

Trumpism, Citizenship, and the Future of the LGBTQ Movement

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Scholarship on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) politics argues that political claims, such as access to the military and marriage, are most effective when representatives from the group articulate that the desire for inclusion and participation in those institutions is *similar* to the desires held by their straight and nontransgender counterparts. This strategy of assimilation has yielded many positive legal changes. And yet the Donald Trump administration marks a period in which these gains have been repeatedly challenged and particular segments of the LGBTQ group are increasingly under attack. This article offers a preliminary analysis of how LGBTQ politics has been impacted by the 2016 election. Using a historical case study of LGBTQ identity construction and agenda development during the second half of the 1990s, I ask: how might the LGBTQ group mine its recent history for clues to rethink its political agenda and political strategies? Having shown that opportunities to advance a different movement — one focused on more radical, broadly inclusive changes — were bypassed during this period, I conclude by putting forward several recommendations for contemporary LGBTQ movement building and resistance strategies.

Keywords: LGBTQ politics, intersectionality, Trumpism, homonationalism

On July 26, 2017, late-night television host Stephen Colbert tweeted a doctored photo of Donald Trump's June 14, 2016, tweet, in which he wrote, "To the LGBT Community! I will fight for you while Hillary

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brings in more people that will threaten your freedoms and beliefs.” Colbert’s screenshot of the tweet, satirically revised in the wake of President Trump’s sudden reversal on allowing transgender people to serve in the military, was posted with key words crossed out to read, “To the LGBT Community! I will fight you.”

I begin here because I believe that reading Colbert’s edits of Trump’s tweet as a palimpsest, in which both messages are conveyed simultaneously, reveals important insights into the question of how LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) politics has changed in the context of what political scientist Robert Lieberman and his coauthors (2017, 9) refer to as “Trumpism,” or “a political orientation that challenges the interlocking liberal commitments to a relatively interventionist state, economic openness, cultural and political pluralism, and internationalism.” By claiming to protect the LGBT community from threats — the presumably “radical Muslim terrorist” in the wake of the mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in June 2016 — the initial tweet by then–presidential candidate Trump illustrates what has become politics as usual under Trumpism: a continuation of nativism (and complimentary isolationism) that extends from Trump’s eight-year “birther” campaign against Barack Obama and the simultaneous leveraging of political outsider status as an appeal to the rhetoric of resentment that is embedded in contemporary populism (Bessire and Bond 2017; Lieberman et al. 2017; Tabachnick 2016).

Moreover, in Trump’s tweets, the positioning the “LGBT community” as unconditionally embraced by U.S. democratic norms, such as equality and liberty, in relation to the vague threat of terrorist outsiders provides a succinct illustration of Jasbir Puar’s 2007 theory of homonationalism. Specifically, rhetorically leveraging the “LGBT community” against the assumption that Muslims are culturally and thus necessarily homophobic is used to promote the United States’ supposedly unique egalitarianism while simultaneously justifying the xenophobic and racist positions that serve as the bedrock foundation for Trumpism. When viewed through the lens of homonationalism and the ongoing list of Trump administration repeals, revisions, and executive orders targeting various sects of the LGBT group for the removal of protections or as the subjects of institutionalized discrimination, Colbert’s version of the president’s June 14, 2016, tweet brings the Trump administration’s true attitude toward sexuality and gender identity into stark relief. It is not the “LGBT community” that concerns Trump but rather the advancement of a nativist and isolationist “America First” agenda that uses rhetorical

loys such as these to elevate some members of the polity as belonging while simultaneously casting others as perpetual outsiders. The hollow promise of this inclusion for LGBTQ people is thus captured in Colbert's edited tweet. In the social and political context of Trumpism, the "LGBT community" is embraced as members of the polity at the very same time that the most vulnerable among that group — undocumented LGBT migrants, LGBT Muslims, and transgender people of color — are made all the more precarious. Colbert's follow-up tweet, with certain words haphazardly crossed out but still legible, as if a child had performed the edits, thus uses humor to not only underscore the belligerent stance that undergirds Trumpism, but also the perceived viciousness of his administration's attacks against the very community he once expressed a desire to protect.

These observations on the paradoxical status of LGBTQ people in the age of Trumpism invites broader consideration of how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer activists and advocates should approach agenda development in this contemporary political moment. In my previous work on how gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities were linked together by political actors in the United States during the late 1990s and early 2000s to produce a new political coalition and umbrella identity category, "GLBT," I noted that the introduction of GLBT as a unified political identity category and associated agenda of political interests was used to pose gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people as a coherent and large minority group that merits rights and recognition under the law (Murib 2017). Although the introduction of "GLBT" quickly evolved into the most common way that activists, community members, journalists, and politicians referred to a shared set of interests organized around sexuality and gender identity — now articulated as its nominally more inclusive iteration, LGBTQ — I argued that the construction of these groups along a single axis of identity — sexuality — erased the political grievances and claims of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people who carry multiple and intersecting identities, particularly LGBTQ people of color, women, transgender people, LGBTQ people with disabilities, undocumented LGBTQ migrants, and LGBTQ people living in poverty or homelessness.

The historical construction of the LGBTQ group along a single axis of identity is significant in the context of Trumpism for the opportunities it creates to advance the interests of a very particular group of LGBTQ people *as citizens*, particularly in light of the paradoxes of inclusion and exclusion that open this article. Citizenship, in this sense, is not simply

legal status but rather a system of valuation that marks some people as normative citizens and others as abject citizens who remain members of the polity but are cast as exceptional outsiders (Berlant 2014; Brandzel 2016). Of particular concern is how the elevation of citizenship rights and obscuring of intersecting identifications has been used by political actors to define and reinforce the boundaries of the LGBTQ group as implicitly white, middle-class, gender-normative, and able individuals who merit recognition and inclusion in social and political institutions ranging from marriage, congressional representation, and the military. Making political demands as citizens, in other words, relied on the projection of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and queer-identified people as individuals who “but for” their sexuality would not be discriminated against (Crenshaw 1989, 151). This projection of a particular group of LGBTQ individuals who would be eligible for legal rights claims consequently foreclosed representation for LGBTQ people who fall outside this narrow ambit of citizenship by virtue of being located at the intersection of multiple axes of identity, including race, ability, gender, religion, migrant status, and class.

Given that notions of proper citizenship — *who*, exactly, is included and afforded standing in the polity — define the current political context of Trumpism, I want to revisit these arguments to continue to think about how the historical processes of narrowly constructing the LGBTQ group as deserving citizens might help us rethink how the LGBTQ group is constructed, the agendas it advances, and how that group works in partnership with various movements mobilizing in this contemporary moment. I use a historical case study of a series of meetings of LGBTQ organizations held in the late 1990s — during which time the LGBT group coalesced and major political agenda items such as marriage and military service were developed (Rimmerman 2013) — for clues into how contemporary LGBT politics might be potentially revised. To those ends, I raise and answer the following questions: to what extent do claims to citizenship and inclusion offer the most effective routes to political and social change for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and queer-identified people in the context of Trumpism? What can political actors embedded within LGBTQ political organizations learn from the rich history of LGBTQ groups pursuing political goals that fall outside of the framework of citizenship? And how might these lessons invite consideration for reconfiguring the politics of sexuality and gender moving forward?

Using this historical case study, I argue that the political and social context of Trumpism calls for the politics of sexuality and gender identity to move out of the centralized sphere of interest groups and targeting the federal government for reforms and inclusion on the basis of citizenship. These reconfigured organizations and movements should meet the demands of this particular political and social milieu of Trumpism by instead pursuing a more decentralized political agenda, with the main features of this decentralization being threefold: (1) a return to grassroots agenda setting at the local level to best assess and identify urgent sites of resistance; (2) loosely associated coalitions of organizations focused on specific issues such as health care, poverty, mass incarceration, and immigration justice working in concert to attempt victories for as wide of a swath of impacted groups as possible; and (3) public education campaigns that aim to combat the swelling tide of resentment among the far right by indicating shared experiences of hardship, difficulty, and marginalization in political and social life that accompany economic shifts and the effects they have on LGBTQ people, white rural populations, and people of color. Throughout these arguments, I argue that what is needed now is not a movement seeking inclusion on the basis of citizenship and rights, but a collection of movements advancing changes that stand to benefit the most precarious members of the polity.

I advance these arguments in the three sections that follow. First, as I am concerned with the dynamics of how and to what effect identities are constructed, I briefly review political science scholarship on identity construction that draws on intersectionality as a theoretical starting point and put forward my own intersectional framework of three elements — backlash, conflict, and representation — for studying identity construction. I apply this framework to a historical case study of a series of meetings that brought lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer political actors together to craft a shared agenda and construct LGBTQ political identity, and I show how these political actors succeeded in foregrounding the LGBT group as a uniquely marginalized sector of the population by underscoring certain members as normative representatives of the group, even while perpetuating other LGBTQ-identified members as abject or nonmembers. In the final section, I draw these threads together to suggest how returning to a decentralized and loosely defined group of political organizations and movements that allow diversity of interests to flourish might be the most effective strategy in the age of Trumpism.

LITERATURE REVIEW, CASE STUDY, AND APPROACH

Social Science Approaches to Political Identity Group Construction

It is generally accepted in social movement and interest group scholarship that a shared sense of identity — that is, collective identity — reduces the personal costs of activism and advocacy (Gamson 1995; Gould 2009). How these identities are constructed, however, has been the subject of considerable debate in the social science scholarship. The political science scholarship on political identities, for instance, takes the boundaries drawn to contain and frame identity-based groups as empirical and theoretical starting points. Identity, in other words, is not static and predetermined but rather dynamic and the result of political wrangling over the boundaries of membership. The focus on processes that give rise to boundaries and the divisions to designate similarity for group members means that identity is understood by political scientists as a paradox in that assertions of belonging and membership require the simultaneous articulation of boundaries to exclude outsiders that give the group's identification and groupness meaning (Norton 1988). In the words of theorist William Connolly, "Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty" (2002, 64).

Taking identity groups as social and political phenomena to explain, particularly with respect to these constitutive exclusions, directs political scientists to examine the political effects of the processes and mechanisms through which identities are constructed. Scholarship grounded in feminist theory, specifically intersectionality, sheds light on the effects of intra- and intergroup exclusions for what comes to be known as political identity. Cathy Cohen's 1999 study of Black political identity and political action, for example, shows how crosscutting issues, such as activism and political responses to HIV/AIDS and sexuality, were minimized by political actors to project the boundaries of the Black identity group as assimilating with dominant monogamous, heterosexual, and gender-normative norms. Cohen explains,

By exaggerating out-group differences and minimizing in-group variation, many African Americans use racial group interest as a proxy for self-interest. The progress of the group, therefore, is understood as an appropriate, accurate, and accessible evaluative measure of one's individual success. (1999, 10)

Cohen's analysis illustrates how Black people living with HIV/AIDS were consequently silenced in political agendas advanced by interest groups that claimed to be concerned with the survival and success of Black people in the United States. The development of these goals, Cohen argues, can only be understood against the backdrop of a long history of social policies (and associated social science) that pathologizes Black sexuality and families as well as social stereotypes of Black sexuality that are deployed to define and maintain racial difference and marginalization. For Cohen, Black political identity — and the norms of that identity as it is embraced and promulgated — is consequently shaped by political actors and members within the group as well as in response to broader political and social contexts.

Similarly, Cristina Beltrán (2010) traces the processes through which political actors constructed group and identity boundaries to bring together Cubans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans — among many other Spanish-speaking groups — under the signifier “Latino” at the sites of social movement activism and later interest group advocacy. Also concerned with dynamics of within-group exclusions, Beltrán's study illustrates that it is not solely the unique demands of each nation-based group that are elevated or silenced within Latino depending on strategic considerations but also, more importantly, that women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified members and the interests they hold *within* the categories of Cuban, Mexican, and Puerto Rican are almost always erased in political activism and advocacy under the aegis of “Latino politics.”

Calling on feminist and critical race theory, Cohen's and Beltrán's in-depth case studies of marginalization within identity-based groups reveals varying degrees of silence and erasure for members who have relatively less power and are seen as contradicting the constructions of Black or Latino identity as unified and assimilating to dominant social and political norms. Dara Strolovitch's study of interest groups further reorients understandings of marginalization and erasure within groups, showing through a systematic analysis of interest group representation that while leaders in interest groups claim to represent the needs of all group members, interest groups often do not advocate on behalf of the political interests that affect what she terms “intersectionally marginalized” (2007, 10) members. Rather, there is an expectation expressed by leaders that their advocacy work will combine with the efforts of other interest groups and eventually “trickle down” to benefit intersectionally disadvantaged members. One of the troubles of this assumption, as Strolovitch points out, is it fails to see the ways that other

organizations are also structuring their advocacy and political work in ways that benefits the most advantaged members, perpetuating neglect for those who are most in need of interest group advocacy. Strolovitch explains the stakes of this relative lack of representation:

Failing to make the case for these multiply marginalized subgroups within their constituencies and within the broader community of organizations representing marginalized groups *limits* the possibility that they will do so effectively to the larger polity. This limitation *reinforces* rather than alleviates the marginalization of intersectionally disadvantaged constituents. (2007, 209; emphasis added)

The implications of these findings are particularly pressing given that interest groups and social movements play a strong role in mediating identities and interests for members, projecting the concerns and political issues that then come to be representative of the group in broader politics as well as culturally. As Strolovitch explains, the constructions of group identities along a single axis reinforces — indeed, is premised on — the organization of large portions of the membership *out* of the group, specifically those who are intersectionally disadvantaged.

These three studies of groups and identity-based politics in the United States demonstrate the ways that feminist and critical race theories can be used by researchers to open up identity-based groups to further inquiry, revealing how marginalization occurs not only between groups — as the predominant theories of identity and groups in social psychology, sociology, and political science hold — but also *within* groups. Intersectionality, specifically the critical insight that race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, religion, and ability are not unitary and mutually exclusive but rather always relationally defined, furnishes the theoretical framework that makes these examinations of within-group marginalization possible.

Of further importance, merging intersectional thinking with critical citizenship scholarship, these studies suggest that the implication of within-group marginalization is the ordering not only of political priorities but also of the construction of a *normative* and *representative* member of that identity-based group and the reinforcement of abject status for those members whose membership and interests are left unaddressed. Therefore, while history suggests that the construction of identity-based groups along a single axis allows the advancement of successful incremental political gains on the basis of citizenship claims, the context of Trumpism blended with homonationalism is a new playing field upon which stakes of these exclusions are much more urgent, with emphasis placed on the question of

who belongs and *what* rights they should have. Intersectionality provides a useful analytic lens for investigating how these within-group exclusions have morphed in the context of Trumpism and the political effects of these dynamics. The following section reviews the main interventions made by intersectionality and introduces my analytic framework for using intersectionality to study identity group construction and agenda development.

Intersectional Framework to Analyze Political Identity Construction

Intersectionality is rooted in two core ontological assumptions. The first is that axes of marginalization, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and nation are not unitary, static, or mutually exclusive but are rather interrelated and thus mutually constitutive of subject positions (Crenshaw 1989). By implication, then, no social group is homogenous, and “each category of difference has within-group diversity that sheds light on the way we think about groups as political actors in politics” (Hancock 2007, 251). The second is that these subject positions are contingent and variously shaped by political and social factors, such as through interactions with institutions, the law, and activism (Simien 2007). Theorizing subjectivity as “differently and differentially constituted through relations of privilege and penalty, with real material effects,” intersectionality breaks with the predominant approach to identity and groups in the social sciences by attending to dynamics between *and* within groups that give rise to social and political inequality (Dhamoon 2011, 240). Inequality and marginalization, in other words, are not predicted by factors such as race and gender but are the starting points for analysis illustrating the ways in which subject positions are shaped by ideological structures, such as sexism, racism, heteronormativity, and classism (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Hancock 2013; Strolovitch 2007). By directing researchers to focus on these ideologies, intersectionality furnishes a powerful theoretical and analytic lens for a study of within-group marginalization that takes place at the site of identity group construction.

Drawing on this review of intersectionality, there are three parts to the analytic framework I propose for studying political identity group construction, with specific focus on revealing dynamics of within-group marginalization: backlash, conflict, and representation. I take each of these in turn, describing how I define each process and my expectations for how each one operates in identity group construction.

The first component of the framework is backlash. I define backlash as opposition or stigmas that are directed against the group; in this study, backlash is assumed to emanate from political actors who consider themselves opponents of the LGBT group. I theorize that backlash creates conditions for identity construction in two different ways. The first is through what scholars of social movements refer to as “stigma transformation” (Benford and Snow 2000; Berbrier 2002). In brief, stigma transformation describes the processes through which political actors attempt to *reframe* meanings associated with the group — taking negative connotations with identities and projecting them as positive associations. Examples of this include the Black Power call to arms, “Black is beautiful.” The second way backlash creates ripe conditions for identity construction is by promoting dialogue about stigmatized groups. Recent scholarship shows that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender political actors have been notably successful at using the backlash that accompanies increased awareness about sexuality and gender identity to engage in public dialogues that persuade people to view sexuality and gender identity as natural and human facets of personal experience (Ayoub 2014; Fetner 2008). Blending these two understandings of the link between backlash and identity construction, I expect that the context of backlash furnishes the urgent circumstances in which movements are made, identities are constructed, and agendas are negotiated (Bernstein 1997).

The second component of the framework is conflict. I define conflict in this study as debates or disputes that take place among political actors regarding the boundaries and meanings of political identity groups — in other words, conflicts over who is included and excluded from the group. Attending to conflicts that take place among political actors directs attention to discourse — and especially narrative — including origin stories that are used to give the group a sense of coherent emergence. Writing of the analytic leverage offered by intersectionality with respect to identity construction, Kimberlé Crenshaw describes what this focus on conflict and narrative reveals:

[W]hen identity politics fail us, as they frequently do, it is not primarily because those politics take as natural certain categories that are socially constructed but rather because the *descriptive content* of those categories and the *narratives* on which they are based have privileged some experiences and excluded others. (1991, 1298; emphasis added)

The focus on conflict in this framework strives to address the issues raised by Crenshaw. Attending to conflicts over the boundaries, membership, and

meanings associated with a group provides an opportunity to examine how and to what degree some members and their interests are privileged, while others are silenced and even erased from group membership, and in so doing, illustrates the political stakes of these exclusions, as they are often self-consciously identified by political actors as they take part in these debates.

The third component of the framework is representation. Representation is the primary way that political actors convey meanings and interests associated with the group across political venues, and thus plays a significant role in how the broader public comes to understand various identity groups, which in turn contributes to how the group members understand their identities with respect to politics. Representation, in the language of political theory, plays a constitutive role (Disch 2012) and “mediates” who is considered members of the groups for the members themselves (Williams 1998). Merging this view of representation with insights from intersectionality draws attention to examining the hierarchies of membership that arise through negotiations over representation of the group and the agendas associated with that group (Strolovitch 2007). I explore representation as part of identity group construction by analyzing the trade-offs that take place with respect to how the group is represented, with attention focused on who and which issues are elevated as important to the group.

Before detailing my case study and approach for implementing this framework, I want to make an important caveat to this framework clear: although the elements of this three-part framework are outlined separately here, these three processes often occur simultaneously, in response to each other, or in feedback loops to shape political outcomes. For the purposes of advancing this framework to demonstrate its analytic potential, however, each process is taken separately in the case study that follows. I do this to show how each operates to determine the inclusions and exclusions that define groups, even while it will be abundantly clear throughout this study that these three processes — backlash, conflict, and representation — all act in concert to shape within-group marginalization and group identity construction.

Case Study, Archive, and Historical Approach

A series of meetings called the National Policy Roundtables (hereafter NPR) serve as the case study for applying my framework of backlash, conflict, and representation. Held biennially, the NPR meetings were convened by the National Gay and Lesbian Policy Institute and brought

together anywhere between 20 to 30 leaders. Participants included executive directors from national interest groups (such as the Human Rights Campaign, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Log Cabin Republicans, GenderPAC, BiNet) as well as local interest groups, such as OutFront Minnesota and ACT-UP New York, and activists, such as representatives from Southerners on New Ground (SONG), all with the hope of drawing them together in coordinated political action. The transcripts from these meetings are archived in the Cornell University Human Sexuality Collection. I focus on three important meetings that defined the goals of the NPR in its initial years: March 1998, September 1998, and September 1999, which are transcribed verbatim in more than 200 pages. I periodize this study to these three meetings because of the influx of activity and discussion regarding the creation of a unified and national movement during this time (Rimmerman 2015).

I use a method called critical discourse analysis (Wodak 2009), which systematically analyzes discourse to identify changes in the meanings that are attached to particular words, concepts, and political objectives through the lens of my three-part framework. The analysis of these transcripts reveals evidence of a critical juncture at which political actors brokered a coalition to unite gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in political action, which was then used to inform understandings of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender identities, as well as the objectives this newly united group would pursue. The following section demonstrates how this analytic framework is applied to the NPR case study.

CASE STUDY: NATIONAL POLICY ROUNDTABLES

Backlash: Making Coalitions

The first National Policy Roundtable was convened in Washington, DC, over two days in September 1997.¹ Backlash was evident during this period, taking two forms. The first was that the perceived unity of evangelical Christians — particularly in their efforts to stigmatize homosexuality and wage attacks against the various groups participating in the NPR — figured prominently in the motivations to form a coalition

1. In 1988, a similar set of meetings were convened to gather leaders to capitalize on the momentum of the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Referred to as the “War Conference,” these meetings established the intention for coordinated political action; however, they also drew critiques for not being diverse and inclusive. See Darrell Yates Rist, “AIDS as Apocalypse: The Deadly Costs of an Obsession,” *The Nation*, February 13, 1989.

articulated by some participants. The second was a period of what sociologist Amy Stone (2012) calls a “losing streak,” for gay and lesbian political organizations, during which evangelical Christians were able to institutionalize discrimination through local ballot measures. As the following reading shows, the proposals for a new coalition channeled efforts into challenging the opposition to social and political gains by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities advanced by evangelical Christians. Backlash, in other words, incentivized these groups to come together in political action.

For example, the second meeting of the NPR, which was convened in March 1998, focused on educating participants about strategies to target federal agencies with the most impact and, by association, how to effectively use coalitions to affect change in politics in the increasingly hostile political environment. A panel of experts, many of whom were ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) members and had been active in the struggle to urge federal action on AIDS in the face of the apathetic and negligent Ronald Reagan administration, led the session. These panelists emphasized the potential power of utilizing coalitions to target the many large agencies that make up the federal bureaucracy. One panelist, identified only as Marj from the Lesbian Health Advocacy Network, instructed participants,

[P]ick an agency to lead in an area and make a coalition and go for it. . . . I encourage the national groups to say they will do coalition building and take a lead around a department, but don't assume the department belongs to you. . . . I really fervently believe that our agenda can only be implemented if national organizations pick a department to run a coalition around.²

Of particular significance for this discussion of unity and inclusion at the site of sexuality and gender identity based political activism and advocacy is Marj's use of lessons from HIV/AIDS activism to inform the future direction of the actions to be undertaken by the NPR participants. Scholars of LGBT history have described the ways in which the structure of ACT-UP succeeded in centering the diversity of the group by structuring it as a collection of affinity groups, or caucuses, under the broader umbrella of the organization. In other words, a defining structural feature of ACT-UP membership was taking part in smaller affinity groups that ranged in specificity from people interested in holistic and complementary therapies

2. “National Policy Roundtable: Selected Minutes on Federal Agencies and Outcome of the 2000 Election,” Cornell University, Human Sexuality Collection (HSC) 7301, box 299, folder 17.

for HIV/AIDS to people of color living with HIV/AIDS (Gould 2009). These smaller groups would then join together to advance a common goal — addressing various obstacles in the fight against HIV/AIDS — with the benefit of a diversity of interests and identities represented. The democratic character of ACT-UP was key to the success of the affinity group structure because even if an affinity group’s proposal was not approved by a plenary vote, the proposals they put forth would be subject to discussion and play a key role in shaping the eventual action.

Marj’s advice to “run a coalition around” a problem echoes this strategy for members of the NPR. Subsequent discussion in the transcript of this meeting shows that the participants took this instruction seriously, with some suggesting that a variety of coalitions could be formed to advance a wide range of issues that impact the lives of LGBTQ people, including antipoverty activism and efforts to ensure access to elderly care for older LGBTQ people. The proliferation of these potential agenda items suggests that the possibility of working in coalitions generated excitement among participants, and illustrates Bernstein’s 1997 assertion that the urgency of responding to social and political circumstances brings disparate groups together into a united front and sets into motion the processes of defining movements. Identity-based groups, in other words, are not based on inherent traits that bring the group together but are a response to political choices to work in concert with each other. Focusing on this moment shows that the coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people is not a sexuality-based group that naturally coheres on the basis of those presumed similarities but one that is brought together under a common frame for unified political action. Negotiating the boundaries of these coalitions has implications for identity construction as well as agenda development, and as the following shows, set the stage for internal conflicts over *who* would be included in the LGBT group and *which* interests would be advanced.

Conflict: Defining Sexuality and Politics

Having committed to coordinated and coalitional political action, many participants argued that it was incumbent on the group to define the boundaries of group membership by shifting the discourse on the origins of sexual orientation and gender identity, which sparked several conflicts over whether and how to reframe the boundaries of the evolving group. Advocates for this strategy argued in favor of moving the discussion away

from purportedly essential characteristics — the scientific origins that evangelical Christians cited as the reason for claiming gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identities do not actually exist — and in the direction of how gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender-identified people are model citizens. The following analysis of the conflicts over the boundaries of the movement and the meaning of group identity shows the role that discourse plays in the processes of identity construction and illustrates how some members and meanings are elevated and constructed as normative citizens, while others are ignored and silenced.

During the September 1998 meeting, Dixon Osborn, from the Service Members Legal Defense Network, summarized the debate over the origins of sexuality and gender identity as he and other participants saw it:

Often posed question to the community is, is this biology or choice. Seems to me to be separate sets of questions that pose false either-ors . . . Opponents suggest that identity of self is a matter of choice or if we act on it then it's a choice. Discussion we should have is one about morality, that it's morally good to be who we are.³

Here, Osborn proposes reframing the relevant identifications as acts of morality that only stand to benefit society. Proponents of this framing extended their arguments to support a vision of healthy families where each person is valued for his or her uniqueness, with one participant explaining that they: “have to make the argument that we are redefining the family, but not tearing down the family, talking about families coming in different shapes.”⁴ In other words, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender-identified people and their families are valuable members of a heterogeneous and multicultural democratic society who deserve consideration under the law. These claims to assimilation on the basis of being analogous to monogamous, straight couples with families were premised on the assumption that members of the LGBT group sought similar family configurations. The elevation of those who fit that mold resulted in the simultaneous erasure of those who did not — in other words, the construction of a normative member of the LGBT group and the concomitant construction of the abject member.

Leaders from groups representing bisexuals, transgender people, and LGBTQ people of color, for example, took issue with the emphasis on

3. “National Policy Roundtable Minutes: September 17 and 18, 1998,” HSC 7301, box 299, folder 13, 26.

4. “National Policy Roundtable Minutes: September 17 and 18, 1998,” HSC 7301, box 299, folder 13, 24.

morality and good citizenship, particularly as they perceived it eroding the urgency of their political demands for the most vulnerable members of their organizations. Those making assertions against this framework articulated concerns over who, exactly, among the LGBTQ group is allowed to claim morality and respectability. In making these arguments, they cited lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people who were nonmonogamous, those who do not conform to rigid gender norms of masculinity and femininity, incarcerated LGBTQ people, undocumented LGBTQ migrants, and LGBTQ people of color whose sexuality and gender identities were shaped by pernicious stereotypes that contributed to their exclusion from the “respectable” LGBTQ group (Strolovitch and Crowder 2018).

Other participants continued these conflicts, arguing that the question of morality ought to be sidestepped in favor of underscoring a definition of sexuality that would be most successful in legal struggles. Participants putting forward this position urged others to see the expediency of advancing a “born this way” definition for sexual identity. Chai Feldblum, the director of the Georgetown University Law Center, pressed participants to see the legal and political reasons for posing identity as immutable: “I would say yes there’s something called orientation and defines a set of people, very hard to change or impossible to change, and it’s central to the person’s identity. All those things are essential for constitutional and political activity.”⁵ Here, Feldblum alludes to the need to pose discrete identities as fundamentally impossible to alter and consequently linked to a unique history of discrimination in order to merit consideration under strict scrutiny by the courts. While this position captured the support of some of the participants — particularly in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1986 decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which denied constitutional protection for gay men based on what the court’s majority represented as scientific, historical, and moral reasons — there were many participants who expressed reservations about the turn to immutability for many of the same reasons that some protested the morality framing. Once again, representatives from various bisexual and transgender oriented groups, for instance, voiced strong objections to framing sexuality and gender identity as a product of biological determinants. One unidentified participant explained, “If you’re really going to actually support bi and trans have to drop the immutability thing . . . So much about being

5. “National Policy Roundtable Minutes: September 17 and 18, 1998,” HSC 7301, box 299, folder 13, 21.

intersex or transgender it's not just a matter of feeling like I'm both with it, some of it's trying things out."⁶ Comments such as these were echoed by other participants, who argued that all the members of the NPR would be well served to remember that, as one participant put it, "heterosexism is the common oppressor."⁷ Similar to the arguments made by transgender-identified activists, who urged lesbian and gay political actors during this same time period to see gender normativity as the common oppressor that should unite transgender, lesbian, and gay activists (Murib 2015), these participants urged others at the NPR to keep in mind that questions of the origins of sexual orientation and gender identity were irrelevant in the face of socially constructed categories that are used to maintain the dominance of straight-identified people over all other possible relationship configurations.

Conflicts over how to frame sexuality and gender identities occupied the remainder of the meeting. Ultimately, these conflicts were resolved through compromise, with the majority of participants agreeing that it was incumbent on the group to unite against a common oppressor and situate the political claims of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender-identified people in relation to the U.S. Constitution, in opposition to heterosexual domination, and with immediate concern for how marginalized groups ought to be treated under the law. This latter focus on the law, in particular, was blended with the morality framing to project a marginalized group of *citizens* that would make claims for attaining political rights. Therefore, what resulted from these conflicts was an implicit agreement to elevate members capable of being perceived as law-abiding and moral as normative members of the group, a status that was obtained by ignoring concerns that this framing would entail significant harms for those who do not conform to those norms.

The following section details the continuing evolution of the LGBTQ group and examines the decisions made regarding how to represent those groups across political venues.

Representation: An Inclusive "GLBT"

Over time, the NPR evolved into a site where executive directors discussed ways to make the movement more efficient by developing shared agendas

6. "National Policy Roundtable Minutes: September 17 and 18, 1998," HSC 7301, box 299, folder 13, 21.

7. "National Policy Roundtable Minutes: September 17 and 18, 1998," HSC 7301, box 299, folder 13, 22.

and delegating tasks, such as lobbying and public outreach. Increasingly, these activities were conducted under the aegis of “GLBT politics.” That is, rather than representing many different agendas through loosely structured coalitions around specific issues as they had done in the past, the organizations taking part in the NPR came to be seen as representative of a new identity category that was emerging in the late 1990s: GLBT (Valentine 2007).

Demonstrating the growing salience of the GLBT group as a group, as well as the association of that group with those white and gender-normative members constructed as normative, Urvashi Vaid, then executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, went so far as to speculate about the possibility of forming an entirely separate movement and group of organizations that would break from the focus on sexuality and citizenship claims in order to prioritize issues dedicated to racial and class justice. The following quote from the transcript of this meeting reveals the extent to which questions of how to represent the evolving group determined the meanings associated with it.

What we can then do is to create a progressive wing of the GLBT movement and resign ourselves to work with THE movement on the “sexual orientation” issue in COALITION and that there will be other ways in which THE movement cannot be together. And we can work with other groups on the race and economic justice issues.⁸

The extent to which representation of the GLBT group was dominated by the construction of normative members is illustrated in this statement, with Vaid suggesting that there was, in fact, a unified GLBT coalition that had taken shape and that the best way to address issues of marginalization within that coalition would be to form an independent wing to represent marginalized members and their interests. The new progressive wing would join in coalition with “THE” movement — comprising organizations presumably preoccupied only with sexual orientation — to draw attention to issues of economic and racial marginalization. This new wing, in other words, would represent an agenda of political goals that extended beyond making claims as citizens and target institutional sources of marginalization and oppression. While some participants supported introducing a progressive flank to the increasingly mainstream GLBT movement, others resisted this strategy on the grounds that it would further naturalize the associations of “GLBT” with both sexuality

8. “National Policy Roundtable Minutes, September 24 and 25, 1999,” HSC 7301, box 299.

and whiteness. For these participants, what was needed was a reorientation of the newly unified “GLBT” agenda to prioritize issues such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act — which would ideally help to protect Black and Latino gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender-identified people by ensuring access to employment — as well as legislation to protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in access to housing.

Taking Vaid’s comments about race and class together illustrates two important features of the GLBT coalition that had taken shape at the NPR since its inception in 1997. First, as the transcripts from these later meetings shows, over a period of just a few years, the groups participating in the NPR had steadily evolved into a united front to address issues of sexuality in politics. The second feature to note is that this new, unified GLBT movement organized on the basis on claims to proper citizenship tended to marginalize issues at the intersection of race and sexuality, as well as political agendas pertaining to bisexuals and transgender-identified people. The paradox of the new coalition and identity category developed at the NPR thus emerges. While the participants at the NPR were seemingly successful at introducing the linked and overlapping nature of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender identity categories, these links were made by naturalizing sexuality as the similarity that bound these groups together. This privileging of sexuality — understood exclusively in opposition to the categories of straight or heterosexual — effectively closed off coalitions with other political groups and completely silenced consideration for internal marginalization and exclusions produced within the GLBT category. Importantly, as the discussion of *how* to reframe associations with the GLBT group shows, the articulation of demands put forth by this group relied upon the construction of a normative member who could take advantage of an incremental legal strategy and rights-based struggle. The GLBT group, in other words, evolved into one that made claims to legal and policy changes on the basis of a very narrow understanding of citizenship, membership, and belonging.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: LGBTQ POLITICS IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

The preceding historical analysis of the period during which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups were brought together in coalitional

political action shows the evolution of the unified LGBTQ group and the elevation of certain members as normative and representative. Detailing the processes through which these changes took place illustrates the trade-offs entailed in defining a group as claimants for rights as citizens. The most obvious cost of grounding claims on the basis of citizenship is the consequently narrow construction of the group, with implications for who benefits from political action. Although the articulation of shared grievances — particularly the exclusion from institutions of citizenship, such as marriage and military service — served as useful sites for resistance, the projection of these citizenship claims under the heading of what would come to be known eventually as “LGBTQ politics” also exerted a significant influence on the construction of the group itself. These calls for inclusion in institutions of citizenship lent to the presumption that all members of the LGBTQ do, in fact, have standing to make those claims and the potential to take advantage of the extension of those citizenship rights. On the surface, this precludes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer members of the polity who are not citizens and, more importantly, channels attention away from members of those same groups who fall outside of the bounds of the normative LGBTQ citizen.

In other words, if, as the preceding analysis suggests, claims to citizenship were advanced on the premise that LGBTQ people are analogous to members of the polity who are seen as embodying proper citizenship — that is, white, gender-normative, middle-class, natural-born citizens in monogamous, heterosexual relationships — and thus deserving of similar rights *as citizens*, then this agenda excludes all those who either do not want to conform to those dominant paradigms or those who are unable to do so for various reasons. Members of these excluded groups include LGBTQ people in nonmonogamous relationships, LGBTQ migrants, transgender people who choose not to (or are unable to for financial or medical reasons) seek gender confirmation treatments, LGBTQ people who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated, LGBTQ people of varying faiths, and LGBTQ people who are living in poverty or homelessness, and LGBTQ Muslims. The parlous status of these excluded groups, particularly in this contemporary political moment, when families seeking asylum are separated at the southern border, Muslims are scapegoated as antigay (and thus anti-American), and lawful exercises of First Amendment rights to protest by people of color are under attack, suggests that the costs of this construction of normative citizenship are borne by those who need political attention the most.

The context of Trumpism, in which these precarious groups are targeted for ever more scrutiny on the basis of their citizenship or claims to it — captured most saliently by Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids and the militarization of the U.S. border with Mexico that criminalizes people seeking asylum, many of whom are LGBT identified — suggests that LGBTQ political agenda development ought to break sharply with the citizenship and assimilation frame, and instead mobilize on the basis of issues in conjunction with identity. This proposed reformulation of the LGBTQ political agenda might take cues from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movement history presented here and return to the practice of “running a coalition” around an issue, with the issues prioritized being identified by the most precarious members of these groups themselves. Focusing on grassroots agenda development in these ways would channel resources away from the powerful Washington interest groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and the LGBTQ Taskforce, and invest in decentralized movements working at the local state and city levels, which are potentially more fruitful targets for activism and advocacy because they are removed from the focus of the federal government and thus insulated from the sweeping changes instituted by the Trump administration.

There are symbolic benefits of this approach as well. Taking steps such as these to create the conditions for a diverse array of groups to organize around issues will not only contribute to the demonstration of critical mass that is necessary for movement success, but also generate more on-ramps for movement participation by showcasing the multifaceted ways that individuals can become involved in pursuing change for issues that impact their daily lives. This latter goal is important in the context of Trumpism because the prevailing climate of political gridlock and growing polarization contributes to feelings of inefficacy for members of the polity. In its most benign form, this sense of inefficacy takes the shape of political apathy and in the most pernicious form manifests as a politics of resentment that channels violence and rage against minority groups, such as that seen in protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. Fostering the formation of numerous decentralized movements that attend to the concerns that impact a wide variety of groups of people will create opportunities for people to become involved and experience the emotional and (hopefully) material benefits of movement activism.

Finally, this newly reformulated movement should revisit how LGBTQ identity is framed. Instead of advancing legal claims on the basis of proper citizenship, as was done in the 1990s through the 2000s, new LGBTQ

movements might look to educate the public on the sources of LGBTQ stigmatization and underscore the shared conditions of being cast as outsiders to proper citizenship. Potential reframings of sexuality and gender identity in this vein might revive the notion that these identities are fluid — and thus encompass far more people than those who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer — and indict the ideological forces of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and white supremacy in structuring the marginalization and erasure of those who do not conform to those norms (Cohen 1997). This more encompassing approach stands to draw the mainstream LGBTQ movement together with a wide variety of movements serving members of the polity who are perceived as abject or noncitizens. These include movements seeking justice for people who are undocumented; movements pursuing radical changes to policing, criminal justice, and mass incarceration that disproportionately target people of color; and movements advocating on behalf of single mothers, sex workers, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Critics of these suggestions might argue that privileging diverse interests will sacrifice the unity of the LGBTQ group and erode at its political standing. And yet, it is important to remember that the LGBTQ initialism has served as the predominant way to index sexuality and gender identity for over two decades. Indeed, as President Trump's use of it in his June 2016 tweet suggests, it is *the* way to refer to sexuality and gender identity, even if one uses it in ways that erase the identities and people who comprise that group. It thus seems reasonable to assume that the visibility achieved by those who initially mobilized the GLBT (and then LGBTQ) group will endure over time, even as activism and advocacy is reconfigured to meet the unique circumstances of Trumpism. Having gained visibility, in other words, might present the perfect opportunity to reassess the goals prioritized and reformulate the goals sought. The historical case study provided here offers clues for how to proceed.

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