

Abstract This article is an exploration of American lesbian and gay activists' attitudes towards transgender inclusion in the LGBT movement. Lesbian and gay activists articulated different attitudes towards transgender inclusion that were inflected by their different subcultural histories and ability to make connections personally with transgender issues. Through an analysis of 32 semi-structured interviews with Midwestern lesbian and gay activists, this article examines the process by which lesbian and gay activists become transgender allies through making parallels to their own oppression or visible transgender discrimination. This research contributes to the existing literature on both collective identities and ally identities by contextualizing the formation of ally identities within the history of the LGBT movement.

Keywords allies, GLBT, qualitative sociology, social movements, transgender

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More than Adding a T: American Lesbian and Gay Activists' Attitudes towards Transgender Inclusion

Existing analysis of transgender inclusion in the American LGBT movement has focused almost exclusively on a handful of events, including the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (Califa, 1997; Gamson, 1997).¹ Transphobia (Weiss, 2003) and a gender-neutral contemporary gay identity (Minter, 2006) have been blamed for the failure of lesbians and gay men to integrate transgender issues and individuals adequately within the American movement, an analysis derived often from either personal experience (Aragon, 2006) or an examination of 1970s lesbian feminism (Denny, 2006). However, there is no existing systematic study of the attitudes of American lesbians and gay men towards transgender inclusion; in addition, the focus of any existing analysis has been the lesbian community, with a dearth of research on the gay male community.

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This study demonstrates that American lesbians and gay men have profoundly different attitudes towards transgender inclusion. Lesbians are more likely to articulate ambivalence about transgender inclusion, a conflict created by both their empathy for transgendered individuals and concern for movement power dynamics. Gay men are more likely to be either opposed to transgender inclusion or to express support of transgender inclusion rooted in gay liberation politics. This article analyzes the root causes of the attitudes that lesbians and gay men have towards transgender inclusion by interviewing a sample of 32 Midwestern lesbian and gay activists.² These differences in attitudes towards transgender inclusion in the LGBT movement have their roots in gender differences in gay men and lesbians' creation of transgender ally attitudes, particularly the ability to create empathetic connections between gender and sexual orientation issues. These differences also have their roots in separate histories of gender variance within the gay and lesbian social communities.

At the foundation of this inquiry is the question of how social movements create unity within diversity. Social movements like the American LGBT movement run the risk of severe fragmentation, with different identities and issues competing for dominance. Activists such as transgendered individuals who join a social movement because of their marginalization in society also run the risk of being marginalized within the social movement. This article contributes to both the literatures on collective identities and ally identities by asking the question of how social movement activists both create ally identities through which they advocate for more marginal social movement members and create a cohesive social movement identity.

After a brief review of literature and methodology, this article will first analyze how lesbian and gay activists develop ally identities towards transgender inclusion. Next, it will examine these attitudes within the context of creating a cohesive social movement.

Background

Although gender variant individuals have always participated in the LGBT movement, there was a consolidation of transgender inclusion in the American LGBT movement in the mid-1990s (Armstrong, 2002).³ Activists in the movements that preceded the contemporary liberal LGBT movement – the homophile, lesbian separatist and gay liberation movements – had conflicting attitudes about including gender variant individuals in their activities, although the brief gay liberation movement was the most tolerant of the three movements (Marotta, 1981; Califia, 1997; Meyerowitz, 2002). In the early 1990s, burgeoning transgender activism in New York City and San Francisco pushed for visible inclusion in both

local and national LGB events and organizations (Green, 2004). Many formerly LGB organizations began to 'add the T' to their organizational name and mission statement (Devor and Matte, 2004). Despite the growth in national transgender inclusion there are still misunderstandings between transgender and lesbian/gay activists. Many activists and scholars have critiqued this inclusion as shallow, merely an 'adding of the T' to organizational name and mission without the addition of transgender specific concerns or a welcome climate for transgender individuals (Minter, 2006).⁴ Owing to the small numbers of transgendered activists within many communities, this addition of transgender specific concerns and climate changes is dependent on the support of lesbians and gay men.

Although part of the same movement and oftentimes overlapping social communities, gay men and lesbians bring different experiences with gender variance and transgender issues to the LGBT movement. The gay and lesbian social communities developed different attitudes towards gender variance that, in my argument, plays a key role in their different understandings of transgender inclusion.

The division between masculine and feminine within the gay community was one of the first markers of sexual orientation. George Chauncey (1994) describes the juxtaposition of 'fairies' or 'inverts' and 'normal men' or 'trade' within the New York gay community that predates the division of society into heterosexuals and homosexuals. Fairies were the most visible members of the gay community, but they were often treated with disdain by gender-normative 'queers' during this time period. When sexual categories became reorganized into a hetero-homosexual binary, gay men often consciously embraced masculinity in contradiction to the fairies. In the late 1970s, the emergence of 'gay clones' and the increasing eroticization of masculinity emphasized the boundaries between the masculine and feminine within the gay community (Levine, 1991). Yet the gay community also supports subcommunities like Radical Faeries that embrace femininity (Rodgers, 1995).

In the gay community, historically, drag queens have been both embraced as the public ambassadors of the gay community and regulated within gay spaces (Newton, 1972; Rupp and Taylor, 2003). In Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor's contemporary study of Key West drag queens, drag queens are 'both celebrities central to the life of gay/lesbian Key West but in other ways living on the margins' (2003: 66). However, this ambivalence has historical and regional variation (Rubin, 1994). Ki Namaste (1996), now Viviane Namaste, suggests that this ambivalence about drag queens is related to the broader regulation of 'elements of femininity and femaleness' within the gay community, and other scholars have examined the relationship between the regulation of drag and women within the gay community (Moon, 1995; Newton, 2000).

The lesbian community has a shorter history of theatrical gender variance, namely the contemporary emergence of drag kings.⁵ Not only are drag kings a recent phenomenon, but there are many institutional differences between drag kings and queens because of historical power differences between gay men and lesbians (Newton, 2000): drag kings rarely address straight audiences, work as kings for a living, or perform outside of lesbian night at the local gay bar (Halberstam, 1998: 264).

In contrast to the history of drag kings, there is a documented and colorful butch and femme history within the lesbian community. Butch-femme dynamics dominated early lesbian working-class communities (Kennedy and Davis, 1993). With the turn towards lesbian separatism and feminism in the 1970s, many second-wave feminists treated both butch and femme lesbians with disdain, as they encouraged lesbians to dress androgynously (Morgan, 1993; Inness and Lloyd, 1996). Butches, and to some extent femmes, were reincorporated into the lesbian community in the 1980s (Nestle, 1992; Rubin, 1992).

As part of this ambivalent history towards gender deviance, in addition to the virulent anti-transsexual literature of the 1970s written by Janice Raymond, the lesbian community is home to one of the most visible disputes about transgender inclusion at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. After Nancy Jean Burkholder, a transsexual woman, was kicked out of the festival in 1991 for not being a 'womyn-born womyn', the technical policy for admission, the Festival has become a battleground for transgender inclusion (Gamson, 1997). In this battle for transgender inclusion, there is a clear distinction between MTF and FTM transgendered individuals; some FTM transitioning transgendered individuals still attend Festival whereas there are reports of screening for MTF transgendered individuals.

Literature review

This article examines how lesbian and gay political activists become supportive allies to transgender individuals and issues, and ultimately to their inclusion in the LGBT movement. Beyond limited research on heterosexual allies (Herdt and Koff, 2000; Fields, 2001), lesbians' attitudes towards bisexuals (Rust, 1995), and transsexual men's relationship with the lesbian community (Rubin, 2003), there has been no empirical examination of the relationship between the different LGBT 'alphabets' from the perspective of ally identities, much less an examination of transgender inclusion. This perspective is useful both for what it contributes to our understanding of transgender inclusion and the existing theory on ally identities, along with contributing to theories about collective identity within diverse social movements.

Work on the creation of ally identities suggests that activists create these identities through three different types of *approximating experiences* that allow individuals to draw on their own experiences to relate to marginal group oppression: *borrowed approximations* or knowing a member of the marginalized group and being witness to their suffering; *overlapping approximations* or the analogy to some oppression they have suffered; and *global approximations* or a connection to their democratic or political orientations (Hogan and Netzer, 1993; Feagin and Vera, 1995). As gay men and lesbians develop as transgender allies, the foundation of their ally identity is a combination of the following approximating experiences: a recognition or witnessing of discrimination against transgendered individuals; a link with their own oppression, specifically oppression based on gender and sexual orientation;⁶ and resonance with political ideologies such as a social justice orientation.

The existing literature on ally identities focuses primarily on a few traditional ally identities, such as white anti-racist activists and feminist men; however, gay and lesbian activists are operating from different subject positions than these traditional allies, as they are trying to create a cohesive social movement out of different marginal identities working for a common goal. The explicit addition of extremely marginalized social groups, such as intersex and transgender, to the LGBT movement requires what is perceived as the sharing of scarce movement resources.

Elizabeth Armstrong argues in her history of the gay movement that in the 1970s the burgeoning gay movement came to terms with the diversity of tactics and goals within the movement by embracing that diversity as a source of unity (2002: 102–7). Events like gay pride parades are opportunities to exercise this ethic of ‘unity through diversity.’ However, even with such a creed, activists in any movement have to balance the necessity of a unified collective identity for a movement (Klandermans, 1992; Taylor and Whittier, 1992), along with enough flexibility to accommodate difference within and the potential destabilization of the movement (Gamson, 1996). This balance between unity and accommodation of differences is central to gay and lesbian activists’ accounts of transgender inclusion. On the one hand, activists who support transgender inclusion in the LGBT movement have to create connections that establish commonalities between gay/lesbian and transgender issues. Identifying common forms of injustice is a key element in the process of creating an oppositional consciousness or collective identity of a group (Mansbridge, 2001: 5). However, activists also have to create spaces for differences in experiences between gay/lesbian and transgender activists. Work by Brent Stockdill (2001) on bridging multiple identities within the AIDS activist movement suggests that these identity differences create cleavages within movements and can be particularly disheartening for

marginalized activists. Creating spaces for marginalized activists and recognition of their, at times, separate needs is critical for movement cohesion.

Methodology

The data for this article comes from 32 interviews with Midwestern lesbian and gay activists who were involved in local LGBT politics between 1992 and 2002. The majority of these respondents are white, middle-class lesbian and gay activists who are between the ages of 30 and 55. However, there were five people of color and five younger (18–25-year-old) activists included in this sample. Although this sample may inadequately represent rural, radical, youth, and minority activists, it does represent a large segment of the LGBT activist population that traditionally occupies a dominant position and a majority of leadership positions within the movement.⁷ In addition, the emphasis of this study is on actively political lesbian and gay individuals rather than members of the social LGBT community, as these activists are more likely to impact transgender inclusion in the LGBT movement. Because of limited space and the logic of this inquiry of dominant activists, this article does not address data on bisexual, heterosexual ally and queer activists' attitudes towards transgender inclusion.⁸

These interviews are part of a larger study on transgender inclusion in non-discrimination ordinances in three diverse Midwestern cities and towns that have out transgendered individuals within their LGBT population. These interviews were semi-structured, lasted between one and three hours, and were conducted between August 2004 and June 2005. Interviewees were recruited on the grounds of their participation as leaders, involved activists, coalition members, volunteers or critics of local anti-discrimination ordinance politics between 1992 and 2002. Although participants were recruited through their involvement in referendum politics, which tend to mobilize a large percentage of the local LGBT activist population, they also include activists involved in city politics, radical politics, HIV/AIDS organizations, state-wide LGBT organizations, PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), and faith-based LGBT friendly organizations. The data for this article is taken from a series of questions about activists' history of interactions with transgendered individuals, understandings of intersections between LGB and transgender issues, and political experiences with transgender inclusion.

Owing to this sampling method, interviewees included many individuals who would not have volunteered for a project explicitly about attitudes towards transgender inclusion. Many gay and lesbian interviewees had difficulty discussing and were hesitant to describe their concerns about transgender inclusion, a hesitation that may indicate the growing prominence

of transgender issues within LGBT politics. Gay and lesbian respondents cushioned discussions about opposition to transgender inclusion with references as to how they did not want to be an 'exclusive' person.

Creating ally identities

Although both gay and lesbian activists could use any of the three approximating experiences to create connections as transgender allies, gay men had difficulty cultivating approximating experiences to transgender issues and individuals. If they did use an approximating experience, they disproportionately used global approximations or social justice ideologies. Lesbians oftentimes used borrowed and overlapping approximations to make connections with transgender issues and individuals; they described their understanding of transgender issues as emerging from their interactions with transgendered individuals and ability to make connections between butch and transgender issues within the community. However, most lesbians were ultimately ambivalent about transgender inclusion in the LGBT movement, fearing a conflict between these approximating experiences and the potential invasion of women's space by transgendered individuals.

Borrowed approximations, or connection with the perceived discrimination of others, were dominant in lesbian accounts, but a few gay activists mentioned transgender discrimination. One of the few gay men who identified as a strong transgender ally, a gay legal advocate, did describe understanding this discrimination as part of his coming to terms with transgender issues. Within his own narrative of becoming a transgender ally, he commented that 'trans people get discriminated against more than any other group, and a lot of it is from gays and lesbians. I used to be one of those people. I thought they just gave us a bad name and reinforced stereotypes about gay men wanting to be women.' For this activist, transgendered individuals were just 'boys wanting to dress up as girls', a stereotype in his mind related to early theories about sexual inversion as an explanation for homosexuality.

Lesbian interviewees often described the discrimination that transgendered individuals face. One older white lesbian commented that 'For a trans person to be out takes a whole lot of courage. They take the backwash of everything. They do. Being gay or whatever, I've had a lot of things said to me because I'm gay. But I would venture to say that any trans person has had 100 times that.' Much of this knowledge about transgender discrimination was gained from interacting with transgendered individuals. One lesbian activist who interacted with transvestites at LGBT events in the early 1990s described that it made her nervous or 'unsure of how to interact' but that 'it was very consciousness raising. You usually

hang around with people like yourself, but everything was fine as far as I could tell. It was gaining knowledge that we have assumptions and we discriminate and we have privilege.’ Other activists gave detailed accounts of interactions with specific transgendered individuals who answered their questions. At LGBT social events some lesbians witnessed discrimination against transgendered individuals and used that as an opportunity to learn more about transgender issues. One white older lesbian described an experience like this one:

[At a social event] there were a couple of trans women there. They were trying to get to the bathroom, and they were being stopped. I didn’t really know too much about them at the time. I didn’t act the way I should have at that moment. I didn’t realize that I should’ve stepped forward and said, ‘You know what? Hurry up and go to the bathroom, and I’ll make sure that everything’s fine.’ So I didn’t step forward, at that point. But then I ran into them again at a wedding party. Then I just made sure that I walked up to them and said, ‘Ladies, if you need to use the facilities, you’ll let me know and I’ll certainly be there for you’ . . . I worked it through. Because sometimes you don’t always know what you need to do. Then later on, after you think about it in retrospect, you’ll find the real answer. Then we sat at the table with them and we visited with them.

This activist described her interaction as an educational experience about transgender issues and part of her growth towards becoming supportive of transgender inclusion.

Both empathy with transgender discrimination (borrowed approximations) and links with their own oppression (overlapping approximations) played a stronger role in lesbians’ abilities to become transgender allies than gay men, a difference rooted in gender rather than sexual orientation necessarily. Research on overlapping approximations has focused disproportionately on anti-racist white women (Frankenberg, 1993; O’Brien, 2001; Schultz, 2001). Scholars suggest that women are more likely to be anti-racist due to higher levels of empathy among women. Women on average develop more relational and empathetic ways of relating to others from a young age (Belenky et al., 1997), a psychological development that may facilitate their development of borrowed and overlapping approximations. For example, heterosexual mothers have an easier time coming to terms with their children’s gay identities than heterosexual fathers in organizations such as PFLAG (Herdt and Koff, 2000). Lesbians in this study were more likely to have empathy rooted in their own marginalization as women, as compared to gay men.

A few gay men who were strong transgender allies described parallels between sexual orientation and transgender issues or gender more generally, often subsuming sexual orientation discrimination within the category of gender. The three gay men who expressed these sentiments

were all older men with previous involvement in gay liberationist politics. One older gay man of color described both transgender and gay issues as related to the 'gender commandments that every child is expected to conform to'. These commandments included 'the sex you should be attracted to' and to 'identify with your gender assignment your entire life'. For this activist, compulsory heterosexuality is then subsumed under the category of 'gender commandments', acknowledging the intimate connections between gender and sexual orientation. This activist's connections were rare; few gay activists used overlapping approximations to create support for transgender inclusion.

Lesbians, both because of their awareness of being women and potential feminist consciousness, brought a 'gender lens' to their understanding of transgender issues that was a foundation of this empathy described earlier. They were more likely to articulate connections between sexism and transgender discrimination than gay men in this study. Similar to the gay man just mentioned, one young white lesbian who is a professional activist described this sexism:

It's part of being put in a box when you're young. You're told you were born this way, and that you have to follow these exact steps. You have a destiny that was determined at birth. You have to be intimate in this way or spend the rest of your life being this way. Both gay and trans people deal with that. And gender in general is like that.

This activist makes effective connections between the mandatory gender requirements by society for all LGBT individuals and men and women more broadly.

Unlike gay interviewees, who never made connections between their own gender variance and transgender issues, a few lesbian interviewees described either their own social location as a butch woman or a significant other who is butch. These butch experiences contributed to their empathy for transgendered individuals, as there may be common experiences of discrimination (Rubin, 1992). One older lesbian activist who described herself as 'looking like a straight person' remembered the first trip she took with her butch partner.⁹ When they traveled in rural and unfamiliar areas, she noticed the following phenomenon:

Everywhere we stopped, if we stopped to get something people would treat her a certain way and treat me differently. And I'd never really paid too much attention to it . . . Well no one would give her the time of day. She'd ask a direction and they'd say no. And I'd ask, in my nice friendly way, and they'd tell me. It was okay for me, they're not threatened by me, or whatever.

This activist used this story to illustrate two things: her own understanding of how transgendered people are discriminated against *and* how she

may unwittingly or unknowingly discriminate against transgendered individuals herself.

For lesbian activists these overlapping approximations often intersected with global approximations, such as feminism or social justice orientations. For lesbians, their political orientations may provide the foundation for overlapping approximations, giving them the ‘gender lens’ to analyze intersections between lesbian and transgender issues. For example, one butch activist noted the impact of Leslie Feinberg’s book *Stone Butch Blues* in her own understanding of the intersection between butch and transgender.

I would say I started out pretty transphobic, which is odd, because I’m so butch. But [the book] *Stone Butch Blues* really opened my eyes, and then I just started looking around and seeing things and talking to folks and thinking about my own biases. When I see myself thinking things that I vilify in others, you have to look at that.

This activist begins her explanation with what she describes as an unusual juxtaposition between her butch identity and her transphobia, suggesting that even before reading *Stone Butch Blues* she saw some connections between butch and transgender issues. She also frames her growing understanding of transgender issues with her own commitment to social justice, as she needs to examine ‘things that I vilify in others’ when she finds them in herself.

Activists with strong social justice political orientations were disproportionately committed to transgender inclusion. Global approximations, such as these broad commitments to social justice, figure heavily in the literature on white activists involved in Freedom Summer and the civil rights movement (Pinkney, 1968; Demerath et al., 1971). Gay and lesbian social justice activists expressed commitments to broad visions of social change, beyond LGBT politics.¹⁰ They often emphasized their commitment to making bridges with people of faith and communities of color. These social justice activists were disproportionately older activists who had a long history of being leaders within the LGBT movement. These social justice activists embedded their commitment in experience with national and statewide LGBT politics and a wide variety of LGBT organizations. Although not all activists with a professional career in LGBT organizations had this social justice orientation, these social justice activists all had professional experience working within an LGBT organization.

Creating a cohesive social movement

Although these approximating experiences create the foundation of lesbian and gay activists’ support of transgender inclusion, these experiences alone are not enough. Unlike other types of ally identities, such as

heterosexual allies and white anti-racists, acceptance of transgender inclusion for gay and lesbian activists involved not just understandings and empathy of transgender issues but also a sense that transgendered individuals *belonged* in the LGBT movement and were represented within a cohesive social movement. Lesbian and gay activists addressed both movement cohesion and space for difference by describing their understanding of commonalities between lesbian, gay and transgender issues and by describing the difficulties of creating transgender inclusive movement spaces. This ability to create movement cohesion was often-times related to activists' abilities to create overlapping approximations and their understanding of the history of gender variance within the LGBT community. The distancing of gay and lesbian identities from gender variance erases the history of inclusion and creates an environment in which transgendered individuals appear to be 'invading' the LGBT movement from the outside.

When asked about the addition of 'the T' to the LGBT movement, most lesbian and gay activists described vague connections based on common discrimination, often unrelated to their own gender-specific position as gay men or lesbians. These frameworks of connection included 'the fundamental right that any person has to live life the way they want' or 'all being children of God.' One middle-aged white gay activist noted:

I think that both groups – the gay community and the transgendered community – have *mutual goals*. Both groups have the tendency to be *oppressed for similar reasons*. Mainly, there are people out there that think they're freaks. 'You're gay – you're a freak. You're transgendered – you're a freak.' So we have that common [background], and it's kind of drawn us together so that we can advocate for each other.

When lesbian and gay activists established these connections, they were establishing the potential for lesbian, gay and transgendered individuals to work together to resist this common discrimination. However, the connections these activists describe are rudimentary at best, as 'the fundamental right that any person has to live life the way they want' may not be enough connection to sustain a large social movement. Activists were vague about this common discrimination. Although these attitudes did not preclude support for transgender inclusion, as a few lesbian activists with rudimentary or nonexistent understanding of transgender connections also strongly supported transgender inclusion, activists with weak understandings of these connections tended to neither strongly support nor actively oppose transgender inclusion, falling into an ambivalent position within the movement.

Some gay and lesbian activists opined that there was not indeed common discrimination between the two groups. One white gay activist

notes that ‘Besides being different from what society says is the norm – heterosexuals, one man, one woman – I don’t know how else they would actually intersect with us.’ Some of this lack of intersection is rooted in what he believes are significant differences of experience between being gay and transgendered.

But I don’t and I hate to say this because I’ll sound like the other side, but *I don’t know that we are experiencing the same thing* . . . And y’know I hate saying that as a gay person, because I know they have struggles. But I don’t know that it’s the *same* struggle as me as a gay man. And [pause] I don’t know, I’m not real comfortable with this to be honest.

This activist acknowledged his lack of education or naiveté about the subject, but also expressed a desire not to be actively exclusive.

Along with describing the contrast between same and different types of discrimination, activists juxtaposed the ‘learned’ nature of transgender issues with ‘instinctual’ lesbian and gay issues. For many activists, interactions with transgendered individuals, media sources, and strong transgender allies created a dynamic process of understanding both the nature of transgender lived reality and the necessity of political inclusion. Activists created a divide between easily understood instinctual gay and lesbian issues and transgender issues, which needed education. One white gay public official explained that ‘for gay and lesbian people it’s just sort of instinctual what the issues are and there’s sort of assumptions you could make about how other gay and lesbian people would feel about that’, in contrast to transgender issues which require ‘more of an education process because that’s not an issue I’m going through’. On the one hand, this activist is describing spaces within the LGBT movement for these different issues and for education on transgender specific issues. On the other hand, this activist is describing an intrinsic difference between gay/lesbian life and transgender life, a difference that ignores the history of conflictual and power-laden lesbian integration into the gay liberation movement (Armstrong, 2002). This separation between instinctual gay and lesbian issues and learned transgender issues creates an artificial boundary between a socially constructed gender-normative homosexuality and the gender problematics of transgender identity, an artificial boundary created by a history of community ambivalence about gender variance.

How gay men and lesbians understand the history of gender variance within the LGBT community affects the way they understand transgender inclusion. Although not all gender variant individuals (e.g. drag queens) identify as transgendered, there are important parallels between the inclusion of transgendered individuals and other gender variant individuals throughout LGBT history.

Gay men in this study only occasionally made connections directly between drag queens and effeminate men when they discussed transgender inclusion, and then only men supportive of transgender inclusion made those connections. For example, one older gay man of color described his experience with transgender issues as ‘when I was young and came out in [the 1970s], the only issues around transgender stuff would be what we commonly call drag queens, which of course is a continual prominent part of the gay community’. Lesbian interviewees made no connections between drag kings and transgender issues, although this may be related to both the recent history of drag kings and the generation of women interviewed.

These gender variance histories affected not just activists’ abilities to make movement connections but also their creation of space within the movement for transgendered activists. It was whether activists believed transgender inclusion was both new and entering the movement from outside sources that impacted their understanding of whether or not transgendered individuals were ‘invading’ or occupying new spaces within the LGBT movement.

As discussed in the previous section, lesbians often made connections between butch and transgender concerns. For example, some lesbians described their first ‘transgender experience’ as one with butch women. One older lesbian activist referenced experiences she had with butch ‘diesel’ dykes in the bars in the 1980s:

People who were absolutely sure that God or whatever had played this hard, hard joke on them, that something was wrong. Because nobody knew a lot. Was it something at birth? Was it something wrong at gestation? They absolutely knew they were not women.

Interviewer: Were these women who would have been called butch?

Or diesel dykes. They just didn’t identify as women at all. Where else could they go? Where else could they go? Often hung out together. Often took lesbian lovers.

This activist contrasts diesel dykes who ‘knew they were not women’ with their ‘lesbian lovers’, suggesting that these butch women may have identified as transgendered if given the choice at a different time period. She also suggests that they belonged in the lesbian community nonetheless, because ‘where else could they go?’ establishing a longer history of gender variance within the lesbian community.

The strong skepticism of some gay men could be related to both this history of gender variance and their early dominance within the lesbian and gay movement. For example, skeptical gay men described an invasion of *their* movement by unwelcome groups. These men often derided

‘alphabet soup’ politics, or the continual addition of new categories to the lesbian and gay movement. Although some lesbians questioned the addition of intersex issues to the LGBT movement, gay interviewees were far more vocal and persistent with their complaints. Activists discussed the potential addition of questioning and intersex to LGBT politics most often. One middle-aged white male activist suggested that the ‘alphabet soup’ issue has gone too far:

Somebody better understand [transgender inclusion] soon because we’ve all been lumped into one category and I don’t ever remember hearing them taking a vote saying they wanted to join our little club nor do I remember us taking a vote saying they could join our club. How and where do they all fit? *It used to be gay and lesbian and that was it.* Now you have everything from ‘questionable’ under this umbrella. I don’t know. I don’t know that I want ‘questionables’ here. I’m not sure I want bisexuals here.

For this activist, questioning, transgendered, and bisexual inclusion were all part of this ‘alphabet soup’ problem. Another gay man who was a local political activist discussed reservations with describing himself as a ‘gay activist.’

I come from a theory that protection should be as broad as possible to include as many classes of people as possible. But one of the reasons I guess I’m not 100% comfortable being a gay activist is because I don’t totally understand why the B and the T are in GLBT.

These comments illustrate some of the proprietary sentiments about the LGBT movement expressed by skeptical gay men in particular. Gay men were more likely to describe these additions as divisive as well. One gay activist suggested that these additions are ‘dissecting the community’ and ‘there comes a point where you have to say, “How many letters do you need to describe the community?” GLBTQRST. It’s silly.’

No lesbians interviewed described this same possessiveness of the broader LGBT movement. However, lesbian activists did describe a concern about smaller spaces within the LGBT movement and the question of voice or who speaks for the movement. Their concerns about smaller spaces and voice were linked to feminist consciousness, level of exposure to transgendered individuals, and consciousness of discrimination.

These attitudes were complicated by the potential differences in exposure to transgendered individuals by lesbians and gay men. Lesbians may be more likely to have contact with transgendered individuals within the lesbian community (Rubin, 2003); many lesbian interviewees mentioned their interactions with lesbian friends who are now FTM transsexuals, MTF lesbians, and transgendered clients they encountered as social workers. Some lesbian interviewees described different attitudes towards FTM transsexuals, who often had their origins within the lesbian

community, and MTF lesbians, who were more often described as 'outsiders' or male energy invading women-only space. There are also a number of visible disputes about transgender inclusion, including a long-standing debate about transgender inclusion in the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (Califia, 1997; Gamson, 1997). Because disputes about transgender inclusion are visible within the lesbian community many lesbians may be more aware of transgender discrimination and empathetic to transgender inclusion. However, the same feminist awareness that allows lesbians to empathize also may make them more concerned about transgender infringement on their political and social space.

Lesbians often described an awareness of the power dynamics within their existing political and social groups, particularly the power dynamics based on gender, class or race. This awareness extended into concerns about the consequences of transgender inclusion for women-only space. Some of this concern about invasion revolved around definitions of who a woman really is (Gamson, 1997). One older lesbian activist described her participation in an LGBT community center discussion about a conflict over a transsexual MTF (male-to-female) woman who attended the women-only discussion group and created an issue.

What ended up happening was this person ended up gathering a number of complaints that was a problem. It was a problem, I think, because she was insisting on talking about her issues, which wasn't a commonality in the room. It was the wrong venue for that. How do you make a rule and still be a LGBTQIA welcoming center? And I was part of the conversation, and for me the challenge is, this is the wrong venue for that individual. The individual is using it as a substitute for therapy, and then probably she needs to get therapy, not set it up in a way that it becomes negative for everybody else . . . That was a 6-week ranting and raving debate from various factions on the board, and I just, that was a hard decision because it becomes a blanket. You gotta make a rule. Can't we make a kinda sorta policy? [laughs] Can't we be affirming most of the time? And you can't.

This lesbian echoes the division between biologically female lesbians and transgendered lesbians, particularly in the divisions of their 'issues'. The transsexual lesbian was invading the space by 'insisting on talking about her issues', using the group as a 'substitute for therapy'. This lesbian retained her previously expressed commitment to a diverse welcoming LGBT center, but yet expressed reservations about this space invasion.

This space was not always a physical one, as the issue of voice or spokespeople also came up, although less often. One white older lesbian paralleled her own narcissism after coming out with the self-preoccupation of transgendered individuals that prevented them from being good spokespeople. When she came out she was self-involved for a number of years so that 'we bored all our family and friends incredibly. You couldn't ask

how we were without us vomiting all over you with it.' By extension, she suggested transgendered people experience something similar when coming out that makes them 'very self-absorbed', leading her to conclude that 'someone who is in the middle of a big transition might not be a great spokesperson for anything'. This distinction between good and inappropriate spokespeople for the movement is intricately connected to a history of hiding gender variance within the LGBT movement. Some ambivalent activists voiced resentment at being asked to speak for or advocate on behalf of transgendered individuals, because they felt they could not 'make it all better'. At the end of her interview one older white lesbian expressed frustration at being asked to advocate for transgendered people within LGBT politics, because 'we're not their mothers. Why can't they speak for themselves?' This lesbian activist had been a strong advocate for the inclusion of transgender protections in her local anti-discrimination ordinance. However, she still had this concern about voice and who was speaking for whom within the movement.

Conclusion

Gay men in this study struggled the most with transgender inclusion; they had difficulty cultivating approximating experiences, movement connections, and space for transgendered individuals. Unlike the stark contrast between supportive and skeptical gay men, lesbians were more likely to be ambivalent about transgender inclusion. Lesbians often made connections between feminism, privilege, social justice and transgender issues, particularly connections between butch gender variance and transgender issues. They described their understanding of transgender issues as both rooted in feminism and their personal interactions with transgendered individuals. However, this feminist consciousness and personal experience also made many lesbians wary of transgender inclusion, particularly what they perceived to be the invasion of women's space.

These differences between gay men and lesbians have consequences for transgender inclusion within the LGBT movement. With few exceptions (Stone, 2006; Stone, 2009) existing empirical work on transgender inclusion has focused on public disputes such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, with little empirical analysis of the day-to-day decisions made in LGBT social movement organizations. Although transgendered activists have been strong advocates for their own inclusion in LGBT politics, the ambivalence and opposition by lesbians and gay men within the movement must affect social movement decisions.

This study contributes to the existing work on social movement collective identity and ally identities by examining the complexities of creating an inclusive social movement. In addition, the study of allies is enriched

by an understanding of the complexities of creating space within a social movement for marginal identities. These complexities are different than the usual study of traditional allies such as white anti-racists who typically join a marginal movement.

The shortcomings of this article include its limited scope and emphasis on local political activists rather than activists involved in national LGBT politics. Transgender inclusion in national LGBT politics may be affected by other forces, such as pressure from local groups and the national political environment. The use of only Midwestern activists also limits the generalizability of the study. However, the easy replicability of a study of this kind could lead to expanded research on this subject with both national activists and activists from other regions.

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Notes

1. Transgender is an umbrella category that encompasses individuals expressing a wide range of gender variation, including transvestites, transsexuals, gender queer, and those who identify as no gender or multiple genders. My grammatical use of transgender as an adjective rather than a noun reflects recent disputes in usage (i.e. activists are transgendered individuals not transgenders).
2. My use of transgender in this research suggests at times a clear dichotomy between transgender and lesbian/gay populations, when there is considerable overlap between the two populations. Some lesbians and gay men identify as transgendered.
3. It is difficult to speak of the history of transgendered individuals in the LGBT movement because of the short history of the transgender political identity. To say that the butch women, street kids and drag queens at Stonewall were either transgendered or would identify as transgendered if given a choice is risking historical error. However, the history of transgender inclusion in the American LGBT movement is connected to the larger history of the inclusion of gender variant individuals in the movement.
4. These reluctant attitudes have been reported in other countries as well (see McDonald, 2006 and Noble, 2006).
5. Halberstam (1998) differentiates between male impersonators, which have a long theatrical history, and drag kings, which became a subcultural phenomenon in the 1990s. Among other differences between male impersonators and drag kings is that male impersonators had limited range of available expression focusing on being 'boyish' rather than masculine.

And both male impersonators and drag kings are different than butch women, although there may be some overlap between these categories. In early lesbian communities there was nothing ‘campy’ about being butch (Kennedy and Davis, 1993).

6. Gay and lesbian activists may also make overlapping approximations based on race, class or disability; however, these were not expressed by my interviewees.
7. In my data analysis I often identify some salient demographics (such as age or race) more than others, particularly for minority interviewees whose confidentiality may be compromised.
8. However, I address this elsewhere (Stone, 2006).
9. This description of normative femininity as ‘looking like a straight person’ illustrates the conflation of gender deviance and sexual minority status in even the LGBT community (see Connell, 1995 and Esterberg, 1996).
10. Queer political orientations are perhaps the most common global approximation in the LGBT movement, but my analysis of queer identified activists is beyond the scope of this article.

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