

# College Students, Sexualities Identities, and Participation in Political Marches

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**Abstract** Student protest is often an engine of social change for sexual minorities and other oppressed groups. Through an analysis of college students in the Add Health survey ( $n=2,534$ ), we found that sexual minorities attend more political marches than heterosexuals. To understand why this sexuality difference occurs, we performed a logistic regression analysis to decipher the importance of four explanations: essentialism, selection, embeddedness, and conversion. We discovered that participation in political groups is the best explanation of the sexuality gap in activism, but racial attitudes were also important. Type of college major was generally connected to student activism, but educational attainment and disciplinary curriculums did not explain the increased activism of sexual minorities.

**Keywords** College students · Sexual identity · Activism · Protest · Social movements

Every society has conformists and dissidents, and these individuals and groups help to form the basis of social life. While systems of education generally condone and legitimize the prevailing social order, some aspects of higher education can politicize segments of the college student population (Van Dyke 1998). With some universities embracing the missions of political engagement among students, universities have the

opportunity to serve as conduits of political activism, social justice, and social engagement (Astin 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Van Dyke 1998). In addressing the political engagement of college students, this study explores the ways that sexual identities, collegiate curriculums, and group memberships sway the participation in political rallies and marches among young adults.

Although most college students never join political campaigns and social movements, in many ways the collegiate experience inspires activism. The reasons for these increases in student political engagement during their time in college are complicated and multifaceted. College is often a time of learning, values exploration, and identity transformations for students (Astin 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Younger students often gain independence from their parents and meet people from different social backgrounds. As students progress through college, many students increase their commitment to social justice activism (Case et al. 2014). Moreover, classes within the Humanities and Social Sciences curricula often achieve their goals of increased political engagement among their students (Beaumont et al. 2006; Bowman 2011; Seider et al. 2012; Winston 2015)

Although collegiate experiences can politicize college students, the political experiences of college students are not uniform and universal. Students from less powerful and stigmatized groups are often more receptive to classes that critically analyze conventional rules, norms, and laws (Johnson and Lollar 2002; Sax and Arms 2008). Accordingly, courses on inequalities and social hierarchies generally boost the political activism of women and African-American students more than their male and white classmates (Longerbeam et al. 2007a; Swank et al. 2013a; Worthington et al. 2005).

The political activism of students ranges from the most conventional (e.g., voting) to the highly unconventional and risky (e.g., civil disobedience). While many students often

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engage in the conventional and institutionalized actions of voting or making political donations during election seasons, they sometimes turn to the more contentions and radical forms of collective protests when they are confronting institutionalized forms of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity (Astin 1993; Broadhurst and Martin 2014). Accordingly, college students often provide a sizable segment of the largest social movements of the last century (i.e., women's liberation, civil rights movement, and LGBT rights).

Protest, or the collective use of unconventional political methods to entice social change, is perhaps the fundamental feature that distinguishes social movements from routine political campaigns (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). Protest can encompass a wide variety of unconventional group actions, ranging from the less militant approaches of vigils, marches, and rallies to the more confrontational tactics of strikes, sit-ins, and violent acts that impose material and economic damage. While there is often much debate about the best tactic to employ at a given historical moment, several studies suggest that use of more radical and confrontational tactics by LGBT activists are an important factor in producing better social policies for sexual minorities (Kane 2007; King et al. 2007).

Even though some empirical studies have explored the role of sexual identities in protest participation (Andersen and Jennings 2010; Duncan 1999; Friedman and Ayres 2013; Swank and Fahs 2011; White 2006), these studies have generally ignored college students. From these community studies, we already know that protesters for AIDS funding were overwhelmingly sexual minorities (Andersen and Jennings 2010; Rollins and Hirsch 2003) and gays and lesbians were more likely to attend feminist protests than heterosexuals (Andersen and Jennings 2010; Duncan 1999; Friedman and Ayres 2013; White 2006).

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 is mostly unknown. That is, we do not know if sexual identities relate to the tendencies to join protests on behalf of racism, environmental degradation, economic polarization, disability rights, and other liberal causes. To address this oversight, this study asked two questions: (1) Do sexual minorities in college protest more than heterosexuals?; and, if so, (2) What factors might account for the sexuality gap in protesting?

## Literature Review

Several studies suggest that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (LGB) probably protest more than heterosexuals (Andersen and Jennings 2010; Duncan 1999; Harris and Battle 2013; Swank and Fahs 2011; White 2006). Though this difference

is noted in the general US populace, only a handful of quantitative studies have explored this difference among college students (Friedman and Leaper 2010; Friedman and Ayres 2013; Longerbeam et al. 2007a). While this sexuality research gap is often noticed, researchers have not yet explained the reasons for this difference. To find the source of this protest gap we turn to political science theories of political distinctiveness (Egan 2008; Lewis et al. 2011).

To explain the liberalism of sexual minorities, Patrick Egan (2008) offers the concepts of essentialism, selection, embeddedness, and conversion. Egan suggests that greater LGB liberalism could be due to issues of essentialism (i.e., that there is something intrinsically unique for people of different sexualities), selection (i.e., the characteristics that cause people to adopt an LGB identity also increase their likelihood of protesting), embeddedness (i.e., involvement in the LGB community leads to more protests), and conversion (i.e., the process of disclosing an LGB identity causes major changes in political outlooks and actions). By exploring these alternative explanations of LGB liberalism, we discuss the possible relevance of specific selection, embeddedness, and conversion variables, as well as integrating some empirical findings that tangentially test the salience of such factors.

## Essentialism and Protesting

Essentialism arguments claim that sexual orientations are innate and fixed entities that determine a person's outlooks, habits, and preferences (DeLamater and Hyde 1998). To address the tenets 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 with the same sexual identities are 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 exist 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 distinguishes people of different sexual orientations; and 8) Exclusivity: Every belongs to only sexual orientation at a given time.

Meeting these requirements is a formidable challenge that is rarely seen in the empirical world. Further, essentialism ignores a massive body of social scientific theories and research; key findings on the fluidity of sexual identities or the difficulty in defining sexual orientation and assumptions about the probabilistic side of human behavior and the role of socialization in self-development (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004; Bandura 1977; Diamond 2008). With the dubious nature of essentialist thinking, Egan also

offers more nuanced explanations for sexuality differences than essentialism.

### Selection and Protesting

Selection arguments see some shared demographic causes for sexual identities and protest behaviors. From this perspective, one can argue that sexual minorities protest more often than heterosexuals because they are younger or less likely to be married than heterosexuals. Although these factors could be pertinent to studies of the general population, questions of exposure to different educational experiences seem most relevant to a sample of students (i.e., age and marital difference are much smaller for college students than the entire US population).

Educational attainment can predict of political activism of heterosexuals and sexual minorities (Jennings and Andersen 2003; Lombardi 1999; Rollins and Hirsch 2003; Swank and Fahs 2011; Taylor et al. 2009). Several studies suggest that LGBs are better educated than heterosexuals (Jepsen and Jepsen 2009; Rothblum et al. 2005), while other studies suggest that the LGB education bonus only applies to men (Black et al. 2000; Fine 2015; Mollborn and Everett 2015). In turn, the greater educational attainment of sexual minorities can be partially responsible for the sexuality gap in protesting.

The filtering into certain academic majors and college classes can also contribute to less protest actions of heterosexuals (Astin 1993; Broadhurst and Martin 2014). In choosing college majors and classes, heterosexual students might try to avoid content and assignments that problematize heterosexual privilege. This can result in a general underexposure of the best classes and service learning opportunities that generate greater activism among college students (Beaumont et al. 2006; Bowman 2011; Case et al. 2014; Seider et al. 2012; Stake 2007). Conversely LGB students often seek out classes in which the professor and discipline have a reputation for being a “safe space” for sexual minorities (Evans 2000; Gortmaker and Brown 2006). LGBs also seem to break the gender segregation traditions of college majors, as gay men more often go into “pink collar” majors like the arts and education than heterosexual men, and lesbian women enter male-dominated majors like engineering and biology more often than heterosexual women (Black et al. 2007; Longerbeam et al. 2007b).

### Embeddedness and Protesting

Organizations, groups, and families often try to create “gay free” social spaces (Galupo and Gonzalez 2013; Ueno et al. 2012). To erase the existence of LGB sensibilities, people who are not completely heterosexual are often told to conceal stigmatized identities or risk the chance of being mocked, belittled, or expelled. The fear of imminent doom from

accidentally disclosing a spoiled identity leads many LGB college students into join more student groups than their heterosexual counterparts (Carpenter 2009; Longerbeam et al. 2007a; Swank et al. 2013a). Memberships in LGB affirmative groups can counteract feelings of rejection and ostracism from family members, classmates, coworkers, and the broader heterosexual community (Frost and Meyer 2012). Conversations with other sexual minorities can also deconstruct spoiled identities, enhance resiliency, and reoriented their mindsets around shared LGB grievances (Bernstein 1997; Poteat et al. 2013).

Participation in student political groups also generally increases protest participation (Broadhurst and Martin 2014; Johnson 2014) but involvement in LGB organizations may have greater consequences for heterosexuals (Goldstein and Davis 2010) and sexual minorities (Swank and Fahs 2011) than for other groups. Though joining a gay athletic club or a gay-friendly church often leads to greater activism among sexual minorities (Duncan 1999; Pacey et al. 2014), several studies indicate that membership in gay and lesbian community centers are the best predictors of LGB activism (Lombardi 1999; Waldner 2001). Membership in LGB community centers seem especially important because other members convey the expectation that sexual minorities should attend events like LGB pride marches (McClendon 2014).

### Conversion and Protesting

Belonging to a stigmatized population can impact a person’s protest inclinations. While LGBs can internalize heteronormative sentiments, LGBs are better at recognizing the hidden and unearned advantages that heterosexuals have over LGBs (Montgomery and Stewart 2012; Swank et al. 2013; Worthington et al. 2005). The general realization that people are targets of heterosexist bigotry can push sexual minorities into greater activism for LGB rights (Duncan 1999; Hyers 2007; Jennings and Andersen 2003; Simon et al. 1998; Taylor et al. 2009; Waldner 2001). In connecting activism to perceptions of social biases and injustices, gay and lesbian college students were more likely to vote for same-sex marriages because they had observed more heterosexist discrimination than their heterosexual counterparts (Swank et al. 2013a). Gay men were more likely to protest governmental policies when they endured homophobic laws and were demeaned by medical professionals (Jennings and Andersen 2003), while lesbians protested more when they were sexually harassed (Friedman and Ayres 2013; Swank and Fahs 2013).

Conversion also suggests that the perception of discrimination against one’s own group can translate into activism for other disadvantaged groups (Friedman and Leaper 2010). According to “common in-group identity” theory (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000), belonging to devalued groups sometimes increases a tendency to feel empathy toward other devalued social groups. This empathy, combined with a sense of shared

oppressions, can in turn lead to greater involvement in many progressive social movements (e.g., feminist, antiracist, disability rights, and 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” (p. 14–15).

Elements of common in-group theories have been supported in quantitative studies. Gays and lesbians self-identify as liberals more than heterosexuals (Swank et al. 2013b) and LGBs are far more liberal than heterosexuals on the death penalty, legalization of marijuana, defense and domestic spending, affirmative action, and the war in Iraq (Bailey 1999; Egan et al. 2008; Lewis et al. 2011; Worthen et al. 2012). Some works also contend that white LGBs have fewer racial biases (Beran et al. 1992; Kleiman et al. 2015) and are more open to interracial dating (Meier et al. 2009) than white heterosexuals. However, other studies suggest that a sexual minority status does not modify the general racial practices of white Americans (Lundquist and Lin 2015; Tsunokai et al. 2009).

The general liberalism of sexual minorities is probably connected to political engagement. Gay and lesbian students generally find politics more important (Carpenter 2009) than heterosexuals, and LGBs feel compelled to “act for the rights of others” (Longerbeam et al. 2007a), more than their heterosexual counterparts. The relative liberalism of LGBs can also influence how people vote (Schaffner and Senic 2006; Swank et al. 2013b) and people’s greater involvement in the civil rights and antiwar activism of sexual minorities (Andersen and Jennings 2010). And while heterosexuals are less likely to be self-defined liberals, the heterosexuals who embrace liberalism are more likely to join LGBT social movements than conservative heterosexuals (Goldstein and Davis 2010; Jennings and Andersen 2003).

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study addressed two research questions: (1) Do sexual minorities in college 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 and Jennings 2010; Duncan 1999; Friedman and Ayres 2013; Swank and Fahs 2011; White 2006). Despite informative qualities of these studies, they have mostly been bivariate studies of small-scale convenience samples. We improve upon these studies by exploring sexual differences in protesting in a large random sample of college students. Moreover, we offer new analytical insights as we identify some of underlying causes of greater protesting tendencies among sexual minorities.

To explore issues of political distinctiveness, theories of Egan (2008) suggest several possible reasons for the possible

sexuality gap in protesting. The essentialist argument suggests that gays and lesbians are inherently more inclined that heterosexuals to protest. Skeptical of essentialist arguments, Egan argues 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 access the desire and ability to protest for LGB interests (embeddedness hypothesis); and/or (3) the coming-out process for LGBs discredits the legitimacy of class, race, and gender hierarchies (conversion hypothesis).

Specifically, in this study, we offer the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Gay and lesbian students will be more likely to protest than heterosexuals.

Hypothesis 2: Educational attainment and exposure to liberal college classes will mediate the tendency of sexual minorities to protest more than heterosexuals (selection hypothesis).

Hypothesis 3: Participation in political and civic organizations will account for the inclination of sexual minorities to protest more than heterosexuals (embeddedness hypothesis).

Hypothesis 4: Rejection of all social hierarchies will explain the proclivity of sexual minorities to protest more than heterosexuals (conversion hypothesis).

## Method

### Sampling

Our data comes from the third wave of the biannual National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health, Wave III in 2001). Add Health began in 1995 with a school-based sample of over 90,000 youths in grades 7 through 12 (a sample of 80 high schools and one of their feeder schools). From this in-school sample, a core sample of over 12,000 were randomly chosen to complete an interview in their homes. Four ethnic groups were oversampled, including Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Chinese adolescents, as well as Black adolescents from well-educated families. Sensitive information, including data on same-sex romantic attraction, were collected through the use of audio computer-aided self-interview (Audio-CASI). Using a laptop computer to record their answers, respondents listened to questions through earphones. Methodological studies suggest the CASI interviews have less issues of social desirability and problems with recall than conventional face-to-face interviews (McCallum and Peterson 2012).



The first wave of Add Health focused on the sexual behaviors and health risks of US adolescents. The later waves, which came in biannual intervals, continued to add new items to the survey. Six years into the study, Wave III asked several questions on sexual identities and civic engagement.

In being a panel study, waves II and waves III were drawn from the pool of participants of wave I (wave III data collected from August 2001 to April 2002). After trying to contact every participant in the first wave, the research team was able to attain 15,178 completed samples (compared to a little over 90,000 in Wave I). By 2001, the participants were young adults (age 18–26) and roughly 16 % of the 15,178 sampled had completed the civic engagement items and attended or completed some sort of college or university ( $n=2,538$ ). Our study drew from this subsample of college educated participants.

## Measures

**Protest Behaviors** Protests are collective events that demand a change in a person, group, or thing that is responsible for a social problem or injustice (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004). Protest forms can include the more sedate versions of rallies, marches, or vigils or the more confrontational actions of boycotts, strikes, blockades, or bombings. Protest events often contain a combination of these different political manifestations, but Add Health had a single item that asked if the participant had “attended a political rally or march” during the last year. This item traces participation in a rally or march 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=1, action not done in that time frame=0).

**LGB Identity** Sexual orientations can be defined by a person’s behaviors, desires, or identities. Add Health focused on people’s sexual identities as it asked participants to “choose the description that best fits how you think about yourself.” By creating a binary code of the responses, people who called themselves “100 % heterosexual” were deemed a heterosexual and a self-identified LGB status was applied to anybody who suggested they were “somewhat attracted to people of the opposite sex, bisexual, mostly homosexual, and 100 % homosexual” (1=LGB, 0=heterosexual).

**Selection Variables** Three educational factors operate as selection variables: educational attainment, social science major, and humanities major. Educational attainment was discerned through the person’s current class standing in college (1=freshman, 2=sophomore, 3=junior, 4=senior, 5=undergraduate degree or more).

College Majors were ascertained through the open-ended question: “What was your college major?” Different

disciplinary curricula were captured by the broad categories of social science and humanity majors. People who indicated that they were majoring in Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology were grouped into the Social Sciences (social science=1, other=0) and American Studies, Creative Writing, English/Literature, Foreign Language, History, Philosophy, and Women’s Studies were grouped into the Humanities (humanities=1, other=0). This classification scheme copies the literature that suggests that these types of majors inspire less homophobia and more activism than degrees in business, the natural sciences, and education (Broadhurst and Martin 2014; Goldstein and Davis 2010).

**Embeddedness** Issues of embeddedness were addressed through the variable of political group membership. With gay and lesbian college students often joining more political groups than their heterosexual peers (Swank et al. 2013a), we recorded if a student had been involved with a “political club or organization” in the last 12 months (yes=1, no=0). This measure did not identify the political goals of the group so we do not know the group existed for LGB issues or not, but we do know that students are more likely to join marches and rallies if they belong to political groups (Broadhurst and Martin 2014; Johnson and Lollar 2002).

**Conversion** Add Health had three items that directly attended to conversion factors. All of these items highlighted the fairness of practices that create and justify gender and race inequalities. Two of our items dealt with the explicit acceptance of structured sexuality and gender inequalities.

Our measure of gender traditionalism addressed sexist mandates about family roles and caretaking (Swim and Cohen 1997). By rejecting the notion that women are best fit for maternal roles, we coded “strongly disagree” the highest for the item: “It is much better for everyone if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and family” (strongly disagree=5, strongly agree=1).

There many ways to conceptualize and measure racial attitudes. Our measure on the insistence of same-race marriages is found in the various “symbolic,” “color-blind” and “aversive” theories of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2006). To address marital racism, Add Health had an item on how important it is to the “same race or ethnic group for a successful marriage or committed relationship.” Answers were placed on a ten point scale of 1 not at all to 10 very important.

Our last conversion variable was a liberal identity. One item read: “In terms of politics do you consider yourself?” In coding the five-point scale in a liberal direction, the people who called themselves “very liberal” received a 5 while the “very conservative” respondents received a 1. While there are not universal definitions of what constitutes a liberal stance on politics, many scholars agree that liberals and conservatives

differ on the size of government, redistribution policies, affirmative action, abortion, homosexual rights, crime and the support of social change (Malka and Lelkes 2010).

### Analytical Plan

We examined the data through a combination of statistical procedures. ANOVAs and chi-squares initially explored significant differences between sexual minorities and heterosexuals. We then turned to a series of logistic regressions to assess the relationship of sexualities to protesting when controlling for the selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors.

## Results

### Bivariate Findings

Our preliminary analysis explored the question of LGB political distinctiveness. Table 1 compared heterosexuals and sexual minorities for each variable. When looking at protest behaviors, we found that few people attended political rallies or marches, but sexual minorities were twice as likely heterosexuals to do so (10.9 % compared to 5.3 %). This finding confirmed our first hypothesis that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals would be more likely to protest than heterosexuals ( $\chi^2 = 14.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, it should also be noted that the effect size of a sexuality identity on protesting was somewhat modest ( $\Phi = 0.07$ ).

Four of the seven independent variables displayed significant differences along for sexual identities. Sexual minorities were more often in humanities majors ( $\chi^2 = 27.51$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and more involved in political groups than heterosexuals ( $\chi^2 = 2.43$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, the data failed to detect any major sexuality differences for educational attainment or choosing a social science major. Along attitudinal lines,

LGBs were more liberal than heterosexuals ( $f$  ratio = 124.46,  $p < 0.001$ ) and were less likely to endorse racist positions on inter-racial marriage ( $f$  ratio = 44.15,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, this general LGB liberalism failed to spill into gender expectations (data accepts “common in-group identity” theory for racial but not gender matters).

### Regression Findings

We turned to binary logistic regressions to estimate the net effects of sexuality on joining political marches when controlling for selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. Logistic regression was chosen over discriminant analysis because of the more relaxed and flexible assumptions (Tabachnick and Fidell 1996). As expected, the study met the simpler requirements of logistic regressions (the dependent variable was mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and dichotomous and there were over 50 cases per predictor). Missing data was handled through a listwise deletion that dropped cases that lacked an observation for each variable.

We ran three logistic regressions that estimated the relationship of sexual identities to attending a political rally. The approach highlights the direct connection of sexual orientation to protesting even after attending to selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. The odds ratios were most useful in this enterprise because they address the likelihood of attending a demonstration given a one unit change in the independent variable. An odds ratio above 1.0 signals a positive association when holding the other variables constant, whereas an odds ratio below 1.0 signals an inverse relationship. Finally, odd ratios are unstandardized scores so larger odds do not always reflect a larger magnitude of effect (Menard 2011).

Table 2 starts with a baseline model for sexual identity and joining political marches or rallies (essential hypothesis). As expected, having an LGB identity significantly increased the

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics

	Range	Heterosexual	LGB	$\chi^2$	$\phi$
Binary codes					
Rally or march in last year	0–1	5.3 %	10.9 %	14.42***	0.07
Social science major	0–1	2.8 %	3.4 %	1.67	0.02
Humanities major	0–1	1.7 %	6.8 %	27.51***	0.10
Political group membership	0–1	3.6 %	5.4 %	2.43*	0.04
Interval codes					
				$F$ ratio	$\eta^2$
Educational attainment	0–5	2.47	2.42	0.50	0.00
Liberal identity	1–5	2.95	3.51	124.46***	0.05
Gender liberalism	1–5	2.08	2.10	0.96	0.00
Old fashioned racism	1–10	3.94	2.67	44.15***	0.02

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table 2** Odd ratios from binary logistic regressions of protest behaviors on same-sex sexualities ( $n = 2,534$ )

Predictors	Essentialist	Selection	Full model
Essentialist			
LGB identity	2.19*** (0.21)	2.03** (0.22)	1.57 (0.24)
Selection			
Educational attainment		1.17 (0.08)	1.16 (0.08)
Social science major		3.43*** (0.27)	3.04*** (0.30)
Humanities major		2.79** (0.32)	2.72 (0.34)
Embeddedness			
Political group membership			14.20*** (0.24)
Conversion			
Liberal identity			1.25 (0.11)
Gender liberalism			1.53 (0.24)
Old-fashioned racism			0.92* (0.03)
Pseudo $R^2$	0.01	0.06	0.18
Step $\chi^2$	12.06**	41.88***	120.54***
Model $\chi^2$	12.06**	53.97***	174.51***

Notes: cell figures include log odds and robust standard errors (in parentheses)

Pseudo  $R^2$  is Nagelkerke

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

likelihood of attending a political march ( $or = 2.19, p < 0.001$ ). However, the miniscule pseudo  $R^2$  suggests that sexual identities account for a very small proportion of variance in march or rally attendance.

Model 2 includes the educational selection variables. With a still significant odds ratio for sexual identities, it is clear that these educational variables explain little of the LGB–heterosexual difference in protest behaviors ( $or = 2.03, p < 0.01$ ). On the other hand, major selection does seem to explain protest tendencies for people of different sexualities. Having a Social Science and Humanities major increased rally attendance by at least two-and-a-half times and Nagelkerke Goodness-of-fit score increased by 0.05 points.

The full model included every selection, embeddedness, and conversion factor. When controlling for this mix of predictors, the LGB protest gap become statistically insignificant ( $or = 1.57$ ). In looking for suppressive factors, the embeddedness measure of political group membership seems to have the largest ramifications. People who belonged to a political group were over 14 times more likely to join political marches than people who did not ( $or = 14.20, p < 0.001$ ). Having a social science major still significantly increased protesting, but the significant relationship with humanities majors was not observed. The conversion factor of racial attitudes could have also dampened the sexuality effects. That is, protesting was significantly less common among people who accepted the prohibitions of inter-racial intimate relationships. Finally, a broad tendency to liberalism and the acceptance of traditional gender roles did not seem to predict the activism of people in this sample.

## Discussion

Members of stigmatized groups sometimes protest against prevailing power structures, and this study sought to more clearly nuance this finding. Early evidence suggests that sexual minorities attended more political marches than heterosexuals; this paper tries to understand why this occurs. To see if an observed sexuality-protest link was the byproduct of other core factors, we used explanations of Egan (2008) on political distinctiveness. Egan suggests that bivariate links of sexualities to protest tendencies could fundamentally be the consequences of different selection, embeddedness, and conversion forces. To test this possibility, we ran a series of hierarchical logistic regressions that estimated the mitigating effects of selection, immersion, and conversion factors.

Our research design is unique and rigorous in many ways. First, it contrasts the political actions of people with different sexualities. Previous protest studies have mostly limited their analysis to protest actions within heterosexual or gay-lesbian communities (Rollins and Hirsch 2003; Swank and Fahs 2011; Waldner 2001). Second, the Add Health project offers a large random sample of college-aged Americans. This improves upon the representativeness of earlier studies that relied upon convenience samples of LGB protesters from a single college (Friedman and Ayres 2013; Swank et al. 2013b). Lastly, Add Health offers access to many suitable measures. This breadth of measures let us

systematically explore how selection, embeddedness, and conversion variables determine the protest actions of college student with different sexualities.

Our findings verified our hunch that sexual identities are relevant to protest actions (Andersen and Jennings 2010; Friedman and Ayres 2013; Swank and Fahs 2011; White 2006). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students were twice as likely to attend a political march or rally as their heterosexual classmates (10.9 % compared to 5.3 %). However, with almost 90 % of students from any sexuality failing to march or rally on a political matter, claims about widespread differences between people of sexual identities seem a bit overstated.

After confirming this sexuality gap in unconventional politics, we explored the underlying mechanisms behind this phenomena. Our study began with an analysis of essentialist arguments about sexualities. Essentialists assume that heterosexuals and sexual minorities are inherently different. Be it a biological or moral impetus, essentialism insists that sexuality differences are universal laws that transcend time and social contexts. To see if sexuality differences were free from social causes, we placed our measures of sexual orientations and protesting actions within a wide range of social milieus.

Selection theories insist that the protesting-sexuality connection is based on other demographic statuses. By emphasizing education as a selective force, we found that there are different sexuality pipelines for college majors. Gays and lesbians were disproportionately drawn to the humanities but the same was not found in the social sciences. However, this sexuality difference in educational choices did not alter the sexuality gap much. The association between sexual identities and protesting remained significant and mostly unchanged in the presence of educational attainment and choosing politicized majors. Although exposure to social science and humanities curricula increased protesting for the general student population, these factors were not key sources the protesting differences among the sexuality continuum.

Immersion theories explore the role of social networks in protest behaviors. In general, civic group membership generally increases the political participation of all citizens but the importance of voluntary groups may be more important to the lives of sexual minorities. To escape homophobic groups and institutions, sexual minorities may turn to LGB communities that normalize and celebrate their conventionally stigmatized identity. Unfortunately, Add Health lacked information on membership in LGB groups, but it did offer some data on membership in political groups.

Including membership in political groups was important. Sexual minorities belong to more political groups than heterosexuals and this group factor was partially responsible for suppressing the sexuality gap in protesting. This suggests that greater LGB activism is partially due to the fact that sexual minorities are typically drawn to more politicized and radical groups than heterosexuals. Clearly, future research should

explore the mechanisms behind this relationship as it would be yield new insights to see how going to college increases access to political groups and how the conversations in campus and community political groups inspire greater protesting for sexual minorities and others.

Conversion theories connect protesting behaviors to experiences with social inequalities. As a target of heterosexist discrimination, sexual minorities are often more critical of traditional sexuality structures than heterosexuals. According to “common in-group” theories, this exposure to discrimination can also foster greater solidarity with other marginalized groups. In turn, this siding with other oppressed groups is supposed to make sexual minorities more predisposed to protesting than heterosexuals.

The conversion factors netted some minor results worth noting. The acceptance of inter-racial relationships offered a weak significant link to protesting while liberal identities and gender traditionalism did not. This suggests that liberal sentiments are probably not a major contributor to sexuality protests gap. However, we do warn that other conversion factors could have provided stronger effects. Addressing the internalization of heterosexist thoughts, or being exposed to discriminatory events, probably would have offered better tests of the conversion hypothesis.

Our final regression suggests that bivariate relationships between sexualities and going to rallies and marches are fundamentally the function of embeddedness and conversion factors. In early regressions, issues of educational attainment and college major barely changed the relationship of sexual identities to protesting. The content, pedagogy, and assignments of humanity and social science classes inspired greater protesting, but these factors were not the source of protesting differences for heterosexuals and sexual minorities. Although college classes failed to lessen the sexuality activism gap, the type of group memberships did in fact lessen this gap. Gays and lesbians joined political groups more often than heterosexuals and membership in these groups were a major force behind the sexuality boost to joining more rallies and marches.

Ultimately, our results suggest that group membership was crucial to the sexuality gap in protesting. While we are confident in the accuracy of these finding, we want to reiterate that certain research decisions could have underestimated that relevance of other selection and conversion processes. The use of cross-sectional analysis always has temporal ordering problems. Group membership can increase protest tendencies but participation in protests alters one’s social networks as well (Opp and Kittel 2010). Our sampling decisions could have also influenced the findings. There could have been selection problems due to issues of attrition during the later waves of the longitudinal sample and our restriction of studying college students slightly truncated the variation in educational attainment (people who never attended college are not in this analysis). The uses of a secondary data set also offered



measurement concerns. Further, the focus on sexual identities, and the reification of gay-straight binary, clearly ignores the fluidity of sexual expressions through a person's lifetime (Diamond 2008). This measure also skipped the personal salience of one's sexuality, as the importance placed on sexual identities can be a predictor of LGB activism (Worthington et al. 2005). Our measure for protest behaviors could also be improved upon. Our single item of attending a political rally or march does not address the more confrontational protest tactics of picketing, civil disobedience, or damaging people or property (Haenfler et al. 2012). This item was also unable to distinguish the amount of marches a person attended in one's life just as it did not trace the goals of the political rallies. It seems wise to assume that protest gap between heterosexuals and sexual minorities would be the largest for the collective challenges to heterosexism (Andersen and Jennings 2010). However, the sexuality protest gap could be smaller or even reversed for other liberal or conservative causes (e.g., police brutality, environmentalism, prayer in the schools). Future research should see how the sexuality gap in protesting spills over to a wide range of liberal and radical causes.

In many cases, we were unable to find adequate measures for every dimension of the selection, embeddedness, and conversion constructs. Egan (2012) suggests that the selection characteristics of being raised in a rural area, having fewer siblings, and being a US citizen can explain the liberalism of sexual minorities. Other educational factors could have also netted bigger effects. We would have liked to have controlled for things that sometimes predict college students activism, including issues such as college type, campus residencies, exposure to engaging pedagogies, or partaking in service-learning experiences.

This study also probably underestimated the importance of embeddedness factors. By looking at people's relationships to political groups, 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 and Gonzalez 2013; Ueno et al. 2012), but we can imagine that joining an LGB support group probably has a stronger impact than joining other sorts of political groups. Other aspects of embeddedness could have produced different results. Information on contextual factors such as living in LGB neighborhoods, visiting LGB establishments, or befriending other activists could have enhanced the role of immersion factors (Barth et al. 2009; Lombardi 1999; Waldner 2001; Worthington et al. 2005). Other studies suggest that knowing an LGB professor can increase LGB activism as well (Johnson and Lollar 2002).

Our data was probably its weakest on conversion factors. Add Health had measures on the rejection of traditional gender and race practices but it lacked any measures on modern heterosexism or internalized homophobia. This absence is glaring, as recognition of heterosexism is one the biggest

predictors of why sexual minorities protest (Klandermans 2014; Swank and Fahs 2011). We would have also liked to see how being exposed to hostile and chilly social environments may connect to these protesting tendencies. For example, perceptions of a heterosexist campus, or unresponsive administrators, can increase student activism (Broadhurst and Martin 2014; Swank et al. 2013a). Future research should also look at how personal encounters with micro-aggressions, hate crimes, employment biases, and silencing techniques can explain the tendency of sexual minorities to protest more than heterosexuals (Swank and Fahs 2013; Jennings and Andersen 2003; Hyers 2007; Taylor et al. 2009).

Ultimately, this study opens up a variety of new areas for future researchers interested in the connections between sexualities and activism. It provides a new framework for thinking about why sexual minorities fight for social change, just as it can remind researchers to always include sexuality measures in their studies of political engagement. These nuances and overlaps provide fruitful new directions for imagining the relationship between social identities, political protest, and social justice.

#### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** Eric Swank declares that he has no conflict of interest. Breanne Fahs declares that she has no conflict of interest

**Ethical Approval** This article is a secondary analysis and does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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