bivariate analysis, sexual identities appear crucial to people's political practices and their understandings of the social order. For the dependent variable, LGBs were twice as likely as heterosexuals to have joined a protest march in the last four years (9.8% as compared to 4.5%). These discrepancies were sizeable enough to record a statistically significant difference for protest behaviors and sexualities ($\chi^2 = 4.48$, $p < .05$). However, greater levels of protesting does not mean that sexual minorities and heterosexuals are essentially different on this point as over 90% never reported any sort of protesting in the last several years. Most of the other selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors saw significant sexuality differentiations as well. With χ^2 and F-scores between 3.94 and 131.09, the variables of gender, doing well in education, knowing gay friends and family, embracing liberal ideals, recognizing sexism and recognizing racism also significantly differed by sexual identity. On the other hand, the ANOVAs did not yield any significant sexuality distinctions for age, race, egalitarian sentiments, or the number of political groups they joined (Table 1).

Logistic regression findings

I turned to binary logistic regressions to estimate the net effects of sexuality on protesting when controlling for selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. As expected, the study met the requirements of logistic regressions (the dependent variable was mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and dichotomous and there were over 50 cases per predictor). Missing data were handled through a listwise deletion that dropped cases that lacked an observation for each variable.

I ran five logistic regressions that estimated the relationship of sexual identities to participating in a protest march in the last four years. The approach highlights the direct connection of sexual orientation to protesting before and after attending to selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors (Grollman 2017; Swank and Fahs 2016). Calculations for unstandardized beta coefficients and standard errors are reported, so larger coefficient estimates do not always reflect a larger magnitude of effect.

The left column of Table 2 opens with a baseline model for sexual identities, controls, and attending a recent protest march (essentialist hypothesis). In comparison to

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for total sample and sexualities subsamples.

Variable name		Full sample	LGB	Heterosexual	
Categorical measures	Range	Yes%	Yes%	Yes%	Chi-square
Protest March last 4 years	0–1	5.6% (0.23)	9.8% (0.29)	4.5% (0.22)	4.48*
Know a LGB person	0–1	64.4% (0.47)	87.7% (0.32)	63.3% (0.48)	42.42***
Young adulthood	0–1	6.5% (0.24)	7.6% (0.26)	6.4% (0.24)	0.35
Female	0–1	49.2% (0.47)	33.9% (0.50)	49.9% (0.47)	16.72***
White	0–1	78.2% (0.41)	77.1% (0.42)	78.9% (0.41)	0.12
Continuous	Range	Mean (SD)			*F*-score
Education level	1–5	3.03 (1.28)	3.29 (1.32)	3.05 (1.28)	6.32**
Family income	1–4	2.86 (0.95)	2.76 (0.94)	2.85 (0.96)	1.45
Political groups	1–4	0.18 (0.48)	0.23 (0.60)	0.18 (0.47)	2.20
Liberal identity	1–7	3.78 (1.44)	5.02 (1.36)	3.72 (1.47)	131.09***
Recognize sexism	0–1	0.32 (0.17)	0.58 (0.23)	0.31 (0.17)	3.94*
Recognize racism	2–6	2.81 (1.20)	3.17 (1.43)	2.79 (1.20)	16.26***
Egalitarianism	5–25	10.95 (12.55)	12.07 (12.45)	10.90 (12.55)	1.43
N		3813	217	3596	

*$p < .05$.
**$p \leq .01$.
***$p < .001$.

heterosexuals, having a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity significantly increased the likelihood of attending a political march even when holding race and gender factors constant ($B = .49$, $p < .05$). However, the miniscule pseudo R^2 suggests that sexual identities account for a very small proportion of variance in protest attendance and other factors can be more important to attending protests than a lesbian or gay identity.

The second regression includes the sexuality and selection variables (age, education, and income). This fitted model suggests that selection factors are partially responsible for increased LGB protesting. When holding age, education, and income at fixed values, the significant association between sexual identities and protesting disappeared ($B = .42$, $p = .12$). With age and education level maintaining direct links to protesting, one can infer that general youthfulness and educational attainments of sexual minorities can partially explain their greater protesting tendencies than heterosexuals.

Our third regression combined protesting tendencies with sexuality and social network factors (embeddedness hypothesis). LGBs again lost a significant direct link to protesting ($B = .31$, $p = .26$), suggesting that the contextual variables did diminish the sexuality protest gap. Both joining political groups and having interactions with lesbians and gays were significant in this model. This combination of findings suggests that connections to sexual minorities is crucial to greater activism among sexual minorities but their membership in feminist and antiracist political groups also reinforce the tendency of LGBs to join more political marches than heterosexuals.

Model 4 integrated the conversion and sexuality variables into an equation. Political identities and just world beliefs significantly weakened the link of LG identities to protesting again ($B = .10$, $p = .67$). Moreover, the coefficient for sexual identities and protesting saw the biggest drop for the conversion factors as compared to the selection and embeddedness variables (Models 2 and 3). This large drop for sexual minorities is most attributable to the stronger associations to the preference of liberal and egalitarian prescriptions rather than the recognition of discrimination along race and gender lines.

Table 2. Unstandardized coefficients from binary logistic regressions of protest behaviors on sexual identities ($n = 3813$).

Predictors	Essentialist	Selection	Embedded	Conversion	Full Model
Sexual identity	.49*	.42	.31	.10	.00
Lesbian, gay or bi	(.27)	(.27)	(.28)	(.28)	(.29)
Selection					
Young adulthood		.54*			.57*
		(.24)			(.26)
Educational level		.29**			.15*
		(.06)			(.06)
Family income		.00			.00
		(.01)			(.01)
Embedded					
Know a LGB person			.74***		.56**
			(.17)		(.18)
Political groups			2.37***		2.36***
			(.22)		(.23)
Conversion					
Liberal identity				.21**	.18**
				(.05)	(.05)
Recognize racism				.11	.10
				(.06)	(.06)
Recognize sexism				.49	.31
				(.30)	(.33)
Egalitarianism				.07**	.06**
				(.01)	(.01)
Controls					
Female	−.45**	−.41**	−.49**	−.51**	−.50**
	(.14)	(.14)	(.14)	(.14)	(.15)
White	−.16	−.19	−.27	−.08	−.20
	(.16)	(.16)	(.16)	(.17)	(.18)
Model χ^2	15.16**	40.62***	132.35***	79.86**	192.62***
Pseudo R^2	.01	.03	.09	.06	.14
N	3788	3788	3788	3788	3788

Note: Cell figures include unstandardized beta coefficients and robust standard errors (in parentheses). Pseudo R^2 is a Nagelkerke estimate.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$ (one-tailed tests).

The full model included every selection, embeddedness, and conversion factor. When holding all of the variables constant, the direct association between sexual identities and protesting totally evaporated ($B = .00$). This suggests that the apparent links between sexual identities and protesting can be ascribed to the cumulative effects of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. That is, selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors can partially shrink the link of sexual identities to protesting but it is the combined effects of these factors that create greater LGB protesting. In looking for specific factors that acted as suppressors, two factors from each of the selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors displayed significant links to protesting. People protested more if they were younger and more formally educated (selection), knew sexual minorities and joined any sort of a political group (embeddedness) and favored liberal and egalitarian political outlooks (conversion).

Strengths and limitations in the research design

To date, there are surprisingly few studies of how sexualities predict social movement participation. Early studies have mostly explored the predictors of protesting within a single

sexual identity, be it a sample that is limited to only heterosexual or sexual minority populations (e.g., Taylor et al. 2009; McClendon 2014). Far fewer studies compare protest behaviors across sexual identities (e.g., Smith and Haider-Markel 2002; Andersen and Jennings 2010; Swank and Fahs 2011). When contrasting the political actions of people with different sexualities, a study of New Yorkers noted that 11.3% of self-identified lesbians-gays and 4.4% of heterosexuals have attended any sort of a protest or rally (Egan, Edelman, and Sherrill 2008). When exploring protesting for specific social causes, studies often note that gays and lesbians were more inclined than heterosexuals to join social movements that challenged sexual prejudice and heterosexism (Barth, Overby, and Huffmon 2009; Battle and Harris 2013). One or two other studies have reported that sexual minorities are more likely to join liberal protests against sexism (Duncan 1999; White 2006), racism (Andersen and Jennings 2010), and the war in Iraq (Andersen and Jennings 2010).

In using American National Election Survey from 2012, I explored associations between sexual orientations and protest activities. In doing so, this study explored people's recent protest participation in light their self-proclaimed sexual identities. Later, the paper took an explanatory twist as it tries to find the mechanism behind possible sexuality gaps in protesting. In trying to find these underlying forces, I applied Egan's theories of political distinctiveness to the protests tendencies of sexual minorities and heterosexuals (see also Swank and Fahs 2016). Egan's multi-level theory suggests four types of factors that could produce a protest gap between heterosexuals and LGBs. According to this theory, unique demographic qualities of gays and lesbians can be responsible for their greater protesting tendencies (selection), or this protest gap could be due to connections of the LGB social networks (embeddedness) or their reactions to the sorts of discrimination that sexual minorities must endure (conversion).

This study had some general strengths and weakness worthy of mentioning. This study uniquely addresses the qualities of protesters and non-protesters between and within sexual identities. Most studies fail to do so as they limit their analysis to studies of protesters within either lesbian–gay or heterosexual populations (Taylor et al. 2009; McClendon 2014). The few studies that address the protest gap between sexual identities have mostly lacked the nationally representative sample of this study. In using convenience samples of college students at a single university (Friedman and Ayres 2013), feminist email listserv (White 2006), or people who volunteered at AIDS awareness event (Andersen and Jennings 2010), convenience samples of this sort often create extremely homogeneous samples (Faugier and Sargeant 1997) and disproportionally overloaded with sexual minorities who are already "out" and located solidly within the LGB community (Rhoads 1997). One study used a random sample to study the protest actions of people from different sexual identities (Swank and Fahs 2016), but that study was on older data set of only young adults. Finally, the use of a random sample does increase the representativeness of the study but this study might have had some selection problems along gender lines since the proportion of female sexual minorities was much less than proportion of gay men.

Earlier studies that compared protesting across sexual identities were also constrained by smaller data sets that had only a few predictor variables. This study improved upon these works by exploring the relevance of a wide range of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors in explaining the protest gap between different sexualities. Swank

and Fahs (2016) also applied Egan's theories to political protesting among a random sample of citizens by their Add Health Data from 2001 was much older and constrained to only young adults (as compared to this recent sample from the entire adult population).

Conversely, this study has some of its own limitations. As a cross-sectional study, there are always potential problems of temporal ordering. I do assume that people rarely change their sexual identities after attending a protest but participation in activism can make people more aware of discrimination or it can encourage them to attach greater importance to belonging to political groups. It is also possible that a person could have attended a protest march before they adopted an LGB identity for themselves. When addressing measurement issues, the presence of suitable ANES items does not mean that all ANES items are perfect. For example, protest participation is assessed through a single item of joining a "protest march" in the last four years. This measure lacks information on the amount and frequency of protesting across a lifetime, and it does not contain any information on what the protest was about. Moreover, the focus on a political march does not address all of the different ways in which people can protest in collective or individual ways (sit-ins, political graffiti, and work slow-downs). Better measures would have informed us about how often people protest for LGB rights and other sorts of liberal and conservative social concerns. Similarly, measures of individual types of protesting could have altered the connection of social networks and embeddedness factors to political engagement. My measure on sexual identities broadly asks if people consider themselves heterosexual, bisexual, and gay or lesbian. While this item clearly captures a person's general sexual identity, this measure does tell us how a person's decided on this identity nor if this identity is more stable or fluid over a lifetime. Finally, at an analytical level, race and gender factors work as control variables in the regressions. This additive approach that does fully address the intracategorical complexity within sexualities (McCall 2005), but splitting the entire sample into smaller race or gender subsamples would dilute the number of LGBs dramatically since only 4.5% of the entire sample identified as LGB.

Conclusion

Even with these methodological caveats, these data provide some illuminating findings. Sexual identities did matter in protesting tendencies as gays, lesbians, and bisexuals were more likely to protest than heterosexuals (9.8% compared to 4.5%). This confirms the assumption that people of stigmatize groups are more likely to resort to protest tactics than people in more privileged statuses. However, this differentiated level of joining protests should not be considered universal since the majority of people from all sexual minorities had not joined a political march in the last four years.

A modified version of Egan's (2008) theory of political distinctiveness was tested through a series of logistic regressions (Grollman 2017; Swank and Fahs 2016). The baseline model regressed sexual identities and gender-race controls on recent participation in a protest march. In comparing the protest tendencies of heterosexuals to LGBs, I wanted to see if sexual protest actions were differentiated among different sexual identities. Next I combined sets of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors with the sexual identity measures. In doing so, I wanted to see if the LGB protest bump would become statistically insignificant when controlling for each type of variable. Finally, I ran a full model

regression to see if the protest gap was attributable to the combined effects of the selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors together.

This study tested two elements of essentialist arguments about sexual minorities. First, sexual minorities are overwhelmingly different that heterosexuals (the discreteness and uniformity arguments for sharp and consistent differences for people with different sexual identities). While people of different sexual identities seem to have slightly different protesting tendencies, widespread and universal differences were not present in the data. Sexual minorities were more likely to protest than heterosexuals, but the vast majority of people from any sexual identity never protest. Secondly, essentialism insists that sexuality differences are innate rules that transcend time and social contexts (the naturalness argument of essentialism). To see if sexuality differences in protesting were impervious to social forces, I placed the measures of sexual orientations and protesting actions within a wide range of social settings.

The separate regressions revealed that each set of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors by themselves could eliminate the significant association between sexual identities and protesting tendencies. However, the final regression revealed that the totality of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors eliminates any association between sexual identities and protest actions. Accordingly, the explanation of why sexual minorities protest more than heterosexuals is not confined to one set of factors but rather the phenomena is created by a combination of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors.

The selection argument suggests that gays and lesbians protest more than heterosexuals due to the unique social statuses of LGBs. By hypothesizing that protesters and sexual minorities often share similar demographic profiles, it was argued that sexual identities and protesting practices could be a result of the greater educational attainment, financial precariousness, and greater youthfulness of sexual minorities (Jennings and Andersen 2003; Taylor et al. 2009; Dalton, Van Sickle, and Weldon 2010). The claim that educational and age factors could cultivate greater protesting among LGBs was confirmed in this study. In the selection only regression, the previously significant link between protesting and sexual identities disappeared as the factors of educational attainment and age distributions gained in importance. While these findings reveal the salience of these selection factors, it is possible that education could have had a larger effect if I had a measure on exposure to class content that can inspire political engagement (Beaumont et al. 2006; Swank and Fahs 2016). Family income seemed disconnected to protest behaviors but this could be a result of how ANES codes family incomes with inconsistent intervals. Finally, future research should see if Egan's claim that the general liberalism on sexual minorities could be related to the sexuality beliefs of parents and siblings.

Issues of embeddedness highlight the importance of connections to LGB communities (Smith and Haider-Markel 2002; Barth, Overby, and Huffmon 2009; Swank and Fahs 2011; Swank, Woodford, and Lim 2013). With many sexual minorities being bullied, mocked, and ostracized by biological family members, many lesbians and gays turn to the LGB peers and organizations to find greater support and affirmations of their sexual identity. This increased connection to the LGB community can foster greater self-esteem, wider public disclosures of sexual identities, and access to social networks that suggest the political challenges to the status quo are necessary, important, and worthwhile. When looking into socialization into LGB communities, ANES had measures on

knowing LG individuals and membership in political groups. Both of these factors demonstrated their importance to protesting as the earlier significant link of sexual identities to protesting was lost (similar to Swank and Fahs 2016). Accordingly, self-identified LGBs are more political than heterosexuals because they are more likely to be ingrained in LGB social spaces and seek out memberships in political groups that work for progressive social change (feminist and antiracist groups). While it seems wise to believe that these measures of embeddedness are underlying forces to greater protesting for gays and lesbians, I do want to warn that these measures of embeddedness were not perfect.

Better measures could have explored different details of integration into LGB communities. Egan (2008) argued that residing in neighborhoods with a high density of sexual minorities can lead to greater LGB liberalism, while others suggest that participating in LGB community centers or social events could be even more important (Taylor et al. 2009; Swank and Fahs 2011). The reliance on social media platforms to create virtual LGB communities could also explain greater LGB activism (Becker and Copeland 2016), and measures on the content exchanged during conversations with sexual minorities could be even better. Political socialization within LGB communities probably has the biggest effect on protesting when people discuss the negative consequences of heteronormativity and reinforce the political necessity of standing up for social justice. Moreover, constant conversations with liberal and radical sexual minorities should be especially important because it increases access to information about upcoming protests.

As teenagers, gays and lesbians often realize that some of their family, peers, and religious referents have misguided and hostile stances on homosexuality. On top of these dismissive or degrading perspectives, gays and lesbians must often endure slights, micro-aggressions, and overt discrimination by strangers as well (Katz-Wise and Hyde 2012). Exposure to such experiences can undermine the justness and acceptability of conventional sexuality scripts, and lead to greater protesting against heterosexual privilege (Jennings and Andersen 2003; Hyers 2007; Friedman and Leaper 2010). The conversion model suggests that this exposure to heterosexist discrimination may also increase activism in other social causes.

To test conversion claims, this study investigated the possibility that gays and lesbians protest more than heterosexuals because they are more egalitarian, liberal, and aware of racism or sexism than heterosexuals. In preliminary analyses, I found several conversion differences among the sexual identities. When compared to heterosexuals, LGBs were more liberal, egalitarian, and aware of racial and gender biases. In turn, these differences in political identities, and awareness of social inequities, were key factors in the increased activism of LGBs (Swank and Fahs 2016). That is the conversion factors of egalitarianism and liberal sentiments undercut the coefficient for sexual identities more than the selection or embeddedness models. While conversion factors often explained greater protesting among sexual minorities, the tendency of LGBs to see more racism and sexism than heterosexuals did not seem as consequential to protesting as the general desire for more egalitarian social structures. This could mean that attentiveness to general social inequalities is a stronger source for LGB protesting than the diagnosis of widespread gender and social injustices. Conversely, this could mean that greater levels of LGB protesting are not related to gender or race mobilizations (again the dependent measure cannot determine the goals of a person's protest). Thus, I hope that future research can look at how sexual identities might influence the participation of specific new social movements around racial, class,

and gender identities. Finally, this study overlooked some key elements of the conversion argument. ANES lacked measures on the recognition of societal discrimination against sexual minorities and the frequency of being personally victimized by heterosexist discrimination. This is important since several studies find that protesting for LGB rights is closely connected to first- and second-hand exposures to homophobic biases (Hyers 2007; Swank and Fahs 2013). Moreover, the liberal identity item loosely taps the concept of a politicized identity. It is likely that measures of a person embracing a radical queer or social justice identity could have created stronger effects for the conversion factors (Rollins and Hirsch 2003; Hyers 2007).

The early regressions in this study tested the impact of several selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors by themselves. While each set of variables suppressed the association of sexual identities to protesting, the explanatory power of all of the variable types was much more impressive. With a coefficient of zero in the final regression, sexual identities showed no sign of unique or direct explanatory power to protesting after controlling for selection factors such as age and education level, plus the embeddedness and conversion factors of joining political groups, knowing LGs, having liberal perspectives, and supporting egalitarian arrangements. This suggests that correlations between sexual identities and protesting factors are probably due to the combined effects of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. This finding suggests that community connections are crucial to greater protesting among gays and lesbians, but the greater youth, intellectual achievements, and liberalism also play crucial roles in making LGBs more politically engaged than heterosexual counterparts. The centrality of all types of variables seems plausible and confirms the acumen of the political distinctiveness theories of Egan and others. However, this finding also counters some earlier quantitative studies that highlight one type of variables over the others. For example, Egan (2008) argues greater LGB activism is mostly due to selection factors of having liberal parents while others found greater that embedders or conversion factors such as attentiveness to LGB issues (Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011) or belonging to activist organizations are more important (Swank and Fahs 2016). Clearly, the relative weight of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors in explaining LGB political activism is not totally established and Cook's (1999) earlier assessment that "we do not fully understand the extent to which the self-adoption of a sexual identity is a political act, or at least has implications for a person's political understanding and political activities" still carries some truth (691). Thus, I welcome future social scientific studies that apply these political distinctiveness studies to some sort of political engagement (be it participating in overt actions like collective protests and voting or covert actions like boycotting products and hacking corporate computers). Researchers might try using longitudinal data to determine if these findings are time specific and intersectional scholars should see if these findings hold across different race, gender, and class subsections of the US population.

Note

1. Terms like heterosexism, homophobia, heteronormativity, sexual prejudice, and compulsory heterosexuality have been used for the denial, policing, and mistreatment of non-heterosexual identities. I focus the concept heterosexism because it highlights the institutional practices that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity,

relationship, or community (Herek 2004). Similar to institutionalized racism and sexism, heterosexism pervades groups and organizations and share some possible parallels with other forms of racism, antisemitism, and sexism.

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