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Explaining the Sexuality Gap in Protest Participation

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ABSTRACT



This study investigated the relationship between sexual orientations and the protest actions of adults in the United States. Drawing from General Social Survey data from 1996 to 2004, we found that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals were more than twice as likely to protest as heterosexuals. To account for this sexuality gap, we used Patrick Egan's (2008) political distinctiveness theories to identify possible underlying causes of these protesting differences. After running several regressions, we found that sexuality and protesting relationships were moderated by issues of educational attainment, marital statuses, metropolitan residencies, political partisanship, governmental grievances, and gender role expectations.

KEYWORDS

Protesting; gays and lesbians; essentialism; social networks; discrimination

Stigmatized and poor populations often have limited access to the traditional modes of power in society (e.g., occupational prestige, assumptions of competence, resources for elections, social and “soft skills”). When faced with structural political disadvantages, members of stigmatized group often rely on the social movement tactics of boycotting, protesting, and civil disobedience when trying to force concessions in recalcitrant elites.

When looking at why individuals engage in protest behaviors, there is a sizeable literature on how protest attendance is patterned along gender, class, and racial cleavages (Caren, Ghoshal, & Ribas, 2011; Roscigno & Hodson, 2004; Schussman & Soule, 2005). Because of the notable “free-rider dilemma,” where members of stigmatized populations do not always engage in actions on behalf of their own group, we cannot assume that most members of stigmatized groups join social movements (Finkel & Muller, 1998; Klandermans, 1996). Nevertheless, privileged people are even less likely to be allies in the fight against their unearned social advantages. Thus men attend far less feminist rallies than women (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004), the affluent endorse union strikes less than the working-class (Roscigno & Hodson, 2004), and heterosexuals are more reluctant to work for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) rights than sexual minorities (Andersen & Jennings, 2010; Friedman & Ayres, 2013; Smith & Haider-Markel, 2002).

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While a few studies have explored protest actions across different sexuality groups (Andersen & Jennings, 2010; Duncan, 1999; Friedman & Ayres, 2013; Gray & Desmarais, 2014; Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; Smith & Haider-Markel, 2002; Swank & Fahs, 2017a; White, 2006), these studies are rare, lack random samples, and are generally restricted to studies of a single movement. Accordingly, we already know that protesters for AIDS funding were overwhelmingly sexual minorities (Andersen & Jennings, 2010; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003) and gay Pride marches have only a small contingency of heterosexual allies (Smith & Haider-Markel, 2002). Sexual identities may also matter for social movements as self-identified gays and lesbians joined more feminist protests than heterosexuals (Andersen & Jennings, 2010; Duncan, 1999; Friedman & Ayres, 2013; Holland, Rabelo, Gustafson, Seabrook, & Cortina, 2016; White, 2006) and lesbians were more likely to attend civil rights and antiwar events than heterosexual women (Andersen & Jennings, 2010).

While there seems to be a “sexuality gap” when addressing protests that deal with sexualities—that is, a disproportional absence of heterosexuals fighting for LGB rights—the ways that a lesbian-gay-bisexual (LGB) status currently interacts with other sorts of social movements, causes, and protest actions is mostly unknown. Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke, and Andersen (2009) noted that roughly 45% of the gays and lesbians in their study participated in antiwar activism, and another 30% to 20% were involved environmental, women’s rights, and educational activism. While similar percentages of activism are probably not present among heterosexual populations, previous research has lacked the data to make such comparisons. To address this oversight, this analysis tests the claim that sexual minorities protest more than heterosexuals. With data from national random samples, this study also explores forces that shape greater LGB protesting among adults in a 10-year period (1996 to 2004).

Literature review

While there is no consensus on how to operationalize a LGB status (Umberson, Thomeer, Kroeger, Lodge, & Xu, 2015), both self-identification and behavioral measures of same-sex sexualities have predicted greater protesting among LGBs. The reasons behind this phenomenon are still uncertain. Earlier studies generally find sexuality differences in protest behaviors but offer no analysis as to why this might occur (Duncan, 1999; Friedman & Ayres, 2013; Swank & Fahs, 2013; White, 2006). To explain greater protest engagement among sexual minorities we turn to political science theories of political distinctiveness (Egan, 2008; Lewis, Rogers, & Sherrill, 2011).

To explain the liberalism of sexual minorities, Patrick Egan (2008, 2012) offered the concepts of essentialism, selection, embeddedness, and

conversion. In an extended theoretical discussion, Egan suggested that greater LGB liberalism could be due to issues of essentialism (i.e., sexual minorities are intrinsically different from heterosexuals), selection (i.e., the characteristics and childhood conditions that cause people to adopt a LGB identity also increases the likelihood of protesting), embeddedness (i.e., involvement in the LGB community leads to more protesting), and conversion (i.e., public disclosures of an LGB identity causes major changes in the political outlooks and actions of sexual minorities). The rest of the literature review will highlight how certain selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors could drive a LGB tendency to protest more than heterosexuals (Swank & Fahs, 2017a).

Essentialism, sexual identities, and protesting

Essentialist arguments claim that sexual orientations are innate and fixed identities that determine a person's outlooks, habits, and preferences (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). In elaborating the tenets of essentialism, Haslam and Levy (2006) identified seven 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 almost identical 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 exist as natural or biological entities; (6) stability: sexual orientations remain constant over a person's lifetime; and (7) exclusivity: every person belongs to only one sexual orientation at a given time.

Meeting all of these requirements is a formidable challenge. Essentialism runs counter to the notion that the self is a social product (Blumer, 1969), that behaviors are based on probabilities rather than deterministic relationships, and that human sexualities are fluid social constructs that change across cultures and a person's lifetime (Diamond, 2008). Essentialism also glosses over issues of ambivalence, uncertainty, and incongruity in a person's sexual thoughts and actions and ignores likely differences of race, class, and gender within the LGB community (Ghaziani & Baldassarri, 2011; Harris & Battle, 2013; Swank & Fahs, 2013; VanDaalen & Santos, 2017). With essentialism offering such dubious assumptions, theories of political distinctiveness highlight other types of explanations for sexuality differences in politics.

Selection, sexual identities, and protesting

Selection arguments contend that protest behaviors and sexual identities share the same demographic roots. In addressing the process of early political

socialization Egan (2008) argued that people who embrace gay and lesbian identities generally have more liberal childhoods than people with other sexual identities. This argument is based on the process of who reveals a LGB identity to others. Due to the risks of verbally disclosing LGB identities, Egan argued that “out” LGBs come from less homophobic families than people who hide any signs of same-sex sexuality behaviors or attractions. In turn, these family dynamics can mean that LGB individuals are exposed to more positive portrayals of social justice movements than heterosexuals who come from more conservative families (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003; Schussman & Soule, 2005).

Sexual identities can also be related to the demographic qualities of adults. Lewis et al. (2011) have suggested that LGBs tended to be better educated than heterosexuals (Bailey, 1999; Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2000; Egan, 2012; Herek, Norton, Allen, & Sims, 2010; Schaffner & Senic, 2006), and this greater educational attainment among LGBs could be responsible for their elevated protest levels (Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Jennings & Andersen, 2003; Lombardi, 1999; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Smith & Haider-Markel, 2002, Swank & Fahs, 2017a; Taylor et al., 2009).

The marital status of people can vary by sexual identities. Heterosexuals are more likely to be married than LGBs, and marital obligations often dampen a commitment to political protest (Schussman & Soule, 2005; Stoker & Jennings, 1995). Marriage can reduce activism for all partners, but heterosexual marriages seem to stunt the collective activism of wives much more than husbands (Caren et al., 2011; Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Corrigan-Brown, 2012). Be it issues of wives lacking control over their family financial resources (Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 1997) or the traditional expectations of wives being more passive, rule-abiding, and confined to the domestic realm (Swank & Fahs, 2017b), married women and “stay-at-home moms” are much less politically engaged than single or divorced women (Stout, Kretschmer, & Ruppner, 2017).

Questions of how income relates to the sexuality protesting gap is unclear. Some studies have found a gay penalty in wages, as gay men seem to suffer wider salary disparities with heterosexual men than lesbians do with heterosexual women (Badgett, 1995; Carpenter, 2007). To complicate the issue even more, the role of income for the protesting of sexual minorities is uncertain. One study suggested that higher-income gays and lesbians attended more demonstrations than lower-income LGBs (Taylor et al., 2009). Conversely, other studies contended that income did not predict the amount of involvement in gay and AIDS rights groups (Simon et al., 1998; Swank & Fahs, 2013). Accordingly, the role of income creating a “protest gap” for sexual minorities and heterosexuals is plausible but has not been established in the literature thus far.

Place of residency can also be connected to sexualities and protesting. Sexual minorities often leave the South and rural areas to escape the greater heterosexism in these locations (Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2002; Egan,

2012; Moore & Vanneman, 2003; Swank, Fahs, & Frost, 2013). This migration to Northern and Western cities can explain greater LGB activism because Southern and rural residence often decreases social movement engagement (Caren et al., 2011; Pacey, Oswald, & Hardesty, 2014). Accordingly, the disproportionate concentration of LGBs in larger Northeastern and Western metropolitan centers could partly explain greater protest inclinations among sexual minorities.

Embeddedness, sexual identities, and protesting

Integration into the LGB community can inspire a desire for social reform. By seeking social support from “fictive kin” and LGB peers, sexual minorities often turn to LGB friends and organizations to deal with demeaning comments they heard from family members, classmates, coworkers, and the broader heterosexual community (Frost & Meyer, 2012). Conversations with other sexual minorities can foster political activism since these conversations improve their wellbeing, sensitize people about shared LGB grievances, enhance group solidarity, and create identities of empowerment (Bailey, 1999; Bernstein, 1997; Passy, 2001). Moreover, political networks also transmit information about specific political events (e.g., an invitation to protest via email, text message, social media, or face-to-face conversations). Thus LGBs are often more likely than heterosexuals to belong to social networks that encourage the political consciousness that sees protesting as necessary, important, and worthwhile.

Early studies have confirmed the importance of social embeddedness in LGB activism. Sexual minorities and heterosexuals show greater political engagement when they routinely talk with gays and lesbians (Barth, Overby, & Huffmon, 2009; Fingerhut, 2011; Lombardi, 1999), and having LGBT “best friends” seems especially crucial for heterosexuals who join public demonstrations against homophobia (Calcagno, 2016). Gays and lesbians join more political groups than heterosexuals, and joining any sort of political group can explain the greater activism of gays and lesbians (Swank & Fahs, 2017a). Moreover, participation in specific LGB organizations and community events can cultivate LGB activism as well. While joining a gay athletic club or a gay-friendly church often leads to greater activism among sexual minorities (Duncan, 1999; Pacey et al., 2014; Smith & Haider-Markel, 2002; Swank & Fahs, 2011), several studies have found that membership in gay and lesbian community centers are the best predictors of LGB activism (Bernstein, 1997; Lombardi, 1999; Waldner, 2001). Membership in LGB community centers seem especially important because members of these centers often convey the expectation that sexual minorities should attend events such as LGB Pride marches (McClendon, 2014).

Conversion, sexual identities, and protesting

Belonging to a stigmatized population can affect a person's protest inclinations. Because LGB individuals are routinely marginalized and vilified, sexual minorities often dislike and distrust heterosexism and sexual prejudices (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2009). Being the target of heterosexist bigotry can push sexual minorities into greater activism for LGB rights (Duncan, 1999; Hyers, 2007; Jennings & Andersen, 2003; Simon et al., 1998; Taylor et al., 2009; Waldner, 2001). For example, the passage of homophobic laws can inspire LGB activism (Riggle et al., 2009). Gay men were more likely to protest governmental policies when demeaned by the medical professionals (Jennings & Andersen, 2003), and lesbians protested more when they were sexually harassed (Friedman & Ayres, 2013; Swank & Fahs, 2013).

Conversion also suggests that perceptions of discrimination against one's own group can translate into greater sympathy and solidarity with other disadvantaged groups. According to "common in-group identity" theory (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), sexual minorities are faster than heterosexuals to reject gender and race hierarchies because they know what it feels like to be the victim of discrimination. This general alignment with disenfranchised groups can in turn lead to greater involvement of sexual minorities in many progressive social movements (e.g., feminist, antiracist, disability rights, labor). As Egan (2008) wrote, 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" (pp. 14–15).

Elements of common ingroup theories have been supported by public opinion studies. When looking at political attitudes, LGBs are far more liberal than heterosexuals on affirmative action, the death penalty, domestic spending, interracial marriage, traditional gender roles, and the war in Iraq (Bailey, 1999; Egan, Edelman, & Sherrill, 2008; Holland et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2011; McDermott & Schwartz, 2013; Meier, Hull, & Ortyl, 2009; Worthen, Sharp, & Rodgers, 2012). Moreover, sexual minorities are more likely than heterosexuals to recognize the existence of racism and sexism in contemporary America (Aosved & Long, 2006; Grollman, 2017; Kleiman, Spanierman, & Smith, 2015), feel more warmth toward women and Black Americans (Aosved & Long, 2006; Grollman, 2017), and express a greater desire to do social justice activism and defend the rights of vulnerable populations (Gray & Desmarais, 2014; Longerbeam et al., 2007). Along behavioral lines, studies have also suggest that LGB liberalism is related to the voting practices of heterosexuals and sexual minorities (Schaffner & Senic, 2006), and that liberal attitudes partially explained the greater civil rights and antiwar activism of sexual minorities (Andersen & Jennings, 2010).

Research questions and hypotheses

This study addressed two research questions: (1) Do sexual minorities protest more than heterosexuals?; and, if so, (2) What factors might account for the sexuality gap in protesting? To date, we have some preliminary studies that suggest that sexual minorities protest more than heterosexuals (Andersen & Jennings, 2010; Duncan, 1999; Friedman & Ayres, 2013; Swank & Fahs, 2011; White, 2006). While these studies are informative, they mostly have been bivariate studies of small-scale convenience samples. We improve on these studies by identifying some of underlying extraneous factors for greater protesting tendencies among sexual minorities.

To explore issues of political distinctiveness, Egan's (2012) theories suggest several possible reasons for the possible sexuality gap in protesting. The essentialist argument suggests that gays and lesbians are inherently more inclined than heterosexuals to protest. Skeptical of essentialist arguments, Egan argued that greater protesting among sexual minorities can occur because (1) the same characteristics that make people more willing to adopt an LGB identity also make them more likely to protest (selection hypothesis); (2) adult socialization within the LGB community increases liberalism, Democratic Party identification, and willingness to base political behavior on the interests of LGBs (embeddedness hypothesis); and/or (3) the coming-out process may lead LGBs to question authority and the status of all outgroups, increasing their likelihood of protesting political causes that directly and indirectly relate to sexualities (conversion hypothesis).

This study investigates whether selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors can moderate the relationship between sexual identities and protest participation in a random longitudinal sample. Specifically, in this study we offer the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: LGB individuals will be more likely to protest than heterosexuals (essentialist hypothesis).

- Hypothesis 2: Selection factors should moderate the relationship between sexualities and protest proclivities. Factors of conservative childhoods, education, family income, marital status, and current place of residency will counteract the tendency of sexual minorities to protest more than heterosexuals (selection hypothesis).

- Hypothesis 3: Embeddedness factors act as a moderator in the relationship between sexualities and protest inclinations. Participation in civic organizations will lessen the penchant of sexual

minorities to protest more than heterosexuals (embeddedness hypothesis).

Hypothesis 4: Conversion factors ought to moderate the relationship between sexualities and protest tendencies. Rejection of gender hierarchies and affiliations with liberal political parties will weaken the affinity of sexual minorities to protest more than heterosexuals (conversion hypothesis).

Method

Sampling

Our data come from the General Social Survey (GSS). As a biannual survey, the GSS offers a full-probability sampling of American households since 1977. Most GSS data are collected through face-to-face interviews, although computer-assisted personal interviewing began in 2002. As a longstanding nationally representative survey, the GSS is often considered to be one of the best sources for quantitative studies of gays and lesbians (Black et al., 2000).

To expand the number of LGB participants we could study, we pooled the data from the 1996, 2002, and 2004 samples (Umberson et al., 2015). These were the only GSS modules that contained germane measures for our key political and sexuality variables (e.g., attending a protest, and endorsement of having a “same-sex sexuality”). These years also offered relevant information on demographic factors, as well as some proxy measures for LGB community involvement and liberal stances on political identities and gender hierarchies.

The three waves of GSS data netted 8,481 participants. As expected, the overwhelming majority of this sample was heterosexual (see Table 1 for details). Only 2.2% of respondents indicated some form of same-sex sexualities ($n = 184$). The sample also had a majority female and White composition (55% female and 79% White). The age pyramid was slightly skewed to older adults. The mean age of the sample was 45.6 years old with 21% of the respondent being under age 30, 41% in the ages 30–50, and 38% over the age of 51. The sample included a diverse array of incomes. When using 1977 dollars as a constant, 19% of the sample had family incomes below \$10,000 per year, 59% made \$10,001–40,000 per year, and 22% made over \$40,001 per year. Participants also had a wide range of educational statuses, with 2% having less than an elementary school degree, 5% reaching middle-school grades, 37% attending or graduating from high school, 28% having some college or a bachelor’s

diploma, and 14% having attended or finished professional or graduate programs. Respondents came from every U.S. state, with 36% of the respondents currently dwelling in a Southern state.

Measures

Protest behaviors

Boycotts, strikes, demonstrations, vigils, and civil disobedience are often classified as the sort of “protest tactics” that disrupt traditional authority structures. GSS had a single item that asked about a person taking “part in a demonstration” during the last year or the distant past. This item traces 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 year or distant past = 1; was the action never done = 0).

Sexual orientations and sexual identities

Sexual orientations of individuals can be ascertained by a person’s behaviors, desires, or identities (Umberson et al., 2015). For the years of this study, GSS offered a circuitous measure of sexual behavior (suggested by Black et al., 2000). To focus on sexual behaviors, one GSS item asked individuals if they have exclusively had sexual intercourse with women, men, or both sexes in the last year. When combining this answer with the gender of the respondent, we were able to locate males who had sex only with males (gay), females who had sex only with females (lesbians), and anybody who had sex with both males and females (bisexuals). Any person who was classified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual was coded as having a “same-sex sexuality” ($n = 184$).

Recognizing that LGB behaviors may not consistently match a person’s attractions and self-labels Egan (2008) invented a clever way to detect a LGB identity in GSS data. In stipulating that LGB identities are a combination of doing certain behaviors and the moral acceptance of LGB practices, Egan simply merged the responses of people who have had same-sex sexual contact with their response to an item on whether gay and lesbian relationships are always or sometimes wrong. When following his lead, we created a LGB identity by finding respondents who had same-sex contact in the last 12 months and indicated that there is nothing wrong with about “sexual relations of adults the same sex.” While we realize that the measures for “sexual sex sexualities” and “LGB identities” overlooks issues of sexual attractions and misses the point that sexualities are not simple binaries that remain stable over time, we do think that these operationalizations function as a close proxy for people’s sexual orientation.

Selection variables

This study has seven factors that serve as selection variables. Two variables explored childhood settings that often increase exposure to heteronormative messages (living in a Southern setting and belonging to a fundamentalist religion during adolescence). Other selection factors include the demographic statuses of educational attainment, family income, current marital status, and qualities of the current place of residency.

GSS asks several questions about contact with more conservative contexts during adolescence. With sexual prejudice being higher in Southern regions (Swank et al., 2013), we identified teenage Southerners as people who lived in a Southern state at 16 years old (U.S. Census designation of 16 states that stretch as far north as Maryland and as far west as Texas). Teenage fundamentalism was ascertained by a response to a question on being raised in self-proclaimed fundamentalist religion when the respondent was 16 years old.

Family income was measured by asking, “What was your family’s income during the current year?” After GSS converted the answers into 1977 real dollars, the responses were divided into four quartiles (1 = under \$12,000; 2 = \$12,001 to \$20,000, 3 = \$20,001 to \$40,000, and 4 = over \$40,000).

Marital status was revealed by the question: “Are you currently married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?” People who indicated currently being married were given a 1, and all other responses netted a 0 (similar to Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004).

Educational attainment was discerned as the presence/absence of a bachelor’s degree. In response to a question on the number years educated, people were considered a college graduate if they had more 16 years of education (4-year degree and higher = 1; less than a bachelor’s degree = 0).

Our measures also addressed two current spatial dimensions. Along the regional divide, we separated Southerners from non-Southerners (Herek et al., 2010). We characterized Southerners as people who currently reside in a Southern state (same U.S. Census designation as used in the teenage Southern residency). To address urban–rural continuums, we looked at the size of the community in which respondent currently lived (Moore & Vanneman, 2003). The coding is the actual population size to the nearest 1,000 for the smallest civil division listed by the U.S. census (city, town, or other incorporated area).

Embeddedness variable

Issues of embeddedness were addressed through a person volunteering for a civic group that exists for “the public’s benefit” (ever = 1, never = 0) and the participation in a political meeting (yes = 1, no = 0). These groups do not automatically focus on LGB issues, but they do try to improve social

relations, and membership in political groups can explain the sexuality gap in protesting (Swank & Fahs, 2017a).

Conversion variables

GSS had three items that attended to conversion factors (perceptions of social biases against stigmatized groups and affiliation with liberal political parties). One of our variables dealt with the acceptance of gender inequalities. Our measure of gender traditionalism focused on traditional prescriptions about family roles, caretaking, and maternalism (Swim & Cohen, 1997). In condoning a gendered division of labor for the public and private realms, a GSS item stated: “It is better for men to work and women to tend home” (*strongly agree, agree* = 1; *other* = 0).

Two other conversion variables addressed electoral politics and the relationship of political parties to themselves. One variable saw if the respondents were aligned with the more liberal of the two major U.S. political parties. To address the resonance of the Democratic Party affiliation, they indicated that they were a strong Democrat in response to a question that asked: “Do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?” (Worthen et al., 2012). Our last item dealt with perceptions of elite politics and participatory democracy; a GSS item stated: “I don’t have a say in what the government does.” In trying to find the strongest perceptions of government that is callous and indifferent to their concerns, we created a dummy variable (*strongly agree* = 1 and all others = 0).

Control variables

To address diversity within LGB and heterosexual communities we added gender and race control variables. Though there is little reason to believe that sexual identities influences the racial and gender composition of the respondents in this study, it is wise to treat these factors as controls in protest participation research (Caren et al., 2011; Corrigan-Brown, 2012). Accordingly we included information of ways the GSS coder identified a person’s sex and how people replied to the question “What race do you consider yourself?” (White = 1, other = 0).

Analytical plan

We examined the data through a combination of statistical procedures. Independent *t* tests and chi-squares looked for significant differences between sexual minorities and heterosexuals for all of the variables. We then turned to logistic regressions to assess the relationship of sexualities to protesting when controlling for the selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. Although logistic regressions lack standardized coefficients like

ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, logistic regressions became necessary because of the binary nature of our dependent variable. 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).

These regression separately tested the associations of sexual behaviors and sexual identities to protest actions when controlling for selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. Interaction terms we included because we wanted to address the possible moderation effects of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors on the ways that sexual orientations and sexual identities connect to protest proclivities (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Missing data were handled through a listwise deletion that dropped cases that lacked an observation for each variable.

Results

Bivariate findings

Our initial analysis explored the question of LGB political distinctiveness. Table 1 employed the sexual behaviors and sexual identity measures to compared heterosexuals and sexual minorities for every variable. When looking at protest behaviors, we found that few people in general attended demonstrations, but sexual minorities were at twice as likely heterosexuals to do so (11.5% compared to 5.4% for same-sex sexual contact and 19.2% compared to 5.2% for a LGB identity). This finding confirmed our first

Table 1. Comparison of same-sex sexualities and assorted variables.

Variable	Same-sex Sexuality	No same-sex Sexuality	Chi- square	LGB	Not LGB	Chi- square
Binary Factors	% Yes	% Yes		% Yes	% Yes	
Protest Participation	11.5%	5.4%	11.94***	19.2%	5.2%	18.35***
Southern Teenager	19.5%	22.9%	1.17	11.5%	22.9%	3.81*
Fundamentalist Teenager	26.6%	31.1%	1.72	17.3%	31.1%	4.61*
University Degree	30.2%	27.0%	.94	40.3%	27.0%	4.52*
Current Southern	34.8%	36.8%	.13	30.7%	36.8%	.63
Currently Married	24.4%	49.3%	45.78***	11.0%	49.3%	29.06***
Social Betterment Group	4.0%	0.5%	13.67***	1.8%	0.6%	2.56
Attend a Political Meeting	6.5%	8.4%	.92	9.6%	8.4%	.08
Unresponsive Government	15.1%	15.9%	.60	23.0%	15.8%	3.77*
Gender Traditionalism	13.7%	20.3%	5.86***	7.6%	18.7%	4.18*
Female	41.8%	55.8%	13.71***	38.4%	55.8%	5.98*
White	80.9%	79.8%	.15	84.6%	79.8%	.74
Continuous Variable	Mean	Mean	F-Score	Mean	Mean	F-score
Current Family Income	45580	53536	5.28*	46349	49772	.33
Current Community Size	329.92	407.91	7.61**	348.57	357.28	.00
Strong Democrat	.59	.48	4.29*	.64	.48	2.61

Note: Community size is in the thousands.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

hypothesis that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals would be more likely to protest than heterosexuals ($\chi^2 = 18.35$ and 11.94 , $p < .001$). However, greater levels of protesting do not mean that sexual minorities and heterosexuals are essentially different on this point because over 80% of heterosexuals and sexual minorities never reported any sort of protesting.

Several of the independent variables displayed significant differences along sexual orientations. Regardless of how sexualities were measured, sexual minorities were significantly less married and poorer than heterosexuals. Conversely, sexual minorities joined more social betterment groups, preferred liberal gender roles, and leaned more Democratic than their heterosexual counterparts. Nevertheless, differences between LGBs and heterosexuals were often larger for the sexual identity than the sexual behavior measures. As Egan expected, people with LGB identities often came from more liberal childhoods than heterosexuals (as indicated by the teenage place of residency and a familial connection to a fundamentalist religion). Moreover, the embracing of a LGB identity seems especially important to educational attainment and matters of gender expectations. In effect, Egan's sexual identity measure revealed that people who were LGB identified were more educated and embraced liberal gender roles more than people who simply had sex with a same-sex partner.

Regression findings

We ran six binary logistic regressions that estimated the relationship of same-sex sexualities to protesting (three for sexual behaviors and three for sexual identities). Our text will highlight if the sexuality measures remained statistically significant in these multivariate contexts. In making such comparisons, we want to warn that the coefficients are unstandardized estimates, so larger b values do not always reflect a larger magnitude of effect (Menard, 2011).

Table 2 tests whether the selection factors moderated the association between sexualities and protest actions. When controlling for Southern and religious fundamentalist youths, as well as current incomes, marital statuses, and places of residencies, both measures of sexualities were no longer independently associated with protesting. Conversely significant main effects were found for several selection factors. Protesting behaviors were associated with a person's current marital status, their educational attainment, and if they lived in the South during their teenage or adult years. This suggests that sexual minorities protest more than heterosexuals because they excel more in college, decide to forgo marital arrangements with partners, and are less likely to live in regions that are socially conservative (as an adolescent or adult). Moreover, these patterns seem to hold regardless of how a researcher operationalizes LGB sexualities.

Table 2. Binary logistic regressions of sexualities and selection factors on protest behaviors.

	Same-Sex Sexuality		LGB Identity	
	B	SE	B	SE
Same-Sex Sexuality (SSS)	.93	.93		
LGB Identity			1.03	.97
Southern Teenager	-.31*	1.31	-.34*	.13
Fundamentalist Teenager	.03	.11	.03	.11
University Degree	.85***	.10	.86***	.10
Current Southern	-.23*	.11	-.24*	.10
Currently Married	-.26*	.10	-.30**	.10
Current Family Income	.08	.04	.09	.04
Current Community Size	.00	.00	.00	.00
SSS × Southern Teenager	-.78	1.09		
SSS × Fundamentalist Teenager	-.54	.72		
SSS × University Degree	.27	.57		
SSS × Current Southern	.04	.61		
SSS × Currently Married	-19.21	6155.79		
SSS × Current Family Income	.00	.00		
SSS × Current Community Size	.00	.00		
LGB × Southern Teenager			-18.48	14827.7
LGB × Fundamentalist Teen			-1.37	1.40
LGB × University Degree			1.00	1.00
LGB × Current Southern			.93	1.05
LGB × Currently Married			-19.18	15843.2
LGB × Current Family Income			.00	.00
LGB × Current Community Size			.00	.00
Female	-.08	.05	-.08	.05
White	-.24*	.12	-.23*	.12
χ^2		150.25***		149.60***
Pseudo R^2		.05		.05
<i>N</i>		8481		8481

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3 scrutinizes the presence of moderating effects for the embeddedness factors. Involvement in social betterment groups and political meetings did not dramatically alter the sexuality gap in protesting. Even when attending to embeddedness factors, LGBs continued to protest more than heterosexuals, and both measures of sexualities retained a significant unique link with protesting. While participation in non-LGB political groups barely suppressed the connections of sexualities to protesting, the main effects for joining any sort of social betterment or political groups were often significant in predicting protest tendencies.

Table 4 merged the conversion, sexuality, and protesting variables into logistic equations. As a group, the conversion factors canceled out the significant direct link of sexual identities to protest participation. Moreover, conversion factors displayed larger coefficients as rejecting traditional gender expectations, aligning with the Democratic Party, and seeing the government as undemocratic offered significant and unique associations with protest activities. Of the specific interaction terms, the same-sex sexuality × strong democratic allegiances were also significant. This regression suggests that sexuality differences in protesting are related to the ways that sexualities inform the perceived legitimacy of the status

Table 3. Binary logistic regressions of sexualities and embeddedness factors on protest behaviors.

	Same-Sex Sexuality		LGB identity	
	B	SE	B	SE
Same-Sex Sexuality (SSS)	1.10***	.16		
LGB Identity			3.85***	.73
Social Betterment Group	-7.88	284.09	1.17***	.30
Attend Political Meetings	2.48***	.13	2.17***	.10
SSS × Social Betterment Group	9.02	284.09		
SSS × Political Meetings	-1.33	.73		
LGB × Social Betterment Group			18.29	283.72
LGB × Political Meetings			12.07	40.19
Female	-.03	.13	-.04	.17
White	-.11	.18	-.13	.20
χ^2	304.71***		476.31***	
Pseudo R^2	.17		.15	
<i>N</i>	8481		8481	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Binary logistic regressions of sexualities and conversion factors on protest behaviors.

	Same-Sex Sexuality		LGB Identity	
	B	SE	B	SE
Same-Sex Sexuality (SSS)	.31	.08		
LGB Identity			.36	.59
Strong Democrat	.31***	.06	.34***	.09
Undemocratic Government	1.79***	.10	1.79***	.10
Gender Traditionalism	-.35***	.09	-.36***	.09
SSS × Strong Democrat	.64*	.30		
SSS × Unresponsive Government	.26	.55		
SSS × Gender Traditionalism	-.17	.46		
LGB × Strong Democrat			.52	.82
LGB × Unresponsive Government			-2.01	1.62
LGB × Gender Traditionalism			1.63	.87
Female	-.23*	.09	-.23	.09
White	-.07	.12	-.06	.13
χ^2	376.07***		379.84***	
Pseudo R^2	.12		.12	
<i>N</i>				

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p < .001$.

quo. Gays and lesbians protested more than heterosexuals because they challenged the prevailing narratives about the openness of the American political system and the righteousness of traditional gender scripts.

Discussion

Disenfranchised groups sometimes use protests to challenge unjust authority relationships. Early empirical work suggests that sexual minorities are more likely to join LGB, peace, and feminist political struggles than heterosexuals (Andersen & Jennings, 2010; Duncan, 1999; Friedman & Ayres, 2013; White,

2006), but the role of sexuality in protesting for other social causes is virtually unknown. To address this oversight, this study tested the “political distinctiveness” assertion that gays and lesbians are far more likely than heterosexuals to join any type of political demonstration.

This study is unique and rigorous in many ways. First, it contrasts the protest actions of people with different sexualities. Previous protest studies have limited their analysis mostly to protest actions within heterosexual or gay/lesbian communities (Caren et al., 2011; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Swank & Fahs, 2013; Waldner, 2001). Second, the General Social Survey offers a large random sample of adults from all ages. This enhances the representativeness of earlier studies that relied on convenience samples of students from a single college (Friedman & Ayres, 2013) or a random sample of teenagers (Swank & Fahs, 2017a). The larger sample size offers big enough cell sizes to run a wide-range statistical regressions. Third, the presence of a longitudinal panel design captures these protest dynamics across a longer time period than common cross-sectional designs (Taylor et al., 2009). Lastly, GSS offers access to many suitable measures. This breadth of measures let us continue our efforts to be the first researchers to systematically explore how selection, embeddedness, and conversion variables determine the protest actions of people with different sexualities (Swank & Fahs, 2017a).

Our findings verified the hunch that sexual identities are relevant to protest actions (Andersen & Jennings, 2010; Friedman & Ayres, 2013; Swank & Fahs, 2017a; White, 2006). While protesting is rare for people of any sexuality, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals were at least twice as likely to attend a protest as heterosexuals. Moreover, this study confirms Egan’s (2008) assertion that measures of sexual identities will have a greater bearing on political engagement than measures of sexual behaviors.

After confirming this sexuality gap in protesting, we tried to see if this difference was the byproduct of other underlying variables. To determine if the observed sexuality–protest link was result of hidden third factors, we used Egan’s (2012) explanations of political distinctiveness. By naming some possible extraneous factors to the sexuality protesting gap, Egan suggested that researchers should be attuned to different selection, embeddedness, and conversion forces. To test Egan’s predictions, we ran a series of binary logistic regressions that estimated the moderating effects of selection, immersion, and conversion factors.

Our study began with an analysis of essentialist arguments about sexualities. Essentialists assume that heterosexuals and sexual minorities are inherently different. Our findings suggest that sexual minorities protest more than heterosexuals but that political indifference is the norm for all sexualities (few people of any sexuality attend protests of any kind). Essentialists also insist that sexuality differences are universal laws that transcend every sort social place and context. To see if sexuality differences were immune to social

causes, we placed our measures of sexual orientations and protesting actions within a wide range of social milieus.

Selection theories insist that the connections between protesting and sexualities are due to the unique demographic qualities of heterosexuals (Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Egan, 2012; Jennings & Andersen, 2003; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003) or the ways that the coming out-process is swayed by the presence of liberal significant others during youth (Egan, 2008). To test these assertions, we saw if the boost in LGB protest was a result of coming from less religiously conservative families or being more educated, single, richer, and urban adults. After running logistic regressions with these factors, we found that our selection factors erased the significant connections of sexualities to protesting (Swank & Fahs, 2017a). This suggests that sexuality differences in protesting is partially because heterosexuals are less educated, quicker to legally marry, and have resided longer in Southern communities than LGBs.

Immersion theories explore the role of social networks in the increased activism of sexual minorities (Bailey, 1999; Bernstein, 1997). Heterosexuals can safely assume that people in their immediate surroundings will accept and condone their sexual orientation. This privilege is not available to LGBs. At some time family members, classmates, coworkers, and others have already shunned or criticized their sexuality, and sexual minorities often have to anticipate the next form of heterosexism that is likely awaiting them. While trying to avoid hostile environments, sexual minorities often seek out LGB communities that accept and normalize their stigmatized identity. Access to these groups can have political ramifications, because these groups often discredit heterosexist assumptions and insist that LGB liberation depends on the political struggles with heterosexism. To operationalize immersion concepts, we explored the relationships of sexualities to protesting when holding civic group memberships constant. Membership in social betterment groups and participation in any sort of political meetings did not dramatically diminish the sexuality protest nexus. While this finding suggests that being active in any sort of political advocacy group does not automatically explain the greater activism of LGBs, it does not address the possibility that greater immersion in the LGB community is responsible for the sexuality gap in protesting.

Conversion theories highlight the links between political sentiments and being the target of heterosexist discrimination. In having a stigmatized social status, sexual minorities are often more critical of traditional sexuality structures than heterosexuals (Duncan, 1999; Schaffner & Senic, 2006; White, 2006). According to “common in-group” theories, this exposure to discrimination can also enhance solidarity with other marginalized groups. We examined the conversion hypothesis by estimating the impact of being suspicious of traditional gender norms, liking the Democratic political party, and thinking that the government was unresponsiveness to people

like themselves. When accounting for these impressions, the direct link between sexualities and protest was not significant. Thus sexual minorities are motivated to join more protests than heterosexuals because they notice more problems in the prevailing sexual, gender, and political order. This confirms earlier research that argues protest “is often seen as a tool for liberals and progressives who want to challenge the political establishment and who feel the need to go beyond conventional politics to have their views heard” (Dalton, 2002, p. 67).

Ultimately, our results suggest that selection and conversion factors are the best at explaining the existence of the sexuality gap in protesting (similar to Egan, 2008). For the selection factors, LGBs protested more than heterosexuals because they had higher educations, lived more in the South and metropolitan areas, and married less frequently than heterosexuals. Likewise, the elevated level of protesting among LGBs is also because sexual minorities are more prone to view traditional gender roles and governmental practices as corrupt, harmful, and unjust. Finally, the tendency of LGBs to join more political groups did not seem as crucial to the sexuality gap in protesting.

While we are confident in the accuracy of these results, nevertheless there are certain research decisions that can impact the external validity of these findings. Studies that link attitudes to protesting can always have problems with temporal ordering since the participation in protests can proceed people’s understandings of the world (Fisher & McInerney, 2012; Opp & Kittel, 2009). Trend studies such as the GSS that select new respondents every 2 years also can suffer from different selection biases for a given year, and the changing historical conditions of 1996 to 2004 could have altered the relationships between the variables in this study. For example, the role of marital status in explaining greater protesting among LGBs could be shrinking due to the increased number of same-sex marriages since these data were collected in 2004 (from 2000 to 2014, states such as Vermont, New York, and Washington began passing laws that recognized same-sex marriage, and the United State Supreme Court ruled that state bans on same-sex marriages were unconstitutional in 2015).¹

As we performed a secondary data analysis, we had to find suitable preexisting measures that fit our variables. The dependence on the GSS left us with too many variables with single item measures and a less than ideal way to identify sexual minorities. Even with Egan’s clever technique to find LGB identities, we would prefer a more explicit question on a person’s self-identified sexual labels. With our two sexuality measures a celibate person who has same-sex attractions would not be classified as LGB. Moreover, other problems with our definitions of sexuality also occurred in this study. The definition of what constitutes “having sex” is not consistent across populations in the United States (Averett, Moore, & Price, 2014), and our

dichotomous code forces people into a simplistic sexual binary while ignoring the sexual fluidity that many people display (Diamond, 2008). Finally, the general clustering of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals into a single category overlooks the possibility that members of these groups might protest at different levels (Herek et al., 2010), though we are eager to explore this in future studies when we have a large enough sample of sexual minorities.

Our measure for protest behaviors could also be improved on. The protest item was unable to distinguish between people who have been to one or hundreds of protests. Future studies obviously should look at how sexual identities predict the actions of more intermittent or persistent protesters. Because protest events come in many forms, future studies should include measures that go beyond attending a demonstration to include participation in kiss-ins, civil disobedience, political graffiti, sabotage, or even political violence. Moreover, it would be safe to assume that people who engage in these more risky and confrontational tactics may be more likely to have stronger ties to small radical groups of LGBT activists. The absence of the goals behind the protests is also problematic. It seems wise to assume that the protest gap between heterosexuals and sexual minorities would be the largest for the collective challenges to heterosexism (Andersen & Jennings, 2010). However, the sexuality protest gap could be smaller or even reversed for other liberal or conservative causes (e.g., police brutality, prolife, prayer in the schools). Future research should see how the sexuality protesting gap operates in a wide range of liberal and radical causes.

In many cases, we were unable to find perfect measures for every dimension of the selection, embeddedness, and conversion constructs. Egan (2012) suggested the selection characteristics of being raised by liberal parents or having fewer siblings lead to greater liberalism among sexual minorities. The GSS lacks information on these factors, so we do not know if these family factors neutralize the relationships of sexualities to protesting. Moreover, the role of marriage in explaining the sexuality protest gap could have changed in more recent samples because of the passage of national same-sex marriage laws since these data were gathered. This study also probably underestimates the importance of embeddedness factors. By focusing on groups that exist for “the public’s benefit,” we do not know either the qualities of group members nor the goals and activities of the group. Due to issues of homophilia, we can assume a high degree of sexual homogeneity in groups (Galupo & Gonzalez, 2013), but we have to admit that speaking frequently with LGB friends or joining LGB support groups probably explains the role of immersion factors in LGB protest tendencies more than joining civic betterment groups (Swank & Fahs, 2017a).

Other aspects of embeddedness could have produced different results. Information on contextual factors such as living in LGB neighborhoods, visiting LGB establishments, or being asked to join a protest could have

enhanced the role of immersion factors (Barth et al., 2009; Egan, 2008; Lombardi, 1999; Waldner, 2001). Affect measures are also missing as the GSS overlooks people's emotional connections to sexual minorities, perceptions of collective power among sexual minorities, and how comfortable people are in disclosing their sexual identities (Paceley et al., 2014; Rollins & Hirsch, 2003; Swank & Fahs, 2013; Waldner, 2001).

Our data also fails to cover some crucial dimensions of the conversion thesis. The GSS had measures on party affiliations and the rejection of gender hierarchies. While critiques of inequalities are often stronger among the disenfranchised and marginalized, we would have liked to see how being personally exposed to hostile and chilly social environments connects to these protesting tendencies. Future research should look at how personal encounters with microaggressions, hate crimes, employment biases, and silencing techniques can influence ingroup attributions and the politicization of sexual identities (Hyers, 2007; Jennings & Andersen, 2003; Swank & Fahs, 2013; Taylor et al., 2009; Tilcsik, 2011). We were also unable to determine if being a sexual minority increased a general commitment to social justice. That is, it would be wise to see if sexual minorities are more likely than heterosexuals to anchor their self-concepts in the values of reciprocity, fairness, and the need to defend the rights of subordinated groups (Hyers, 2007; Swank & Fahs, 2013). Finally, Egan's theory of political distinctiveness can be expanded a bit. Changing political opportunity structures, such as elections about same-sex marriages, can increase greater activism among people with different sexualities (McVeigh & Diaz, 2009; Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009).

Even with these methodological caveats, this work offers unique and important insights. Lesbians, gays, and bisexuals have a greater tendency to attend protests than heterosexuals regardless of how one measures a sexual minority status (be it behaviorally or through a self-identified status). Thus Egan's (2008) emphasis on using identification measures for LGB political distinctiveness seems to be an overstatement. On the other hand, Egan's emphasis that selection and conversion factors drive LGB politics mostly was confirmed in this study. The selection factors of educational attainment, being married, and Southern residencies erased the link of sexual identities to protesting, as did the conversion factors of LGBs generally aligning with the Democratic Party, seeing an undemocratic political structure, and embracing gender liberalism.

Ultimately, this study opens up a variety of new areas for future researchers interested in the connections between sexualities, activism, and social identities, and it provides a new framework for thinking about why people choose to fight for social change. Moreover, theories that explain protest actions such as political distinctiveness seem especially important in the era of flourishing protests against a disastrous Trump presidency—a presidency that has seen

massive protests which are in part driven by a contingency of activists who are driven by increased homophobia in the Trump era (Fisher, Dow, & Ray, 2017).

Note

1. To address issues of heteroscedasticity, we ran some exploratory regressions with year as a dummy variable. Treating time as a control largely removes issues of autocorrelations from the regression estimates (Stimson, 1985), but our tables do not include these regressions since time controls failed to substantively alter the findings presented in this study.

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