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Sexual identities and participation in liberal and conservative social movements



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ABSTRACT

The desire for social change, political activism, and sexual identities may all be related. Lesbians and gays generally contest heterosexism more than heterosexuals but we do not know how sexual identities sways participation in class, race, and gender based social movements. When analyzing the American National Election Surveys of 2012 ($n = 3519$), gays and lesbians were about twenty times more likely to join LGB justice campaigns than heterosexuals. Moreover, the greater activism of gays and lesbians also crossed over to recent Occupy Wall Street, peace, and environmental mobilizations. Finally, this analysis ends with logistic regressions that determine if any sexual identity gaps in movement participation are the result of demographic, contextual, and ideological covariates.

1. Introduction

Stigmatized and poor populations generally lack the resources to effectively challenge discrimination through elections, the courts, media campaigns, school curriculums, etc. When faced with this political disadvantaged members of stigmatized group have relied on the social movement tactics of boycotting, protesting, and civil disobedience when trying to force concessions in recalcitrant elites and when trying to secure even the most basic of civil rights (Tarrow, 1996).

Patterns of social movement participation is commonly patterned along gender, class, and racial cleavages (Brady et al., 1995; Schussman and Soule, 2005). Few members of stigmatized populations engage in activism for their own group but people of privileged groups are even less likely to work against their unearned social advantages. Thus, men far less often attend feminist rallies than women (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004), the affluent less often endorse unions than the working-class (Eggert and Marco Giugni, 2015), and heterosexuals are more reluctant to work for LGBT rights than sexual minorities (Andersen and Jennings, 2010; Fingerhut, 2011; Friedman and Ayres, 2013; Montgomery and Stewart, 2012; Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002; Swank et al., 2013).

While relatively few studies explore social movement involvement across different sexual identity groups (Andersen and Jennings, 2010; Battle and Harris, 2013; Duncan, 1999; Friedman and Ayres, 2013; Gray and Desmarais, 2014; Longerbeam et al., 2007; Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002; White, 2006), we do know that protesters for AIDS funding were overwhelmingly sexual minorities (Andersen and Jennings, 2010; Rollins and Hirsch, 2003) and gay pride marches have only a small contingency of heterosexual allies (Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002).

In assuming a “sexual identity gap” for social movements that deal with sexualities, the ways that a Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual (LGB) status interacts with other types of social movements is far from certain. Terriquez (2015) and Swank and Fahs (2017) discovered that gays and lesbians protest more than heterosexuals, but these studies were unable to determine if this greater levels of protesting was restricted to LGB rights or not. A few studies contend that self-identified gays and lesbians join more feminist movements than heterosexuals (Duncan, 1999; Fisher et al., 2017; Friedman and Ayres, 2013; White, 2006) or that Black gay men protest racism more

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than Black heterosexual men (Battle and Harris, 2013). Moreover, studies that explore cross-movement participation suggest lesbians attended more civil rights and antiwar events than heterosexual women in the 1980s (Andersen and Jennings, 2010) and 41% of Canadian LGBs who went to gay rights protests also joined feminist, labor, environmental, peace, antipoverty, and aboriginal rights protests (Carroll and Ratner, 1996). Thus, LGBs may engage in more liberal social movements than heterosexuals but the reasons behind this phenomenon is understudied and mostly not known.

2. Literature review

To address the possible mechanisms behind greater LGB activism I turn to political science theories of political distinctiveness (Egan, 2008; Egan, 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Swank and Fahs, 2017). In an extended theoretical discussion, Egan suggests that greater LGB liberalism could be due to issues of essentialism (i.e., there is something intrinsically unique for people of different sexual identities), selection (i.e., demographic and educational factors that lead to LGB identities also increases social movement participation), embeddedness (i.e., adolescent and adult involvement in the LGB community leads to more movement participation), and conversion (i.e., enduring heterosexist discrimination inspires the political outlooks associated with social movement participation). The following sections explore the possible relevance of specific essentialist, selection, embeddedness, and conversion variables in explaining greater liberal activism among LGBs.

2.1. Essentialism and social movement participation

Essentialism sees sexual orientations as innate and fixed identities that determine a person's outlooks, habits, and preferences (DeLamater and Hyde, 1998). In codifying the tenets of essentialism, Haslam and Levy (2006) identify six key features: 1) Discreteness: Boundaries between people of different sexual identities are sharp, decisive, and clear-cut; 2) Uniformity: People in the same sexual identity are remarkably similar to one another; 3) Informativeness: Knowing someone's sexual identity imparts a good deal of information 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, spiritual, or biological entities; 6) Stability: Sexual orientations remain constant over a person's lifetime; and 6) Exclusivity: Everybody 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 construct, that human tendencies are probabilistic rather than deterministic, and that sexual identities are fluid entities that change across cultures and a person's lifetime (Diamond, 2008). Moreover, essentialism does not explain why lesbians and gays might be more liberal than heterosexuals as it simply states that it is due to force outside of human control. Thus, political distinctiveness also offers more social and psychological explanations of sexual identity differences in politics.

2.2. Selection and social movement engagement

Selection argues that demographic commonalities among sexual minorities increases their liberalism. In making such an argument, Lewis et al. (2011) suggested that LGBs tend to be younger and better educated than heterosexuals (Black et al., 2000; Egan, 2012; Fine, 2015; Herek et al., 2010; Schaffner and Senic, 2006; Wilkinson and Pearson, 2015) and these differences could be responsible for greater LGB participation in social movements (Jennings and Andersen, 2003; Lombardi, 1999; Rollins and Hirsch, 2003; Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002; Taylor et al., 2009).

Egan (2008) also suggests that self-identified LGBs could come from distinctively liberal childhoods and backgrounds. In emphasizing the hardships of the “coming-out” process, Egan argues that people who publically embrace LGB identities are more likely to come from liberal families and tolerant communities than people who suppress or conceal any same-sex sexuality desires or actions. Or in Egan's (2008) own words: “acquiring a gay identity may come from backgrounds in which there is less moral approbation of homosexuality—and these backgrounds themselves are in turn strong predictors of liberal political attitudes” (page 14).

2.3. Embeddedness and social movement engagement

Social networks can inspire political activism (Tarrow, 1996) and integration into the LGB community seems to politicize individuals (Brady et al., 1995; Klandermans, 1997; Passy, 2001; Schussman and Soule, 2005). By seeking social support from “fictive kin” and LGB peers, sexual minorities often turn to LGB friends and organizations to cope with heterosexism in their family of origins and the broader heterosexual community (Frost et al., 2016). Conversations in gay affirmative settings can sensitize people to the systematic nature of discrimination, enhance group solidarity, and lead people into viewing U.S. society through the lens of LGB interests (Bernstein, 1997). Moreover, LGB social networks can also transmit beliefs that collective action is necessary, important, and worthwhile and impart information about specific political events (e.g., an invitation to activism via email, text message, social media, or face-to-face conversations).

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 et al., 2009; Fingerhut, 2011; Lombardi, 1999; Swank and Fahs, 2012) and having LGBT “best friends” seems especially crucial for heterosexuals who join public demonstrations against homophobia (Calcagno, 2016). Moreover, joining gay athletic clubs, churches, and LGB community centers often leads to greater activism among sexual minorities (Duncan, 1999; McClendon, 2014; Pacey et al., 2014; Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002;

Swank and Fahs, 2012) and gays and lesbians seem to join more political groups than heterosexuals (Swank and Fahs, 2017).

2.4. Conversion and social movement activism

Belonging to a stigmatized population can alter a person's understanding of the social order. Because LGB individuals are routinely marginalized and vilified, sexual minorities often abhor heterosexism (Rostosky et al., 2009). Perceptions of mistreatment and injustices often precedes activism (Benford and Snow, 2000; Klandermans, 1997), so the narrative that one is a target 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). For example, the passage of homophobic laws, being mistreated by medical professionals, or dealing with hate crimes can inspire LGB activism (Friedman and Ayres, 2013; Jennings and Andersen, 2003; Rostosky et al., 2009; Swank and Fahs, 2013).

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 and Dovidio, 2000), sexual minorities are prone to reject all types of social hierarchies because their exposure to heterosexism. Or stated otherwise, being considered a sexual outsider or deviant can foster a queer consciousness that detests all forms of social exclusion, bigotry, and exploitation (Bernstein, 1997; Carroll and Ratner, 1996; Klandermans, 1997; Valocchi, 2001). 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” (14–15).

Elements of common in-group 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 (Davies and McCartney, 2003; Lewis et al., 2011; Meier et al., 2009; Schnabel, 2018; Worthen et al., 2012; Swank and Fahs, 2017). Moreover, sexual minorities are more likely than heterosexuals to recognize the existence of racism in contemporary America (Grollman, 2017; Kleiman et al., 2015), support gender equality in families (Schnabel, 2018; Shechory and Ziv, 2007), feel sympathy for victims of racial discrimination (Grollman, 2017), and proclaim that being gay made them more “sensitive to prejudice and discrimination against others” (Riggle et al., 2014). Moreover, LGBs also express greater commitments to “fight for social justice” and defend the rights of vulnerable populations than heterosexuals (Gray and Desmarais, 2014; Longerbeam et al., 2007; McCright and Dunlap, 2008).

2.5. Research questions and hypotheses

This study addressed two research questions: 1) Do sexual minorities join social movements more often than heterosexuals? and, if so, 2) what factors might account for the sexual identity gap in movement affiliation? To date, some preliminary studies suggest that sexual minorities join social movements more often than heterosexuals (Andersen and Jennings, 2010; Duncan, 1999; Friedman and Ayres, 2013; White, 2006; Swank and Fahs, 2017; Swank et al., 2013). While these studies are informative, they have mostly been bivariate studies of small-scale convenience samples. This study improves upon these studies in several ways. First, the analysis is conducted on a large random sample of adults in the United States. Second, this paper tries to identify the underlying factors that inspire cross-movement participation among sexual minorities.

Political distinctiveness theories suggest several reasons for the possible sexual identity gap in social movement engagement (Egan, 2012; Lewis et al., 2011). The essentialist argument suggests that gays and lesbians are inherently more inclined than heterosexuals to be part of collective struggles for social justice. Skeptical of essentialist arguments, Egan argues that greater activism among out sexual minorities can occur because (1) the same characteristics that make people more willing to adopt an LGB identity also drive activism (selection hypothesis); (2) political socialization within the LGB community increases the willingness and ability to join numerous progressive social movements (embeddedness hypothesis); and/or (3) exposure to heterosexist discrimination undermines the legitimacy of all social hierarchies and increases LGB commitments to end racism, sexism, and social inequalities (conversion hypothesis).

Theories of political distinctiveness have shown some utility in explaining sexual identity differences in political attitudes (Egan, 2012; Lewis et al., 2011) and the tendency to join political protests (Swank and Fahs, 2017). As the first empirical paper to apply political distinctiveness theories to a wide range of liberal and conservative social movements, this study offers the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. LGB individuals will join more liberal social movements than heterosexuals.

Hypothesis 2. LGB Individuals join more social movements because they are relatively younger and more educated than heterosexuals (selection hypothesis).

Hypothesis 3. LGB individuals join more social movements because they often belong to social networks and civic groups that condone and expect liberal activism (embeddedness hypothesis).

Hypothesis 4. LGB individuals join more liberal social movements because they are more skeptical of the status quo than heterosexuals (conversion hypothesis).

Based on these hypotheses the rest of this paper ascertains if sexual identities have a negligible effect on social movement participation after controlling for these selection, embeddedness, and conversion covariates.

3. Method

3.1. Sampling

Data for this study came from the Time Series Study of the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES). While this random biannual survey has existed for decades, the data is restricted to 2012 because it contains items on sexual identities and social movement participation (Cassese et al., 2013). As a multisplit research design, ANES constantly modified its survey items and data gathering modes throughout the 2012 elections (face-to-face interviews and web based collection methods before and after the general election). Although information from the face-to-face interviews was sought, the questions on social movement engagement were limited to the post-election web version of ANES ($n = 3860$).

The web version of ANES draws upon Knowledge Networks for respondents. Knowledge Networks (KN), currently known as GfK Custom Research, created and maintains a panel of people who have previously agreed to complete on-line surveys. When building a list of 40,000 US households, KN recruited people through random-digit dialing and address-based approaches. Although issues of race, gender, and education selection biases are found in KN samples, their selection biases seem no worse than random telephone surveys (Chang and Krosnick, 2009) and they have much better response rates than the face-to-face interviews of ANES (Weinberg et al., 2014). Finally, ANES does not report how many people were asked to complete their online surveys but 3519 of their 3860 respondents provided surveys without missing data on the relevant variables in this study.

3.2. Measures

Suitable measures were found for 13 independent and dependent variables in the Web Version of ANES 2012. All of the items were close-ended questions that offered different Likert scale and categorical answers for each prompt.

Participation in Liberal and Conservative Social Movements. Social movements can be defined as ad-hoc coalitions that challenge established power structures through electoral and non-electoral means (Tilly, 2004). Participation in social movements encompasses a vast repertoire of behaviors. People can join movements through lobbying, making financial contributions, attending marches or demonstrations, creating consciousness raising groups, building alternative media sources, bookstores, community centers, and other means. While the ways that people can join movements is almost endless, ANES had a single item that asked if people “were active” in a list of eight contemporary social movements. Six of these social movements are often classified as liberal “New Social Movements” which want to redistribute resources, alter discriminatory practices, transform social norms, abolish social stigmas, and expand the rights of disenfranchised populations (LGB rights movement, environmental rights movement, occupy Wall Street movement, peace movement, racial equality movement, women’s rights movement).¹ Two conservative movements seek a return to conservative mores that were supposed to be the norm before the new left movements of the 1960s (Tea Party and right to life). This item traces lifetime participation for each one of these eight movements but it did not address the ways nor the frequency in which a person participated in these movements. Answers for this measure were coded in eight separate binary variables (participation in a lifetime = 1, no participation in a lifetime = 0).

LGB Sexual identity. When addressing personal sexualities, ANES asked people to classify their sexual identity: “Do you consider yourself?” The three answers of heterosexual, bisexual, and gay or lesbian were transformed into one dichotomous variable (lesbian, gay, or bisexual = 1, other = 0). With this coding scheme 95.5% of the sample were considered heterosexual ($N = 3642$), 4.5% were treated as LGB lesbian or gay ($N = 181$). While this measure traces current sexual identities, it does not indicate if people based their sexual classifications on actions, desires, or any other criteria. Egan (2008) argues that the analysis of LGB identities are preferred to sexual behaviors because identity formation is closely connected to selection and embeddedness factors. For example, adolescents who publicly call themselves LGB are more likely to come from liberal families than heterosexually identified youth who engage in same-sex sexual behaviors. In supporting this claim, Schnabel (2018) found that sexual identities were much better at predicting liberal identities than the gender of one’s sexual partners.

Selection variables. Two demographic factors serve as selection variables: young adulthood and educational level. Young adulthood was ascertained through a question about age groups. After asking participants their age at the interview data, ANES created a list of 13 age groups that ranged from 17 to 75 years old. Because early adulthood is often the peak of protest actions for individuals (Schussman and Soule, 2005), I created a dummy variable that separated the 18–24-year olds apart from the people over 24-years old (18–24 years old = 1, 25 plus = 0).

Educational attainment was recorded through a question about their highest level of education. Responses of less than a 1st grade to doctoral degree were collapsed into four categories (high school degree or less = 0, some college = 1, bachelor’s degree = 2, masters, professional, or Ph.D. degrees = 3).

Embeddedness. Contextual predictors of activism were addressed through three variables (knowing a LGB person, emotional closeness to lesbians and gays, and belonging to a political group). ANES created a dummy variable for knowing at least one LGB relative, neighbor, co-worker, or close friend. Interpersonal contact with gays or lesbians person seems connected to voting practices

¹ Recent American peace mobilizations have mostly centered around US wars in Iran and Iraq (Woehrle et al., 2008), Occupy Wall Street created over 1500 encampments which protested corporate greed and welfare for the rich (Gaby and Caren, 2012), the women’s movement was in its “third-wave” that mostly focused on change gender norms on sexuality, female agency, sexual harassment, and reproductive rights (Staggenborg and Taylor, 2005), environmentalism has generally been constructed as a “lifestyle movement” that emphasizes green living, recycling, and eating organic or locally grow foods (Haenfler et al., 2012) and racial justice movements have been as profuse as challenging law enforcement practices, housing segregation, health disparities, immigration policies (Isaac, 2008).

(Barth et al., 2009; Swank et al., 2013) and sexual minorities seem to know more gays and lesbians than heterosexuals (Galupo and Gonzalez, 2013).

In addressing issues of affect, an ANES feeling thermometer asks respondents to rate their emotional warmth or coldness towards gays and lesbians (similar to Battle and Harris, 2013). With scores ranging between 0 and 100, lower scores indicated states of distance and disgust while higher scores suggests fondness and affection toward gays and lesbians. This ANES gay feeling thermometer has predicted a wide range of political stances in other studies (Iyengar et al., 2012). Group affiliations were tracked through membership in an issue-oriented political group (yes = 1, no = 0). I would have preferred a more precise question about joining a political group that advocates for sexual minorities, but studies do suggest membership in political and neighborhood groups do vary by sexual identity (Dalton et al., 2010; Swank and Fahs, 2017).

Conversion. The conversion factors had a mix of experiential and perceptual measures. On the experiential side, ANES asked how much discrimination the respondent had “personally faced because of your ethnicity or race?” Responses were placed on a five point scale of a great deal to none at all (5 = great deal). While being victimized because of one’s race captures personal exposure to discrimination ANES lacked questions of how often a person endures sexuality based slights, insults, and prejudicial treatment.

ANES had three variables on the recognition of social biases against stigmatized groups in the United States (Swim and Cohen, 1997). In addressing perceptions of race, gender, and sexuality biases, ANES asked people to consider “how much discrimination is there in the United States today against” women, racial minorities, and LGBs. Responses were coded in the direction of detecting widespread biases against Hispanics, women, and gays-lesbians (a great deal or a lot of discrimination = 2, moderate amount of discrimination = 1, little or no discrimination = 0).

Finally, two variables dealt with social change desires. The egalitarianism variable explores a preference for greater social equality. ANES asked five items about the morality of giving everybody an “equal chance to succeed,” the belief that Americans “would be better off we worried less about inequality,” and the need of “pushing equal rights.” With answers of strongly agree to strongly disagree the responses were coded in an egalitarian fashion with the composite score of being 5 to 25 (Cronbach α = 0.95). With liberal identities generally reflecting an approval of redistribution policies and protections for disadvantaged populations, I explored how participants placed themselves on a seven point scale that started with extremely liberal and went to liberal, slightly liberal, middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely conservative (Extremely liberal = 7).

3.3. Analytical plan

The analysis came through a combination of statistical procedures. One-way univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) ascertained significant bivariate differences for sexual identities and social movement participation. Subsequent logistic regressions assess the relationship of sexualities to movement participation when controlling for the selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. Logistic regressions are well suited at analyzing dichotomous dependent variables and they are not confined by many of the strict requirements other sorts of regressions (e.g., a normal distribution in the dependent variable or no problems of homoscedasticity).

4. Findings

4.1. Bivariate analysis

Table 1 deals with sexual identities and social movement participation. In addressing the general trends in the data, it is clear that 1) few people join social movements; 2) gays and lesbians generally joined more liberal movements than heterosexuals, but the difference in activism levels is contingent on social movement goals; and 3) conservative social movements are preferred more by heterosexuals.

When looking at specific movements, the sexual identities difference is most pronounced around struggles with heterosexism. As

Table 1
Lifetime participation in different social movements by sexual identity.

	LGB	Heterosexual	Chi-square
	% Yes	% Yes	
Liberal Movements			
LGB	20.4%	0.9%	344.87***
Feminist	2.3%	2.0%	.07
Racial Justice	2.3%	1.1%	1.92
Peace	4.0%	1.4%	7.80**
Environmentalism	4.6%	2.0%	5.43*
Occupy Wall Street	2.3%	0.8%	4.25*
Conservative Movements			
Tea Party	1.7%	2.7%	.63
Right to Life	1.8%	2.9%	.66
N	171	3642	

Note: *** p < .001 ** p < .01, * p < .05.

Table 2
Binary logistic regressions for sexual identities and social movement participation.

Movement	LGB Identity		LGB Identity + Selection		LGB Identity + Embeddedness		LGB Identity + Conversion		Full Model	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
LGB	26.52*** (.19)	.25	27.16*** (.23)	.26	13.48*** (.30)	.29	13.76*** (.28)	.27	9.49*** (.38)	.31
Feminist	1.15 (.00)	.52	1.25 (.08)	.53	.46 (.17)	.55	.52 (.09)	.53	.37 (.26)	.65
Racial Justice	2.05 (.00)	.53	1.69 (.12)	.55	1.17 (.16)	.57	.84 (.13)	.56	.69 (.30)	.69
Peace	3.00** (.01)	.41	2.84* (.03)	.41	1.44 (.18)	.46	1.25 (.14)	.44	1.04 (.27)	.50
Environmental	2.36* (.00)	.38	2.18* (.03)	.38	1.40 (.14)	.41	1.16 (.09)	.39	1.02 (.20)	.44
Occupy	2.88** (.01)	.54	2.60* (.01)	.54	1.49 (.17)	.59	1.27 (.11)	.56	.88 (.25)	.64
Tea Party	.62 (.00)	.59	.54 (.04)	.59	.83 (.12)	.63	1.46 (.20)	.63	1.62 (.28)	.68
Right to Life	.62 (.00)	.59	.61 (.01)	.59	.78 (.07)	.60	1.51 (.09)	.61	1.60 (.16)	.64

Note: OR above 1.0 indicate greater social movement participation for people with LGBs identity, SE is standard error, and score in parentheses is Nagelkerke Pseudo R² for the entire model.

***p < .001** p < .01, * p < .05.

Selection model is limited to variables of sexual identity plus race, gender, age and education.

Embeddedness model includes sexual identity plus having a LG friend or family member, closeness to lesbians and gays, and political group membership.

Conversion model contains sexual identity plus experiencing racial discrimination, recognizing heterosexism, recognizing racism, recognizing sexism, liberal identities, and egalitarianism.

Full model includes sexual identity plus all selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors.

shown in Table 1, approximately one out of five gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have joined the LGB rights movement while less than one out of hundred heterosexuals have done the same thing ($\chi^2 = 344.87$, $p < .001$). Significant sexual differences were also found for three other liberal movements. While the sexuality differences were much less than for LGB activism, LGBs were roughly twice as likely as bisexuals to join the peace, environmental, and occupy Wall Street movements as heterosexuals (χ^2 ranged from 7.80 to 4.25, $p < .01$ and $p < .05$). For the rest of the liberal social movements, sexual identities did not significantly differentiate participation for anti-racist and feminist movements.

Determining the typicality of these results is far from clear. Some studies find higher levels of across movement participation for LGBs. A study of 525 gays and lesbians from San Francisco found that almost half of the sample reported participation in feminist or peace movements in their lifetime while another 45% indicated environmental activism in that time span (Taylor et al., 2009). These finding also counters earlier bivariate studies that find greater involvement in the women's and civil rights movements among sexual minorities (Andersen and Jennings, 2010; Duncan, 1999; White, 2006) but echoes some more recent studies that question the link of sexualities to race and gender attitudes (Battle and Harris, 2013; Harnois, 2015; Harnois, 2017; Swank and Fahs, 2017).

4.2. Logistic regression findings

Table 2 includes five logistic regressions on sexual identities and involvement in eight social movements. The initial regression offers bivariate calculations for sexual identities and movement participation (column 2). These zero-order scores serve as a baseline that links LGB identities to activist tendencies without the selection, embeddedness, and conversions factors. The second set of regressions was limited to social movement participation and the selection factors of a person's sexual identity plus their race, gender, age and education levels (column 3). The third batch of regressions estimated the association of sexual identity to social movement participation after controlling for the embeddedness covariates of having a LG friend or family member, being emotionally close to lesbians and gays, and belonging to a political group (column 4). The fourth series of regressions reflects the connection between sexual identities, social movement participation, and the conversion factors of experiencing racial discrimination, recognizing heterosexism, recognizing racism, recognizing sexism, having liberal identities, and supporting egalitarian social arrangements (column 5). The final regressions highlights the direct connection of sexual orientation to social movement engagement after attending to all selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors. It should be noted that to save space Table 2 only displays the Odds Ratio for sexual identities and the Nagelkerke Pseudo R² serves as the coefficient of determination. Odds Ratio (OR) determine the probability of joining social movements differing across sexual identities. OR values of 1 suggest no associations between sexual identities and movement engagement and ORs that are farther away from 1 suggest stronger effect sizes. In light of Chen et al's. (2010) guidelines, I considered large effects to be above an OR of 4.72, medium effects at the 2.74 threshold, and small effects to rest above an OR of 1.52.

Finally, missing data was handled through a listwise deletion that dropped cases that lacked an observation for each variable.

Column two of [Table 2](#) estimated the bivariate connection of sexual identities to the different social movements. As like [Table 1](#), LGBs are significantly more likely to join four liberal social movement (LGB rights, peace movements, environmentalism, and Occupy Wall Street). In addressing the effect size, only the odd ration for LGB rights movement was large (OR = 26.52, $p < .001$), the peace and occupy movement were medium (OR = 3.00 and 2.88, $p < .01$) and environmental effect was small (OR = 2.36, $p < .05$). Column 3 explored the association of sexual identities to participation in eight social movements when controlling for the selection factors. Repeatedly the inclusion of race, gender, education, and age covariates showed little impact on the link of sexual identities to movement engagement. Like the bivariate baseline regression, sexual identities were significantly linked to the same liberal movements and none of the conservative movements. The selection variables barely changed the OR for the LGB movement (OR increased to 27.16, $p < .001$) but the strength of association between sexual identities and joining the peace, environmental, and occupy movement shrank to small levels (OR = 2.18 and 2.60, $p < .05$). This suggests that the selection variables of race, gender, education, and age do not seem to be a major source of differentiating in movement engagements by sexual identities.

The next column explores the connection of sexual identities and embeddedness factors to social movement involvement. With only one exception, the significant link of sexual identities to movement engagement disappeared when controlling for membership in political groups, emotional closeness to lesbians and gays, and knowing LG friends or family members. The elimination of previously significant links suggests that the integration into LGB communities plays an important part in the increased involvement of LGBs in peace, environmental, and labor movements (OR of 1.49 to 1.40). Moreover, the change of direction for feminist activism suggests that LGBs are slightly more inclined to challenge sexist practices because of their integration in the LGB community (as compared to an inherent tendency to challenge male privilege). Conversely, connections to a LGB social milieu did not erase the significant link of a sexual identity to participation the LGB rights movement (OR = 13.48, $p < .001$). Thus knowing or being emotionally close to LGBs, plus the participation in any sort of a political group, only partially explain greater involvement in the LGB rights movement among sexual minorities.

Column five presents Odds Ratios for sexual identities, social movement participation, and the conversions factors of experiencing racial discrimination, recognizing heterosexism, recognizing racism, recognizing sexism, having liberal identities, and endorsing egalitarian sentiments. When taking the conversion factors into account, people with LGB identities were still considerably more likely to join political challenges the heteronormativity (OR = 13.76 $p < .001$). This means the general liberalism and greater sensitivity to racial and gender hierarchies among LGBs did seem to be the major forces behind their greater involvement in struggles against heterosexism. Conversely, the OR for sexual identities and the peace, environmental, and occupy movements were no longer significant.

The last column explores the link of sexual identities to movement participation when holding all of the selection, embeddedness, and conversion constant. The full model acted much like the separate embeddedness and conversion regressions before it. Sexual identities only had a direct significant association with participation in LGB political mobilizations (OR = 9.44, $p < .001$), but the significant association with all other social movements ended. In fact, the combined effects of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors were striking as the ORs for peace, environmental, and occupy movements were nearly 1.0 and the direction of sexual identities to movement engagement were reversed for five of the social movements (Pseudo R^2 also ranged from 0.38 to 0.16). This final regression suggests that both the embeddedness and conversion factors by themselves can explain the greater involvement of LGBs in peace, environmental, and labor social movements, but the combined effects these sorts of variables has a stronger damping effect for each sort of movement outside of movements that challenge the privileging of heterosexuals.

4.3. Strengths and limitations in the research design

This study is unique and rigorous in many ways. Few studies compare movement participation across sexual identities (e.g., [Andersen and Jennings, 2010](#); [Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002](#)) and these studies mainly limit themselves to studies of activism for LGB rights ([Montgomery and Stewart, 2012](#)). Even fewer studies explored sexual identity differences in feminist ([Duncan, 1999](#); [Fisher et al., 2017](#); [White, 2006](#)) or antiracist movements ([Battle and Harris, 2013](#); [Terriquez, 2015](#)) but this is only the third study that explores the role of sexual identities in predicting participation in wide range of contemporary social movements ([Andersen and Jennings, 2010](#); [Friedman and Ayres, 2013](#)).

Earlier studies that compared protesting across sexual identities often study only a few predictor variables ([Andersen and Jennings, 2010](#); [Duncan, 1999](#); [Rollins and Hirsch, 2003](#); [Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002](#); [White, 2006](#)). This analysis explores a much wider range of selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors in explaining activist differences between different sexualities. [Swank and Fahs \(2017\)](#) also used the political distinctiveness model to explain protesting differences by sexual identities, but the study failed to look at the goals of the protesters and sample was limited to young adults who answered questions over twenty years ago.

Use of a national random sample is also unique for this line of inquiry. Studies on sexual identities and social movement participation often rely on convenience samples of college students ([Friedman and Ayres, 2013](#)), members of activist organizations ([Terriquez, 2015](#)), or people who attended a political event ([Andersen and Jennings, 2010](#); [Fisher et al., 2017](#); [Rollins and Hirsch, 2003](#); [Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002](#)). Convenience samples of this sort often have small sample sizes and create extremely homogeneous samples that overloaded the percentage of sexual minorities who are younger, more educated, living in the same region, already “out” and located solidly within the LGB community ([Rhoads, 1997](#)). Such selection biases are less likely to occur with a random national sample that tries to insure equal access to all segments of the US population. Finally, [Egan \(2008\)](#) argues that sexual identities fits his theory better than sexuality behaviors and this study follows such advice.

Conversely, this study has some of its own limitations. The small proportion of sexual minorities can compromise the statistical power of the regressions and cross-sectional studies always risk potential problems of temporal ordering. People rarely change their sexual identities after attending joining a social movement but participation in activism can make people more aware of discrimination or it can encourage them to attach greater importance to belonging to political groups. Similarly, without longitudinal data one cannot tell if these findings apply across different generations. However, a recent study that pooled 25 years of data found gays and lesbians were significantly more liberal than heterosexuals on gender norms, punishment of criminals, immigration, and religious issues from 1991 to 2106 (Schnabel, 2018). When addressing measurement issues, the presence of suitable ANES items do not mean that the ANES items are flawless. While the list of eight social movements covers many major social movements it still ignores some social movements that currently exists (i.e., immigrant rights, disability activism, or the labor movement). The movement measure also lacks information on the amount of participation across a lifetime and the ways that a person normally participated in the social movement. Finally, my measure on sexual identities broadly asks if people consider themselves heterosexual, bisexual, and gay or lesbian. While this item clearly captures a person's general sexual identity, this measure misses differences among sexual minorities does not tell us how a person's decided on this identity nor if this identity is more stable or fluid over a lifetime (Diamond, 2008).

5. Conclusion

This study started with a simple premise. Participation in liberal social movements can vary by a person's sexual identity. To address this issue, the tendency of people joining eight types of social movements were aggregated by their sexual identities (LGB and heterosexual). This technique revealed the folly of essentialist assumptions about politics. The majority of people from all sexualities never joined social movements, so there was not a universal and absolute difference between of different sexualities. However, a probabilistic approach discovered that LGBs engage in more liberal movements than heterosexuals and sexual minorities were significantly more likely than heterosexuals to join four movements (LGB rights, peace, environmentalism, and occupy Wall Street). The divergence of movement participation was at its widest for matters of LGB liberation (20% compared to 1%) but LGBs were more than twice as likely as heterosexuals to join antiwar, environmental, and anticorporate movements (similar to Andersen and Jennings, 2010). Conversely, a noticeable sexual identity gap was not present in other liberal or conservative social movements (feminism, antiracism, the Tea Party and Pro-life). This lack of sexuality effects for feminist and antiracist movements counters the findings of earlier non-random samples (Andersen and Jennings, 2010; Duncan, 1999; Friedman and Ayres, 2013; Terriquez, 2015; White, 2006) but does confirm some recent studies that found an equivalent level of feminist ideals among people of different sexual identities (Harnois, 2015; Harnois, 2017; McDermott and Schwartz, 2013; Swank and Fahs, 2017). Clearly, these findings beg further research to determine if sexual identities really have little bearing on political struggles against racism and sexism.

To see if the observed sexual identity differences in movement participation were the byproduct of other core factors, this study used theories political distinctiveness (Egan, 2008; Grollman, 2017; Lewis et al., 2011; Swank and Fahs, 2017). Political distinctiveness theories suggests that bivariate connections of sexual identities to activism could be the result of different selection, embeddedness, and conversion forces. The theory of political distinctiveness was addressed through a series of logistic regressions that tested the claim that the increased involvement of LGBs in liberal social movements could be attributable to a combination of demographic, contextual, and perceptual factors.

The ability of political distinctiveness variables to explain greater liberalism among sexual minorities depended on the goals of the social movement. The link of sexual identities to LGB activism was mostly impervious to the variables in the models. None of the selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors eliminated the significant sexual identity differences for participation in LGB activism. This could mean that gays and lesbians are inherently different in their tendency to join movements that challenge heterosexual privilege (similar to Battle and Harris, 2013; Grollman, 2017; Lewis et al., 2011) or ANES ignored key selection, embeddedness, or conversion factors.

While it possible that the sexual identity gap in LGB activism is immune to selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors, it is also possible that this finding could be an artifact of three issues: 1) heterosexual allies are a such rare phenomena that it is hard to fully collapsed a 20 percentage point difference in LGB activism without an even large sample; 2) measurement errors could have underestimated the effect of the variables in the study; and 3) the ANES data set could overlooked some key extraneous variables that were not specified in our empirical analysis.

This study also tried to determine if selection, embeddedness, and conversion factors played equal roles in explaining the increased involvement of LGBs in other liberal social movements. Selection arguments claim that sexual identity differences in political engagement could be due to the unique social statuses and childhood experiences of LGBs. It was hypothesized that gays and lesbians join more liberal social movements because they are more educated and younger than heterosexuals. While these claims sound plausible, these factors by themselves did not dramatically alter the connection of sexual identities to the participation in the occupy Wall Street, peace, and environmental movements. While these finding suggesting an absence of educational effects for participation in these political mobilizations (Egan, 2008; Lewis et al., 2011; Swank and Fahs, 2017), it is possible that education could have had a larger effect if ANES had a measure for a person's college major or exposure to class content that inspires liberal political engagement (Beaumont et al., 2006; Swank and Fahs, 2017). Finally, the ANES data could not test Egan's (2008) claim that self-identified gays and lesbians are often raised in more liberal and educated families than heterosexuals or men-who-have-sex-with men.

Embeddedness theories highlight the role of social networks in political endeavors (Brady et al., 1995; Klandermans, 1997; Passy, 2001; Schussman and Soule, 2005). To escape homophobic groups and institutions, sexual minorities often use LGB peer groups and friends to normalize and reclaim a demeaned identity. Greater LGB social ties also offers access to conversations about the absurdity

of heteronormativity and can reinforce the need to become politically engaged. When exploring LG community immersion, ANES had measures on emotional closeness to LG individuals, knowing LG individuals, and membership in political groups. Greater contact with political groups and LGB individuals eliminated the significant link of sexual identities to participation in peace activism, environmentalism, and occupy Wall Street. This suggests that greater proportions of gays and lesbians in these movements could be partially attributed to the qualities of their acquaintances and group affiliations. While these findings counters Egan's (2008) findings that the role of embeddedness is “overemphasized” in studies of distinct LGB political attitudes, it parallels the claims that being attuned to LGB political issues (Lewis et al., 2011) and joining political groups is crucial to greater political engagement among sexual minorities (Armstrong, 2002; Battle and Harris, 2013; Swank and Fahs, 2017).

Although LGB contacts and political group memberships were important in this study, other dimensions of embeddedness could have produced larger ramifications. LGB community connections could have focused on the ramifications of living in gay friendly neighborhoods (Egan, 2008) and daily interactions in LGB centered workplaces, restaurants, and social clubs (Duncan, 1999; McClendon, 2014; Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002; Swank and Fahs, 2012). Moreover, measures on participation in LGB, environmental, peace, and labor advocacy groups could have produced bigger outcomes (Heaney and Rojas, 2014; Swank and Fahs, 2012) as could have measures on perceived racism and sexism in LGB individuals and organizations (Battle and Harris, 2013; VanDaalen and Santos, 2017).

Conversion theories connect social movement activities to experiences of exclusion and mistreatment. 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 heterosexism can also undermine the credibility of other social institutions and foster greater solidarity with other marginalized groups. Moreover, this conversion process can become a “master frame” or “identity for empowerment” that facilitates a vision of how battles against homophobia are also battles against racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc. (Armstrong, 2002; Bernstein, 1997; Carroll and Ratner, 1996; Heaney and Rojas, 2014).

This conversion argument had mixed results in this study. As stated earlier, sexual identities predicted participation in LGB, peace, environmental, and Occupy movements but there was no significant difference in LGB activism against race and gender biases. This suggests that gays and lesbians may recognize racism and sexism more than heterosexuals (Grollman, 2017; Kleiman et al., 2015; Swank and Fahs, 2017) but this recognition of sexist and racist practices does not automatically translate into greater feminist and anti-racist activism (Harnois, 2017).

Conversion factors, as operationalized in this study, were also ill-equipped to neutralize the link of sexual identities to participation in LGB movements. Being a sexual minority increased participation in LGB movements regardless of the fact that sexual minorities were more liberal, saw greater levels of widespread discrimination, and experienced more personal cases of racial discrimination than heterosexuals. However, one should remember that ANES lacked information on exposure to heterosexist discrimination and this is a key element in LGB activism (Friedman and Ayres, 2013; Swank and Fahs, 2013).

Although conversion factors did not dramatically undermine the link of sexual identities to LGB activism, the same cannot be said for other social movements. Conversion factors eliminated the significant links of sexual identities to peace, environmental, and occupy Wall Street mobilizations. Calling oneself a liberal, being exposed to racial discrimination, expressing an awareness of institutionalized inequities, and rejecting social hierarchies seems to undercut the effects of sexuality for these political campaigns (Lewis et al., 2011). Accordingly, lesbians and gays were more inclined to join collective efforts to contest environmental degradation, US war policies, and economic polarization because they were more aware and less accepting of social inequalities than heterosexuals. Finally, conversion factors could have had a bigger effect if ANES had measures about the rejection of militarism, the virtues of US foreign policy, the consequences of environmental problems, the extent of economic polarization, respect for poor people, or distrust of corporations, banking, and the stock market.

In taking this research as a starting point, this study begs for more research on the connections between sexual identities and activism. It is important to test the finding of equivalent levels of feminist and antiracist activism among LGBs and heterosexuals. Perhaps lesbians and heterosexual women are more feminist than gay men or bisexuals women retain more traditional gender roles than lesbian women. Future activism studies should include different sexuality measures in their analysis and it would be interesting to see if political distinctiveness theories applies only to sexual minorities who confidently disclose their sexual status (as compared to people who are conflicted, ashamed, and closeted about their same-sex attractions). Hopefully political distinctiveness theories can leave the confines of political sciences and be used more widely to the field of sexuality studies. This study suggests that studies that ignore selection, embeddedness, and conversion variables in their analysis are likely to mis-specify the links between sexual identities and wide litany of political and social behaviors. Finally, this study should reinforce the value of having national random samples and I recommend replication studies explore the ways that these findings hold for data from other decades, countries, and continents.

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