

Cultural Anchors and the Organization of Differences: A Multi-method Analysis of LGBT Marches on Washington

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Abstract

Social scientists describe culture as either coherent or incoherent and political dissent as either unifying or divisive. This article moves beyond such dichotomies. Content, historical, and network analyses of public debates on how to organize four lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Washington marches provide evidence for an integrative position. Rather than just describe consistencies or contradictions, we contend that the key analytic challenge is to explain the organization of differences. We propose one way of doing this using the mechanism of a cultural anchor. Within and across marches, a small collection of ideas remains fixed in the national conversation, yet in a way that allows activists to address their internal diversity and respond to unfolding historical events. These results suggest that activists do not simply organize around their similarities but, through cultural anchors, they use their commonalities to build a thinly coherent foundation that can also support their differences. Situated at the nexus of culture, social movements, sexualities, and networks, this article demonstrates how the anchoring mechanism works in the context of LGBT political organizing.

Keywords

culture, coherence, social movements, sexualities, networks

The means by which social cohesion is generated—in small groups, organizations, and the larger society—stands at the heart of the sociological imagination, both theoretically (e.g., Alexander 2006; Blau 1974; Collins 1975; Durkheim [1893] 1984; Mills 1959; Parsons 1937) and methodologically (e.g., Borgatti 1999; Dorian and Fararo 1998; Granovetter 1973; Moody and White 2003; Schaefer 2009; Shwed and Bearman 2010; White, Boorman, and Breiger 1976). Disciplinary advance, however, does not

come from explaining only consensus and consent or strife and dissent. The key analytic challenge is to explain the *organization of differences*, an approach that optimizes

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actors' ability to achieve stability among inevitable flux. This brings us to a general paradox of social life: how can it be at once stable and susceptible to change, protean yet perennial?

Sociology's subfields of culture and social movements have developed alongside these tendencies, even while the research questions scholars ask are specific to their intellectual homes. Is culture coherent or incoherent? Do differences among activists unite or divide their mobilization efforts? To answer these questions, we use historical, content, and network analysis of public debates on how to organize four lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) marches on Washington. Rather than document only the means by which activists manufacture consent or the intransigence of infighting, we provide empirical support for a *thin coherence* approach to the study of culture, politics, and sexualities. We show that the public forum generated by a march on Washington proposal is predictably heterogeneous—there are competing reasons why people feel such a protest event is necessary. Stopping here, however, as many analysts may be tempted to do, would lead us to mistakenly conclude that heterogeneity is ipso facto an empirical indicator of cultural incoherence and political disorganization. Innovative use of network analysis to detect relationships among ideas (as opposed to people, for which the method is conventionally used) reveals unexpected insights.

Within and across each march, a small collection of themes remains central to the national conversation in a way that allows activists to respond to historical events. These recurring and interconnected ideas operate as a *cultural anchor*, which activists use to engage in a meaningful dialogue with each other within what is a cacophonous though not unintelligible public forum. The cultural anchor organizes differences by providing a “conceptual handle or peg” (Benford and Snow 2000:623) that activists use

to connect related ideas and respond to external circumstances. It addresses “the biggest unanswered question in the sociology of culture,” namely, “whether and how some cultural elements control, anchor, or organize others” (Swidler 2001:206). Activists create and leverage cultural anchors to promote stability among inevitable flux and a sense of perpetuity despite the unremitting passage of time.

IS CULTURE COHERENT?

Early anthropology, where investigations of culture initially fermented, generally described culture as coherent, consistent, unitary, integrated, organized, or cohesive: “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor [1871] 1958:1). Consider also Geertz's (1973:449–50) conclusion from his celebrated study of the Balinese cockfight: “Drawing on almost every level of Balinese experience, it brings together themes—animal savagery, male narcissism, opponent gambling, status rivalry, mass excitement, blood sacrifice . . . and, binding them into a set of rules, . . . builds a symbolic structure in which . . . the reality of their inner affiliation can be intelligibly felt.” Although scholars conceded that culture is diverse in its definitions (what it can mean) and components (what it can consist of), they presumed the pieces of the puzzle were integrated. Again from Geertz (pp. 17–18): “Culture is most effectively treated . . . by isolating its elements, specifying the internal relationships among those elements, and then characterizing the whole system in some general way. . . . Cultural systems must have a minimal degree of coherence.” Classic monographs, all of which define cultures deliberately in the plural as ways of life of a group or subgroup of people, nations, or time periods (Williams 1976), include Mead's (1928) study of

adolescent Samoan culture; Benedict's (1934) accounts of the Pueblos of New Mexico, the natives of Dobu in Melanesia, and the Indian tribes of the American Northwest; Malinowski's (1945) posthumously published work on problems of warfare and witchcraft in East and South African culture; Levi-Strauss's (1962) inquiry into the savage mind of primitive peoples; Sahlins's (1985) recounting of Captain Cook's effects on Hawaiian culture; and Anderson's (1983) study of imagined communities. Social anthropologists (e.g., Victor Turner), semioticians (e.g., Ferdinand de Saussure), and French structuralists (e.g., Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan) similarly assumed that culture is coherent, has an internal logic, and is stable across social contexts.

Several common themes run across these studies. Scholars were generally not concerned with construct specification because they presumed culture was a latent variable that they could study using any number of indicators. This produced a loose conceptualization of the concept as a people's way of life with a corresponding group-level unit of analysis, from tribes (in anthropology) to disaffected youth (in cultural studies). Scholars used the culture concept to describe large-scale boundaries, and they overwhelmingly deployed ethnographic methods. This analytic and methodological approach led to the conclusion that culture is shared, consensual, and coherent. The goal of documenting cohesion led scholars to exclude inconsistent elements, a process we recognize today as a softer version of sampling on the dependent variable: *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, or "after we know what a theory had to fit, it is often easy to fit any theory to it" (Stinchcombe 2005:296). We summarize these themes as follows:

Assumptions of Cultural Coherence: Cultural elements (e.g., values, norms, beliefs, customs, and attitudes) will be internally consistent, integrated, consensual, and mostly

resistant to change within a respective social group.

The developing literature on coherence inspired new questions. Can the same cultural object mean different things to different people or even the same person (Berezin 1994; Turner 1967)? Might the meanings that inhere within one cultural object be internally conflicting or situationally cued (Beisel 1993; Shively 1992; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991)? Is the scale of the social context (e.g., from dyads to organizations to societies) related to the conceptualization of culture as more or less coherent (Sewell 1992, 1996)? As researchers sought answers to these more complex questions, inspired in part by a movement in sociology away from functionalism and toward conflict theory (Cosser 1956; Simmel 1955), scholars began favoring a conception of culture as incoherent, fragmented, inconsistent, malleable and thus subject to change, unstable across contexts, internally contradictory, loosely integrated, and weakly bound (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Ortner 1984). Sociologists offered metaphors of culture as a toolkit of ideas (Swidler 1986) or a political repertoire (Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1978) and acknowledged that people's storage of knowledge (what they are exposed to and what they know) is greater than what they use in specific instances—and how they use it is often inconsistent. Swidler (2001:12) incisively reviews this multidisciplinary trend: "From Foucault's 'genealogical' approach to the multiple layers of overlapping practices that constitute the modern subject, to Levi-Strauss's emphasis on 'bricolage,' to Bourdieu's insistence on the fundamental contradictions (the 'misrecognition') at the heart of any system of cultural hierarchy, many contemporary theorists have subverted or abandoned the notion of culture as a unified system."

Culture could be incoherent for reasons of consistency (are its elements internally

homo- or heterogeneous?) or concentration (are its elements shared by group members or are there cleavages across subgroups?). As an example of the former, social psychologists argued that our attitudes (what we think) do not always align with our behaviors (what we do) (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; McGuire 1960, 1969). Referencing the latter, anthropologists suggested that “many things one would want to call cultural are not completely or even generally shared” (D’Andrade 1984:90; see also D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Quinn 1996). Organization theorists contributed by finding their work-sites differentiated, full of separation and conflict, and often fragmented and in flux (Martin 1992). Acknowledging that culture can be incoherent forced analysts toward more rigorous construct specification, away from a latent-variable view of culture, and toward the inclusion of more diverse units of analysis. Scholars now assumed that people use their knowledge in ways that are contradictory and context-specific. Culture was no longer seen as internally stable or shared across groups and time periods. Indeed, research pointed to mitigated pressures for integrating discrepant cultural components or for excluding them to maintain harmony or function. The new analytic tasks were construct specification, broadening the unit of analysis, and verifying conflict. We summarize the second position as follows:

Assumptions of Cultural Incoherence: Cultural elements will be internally heterogeneous, inconsistent, contested by members of different subgroups, and susceptible to change, often due to environmental fluctuations.

Binary conceptions of culture as either coherent or incoherent are oversimplified. Scholars have recently articulated a third, integrative position. The best example of this is Sewell’s (1999:53) account of the Christian symbol of the Trinity, “which attempts to unify in one symbolic figure three sharply distinct and largely incompatible possibilities of

Christian religious experience: authoritative and hierarchical orthodoxy (the Father), loving egalitarianism and grace (the Son), and ecstatic spontaneity (the Holy Ghost).” In this view, coherence may be possible if we can find ways to organize differences. Griswold (1987b) argues that literary genres reconcile stylistic similarities and differences by abstracting common elements while allowing for variations. In a separate study (Griswold 1987a:1079), she shows that literary elites in three different countries favorably reviewed fiction novels that were “simultaneously coherent and ambiguous.”

Imagery similar to Sewell’s and Griswold’s recurs across sociology’s sub-fields. We see it in organizational research on “legitimizing accounts,” or “local recitations of broadly available cultural accounts” (Creed, Scully, and Austin 2002:477); in writings on “institutional logics,” or a core set of general principles on which organizations can individually elaborate (Friedland and Alford 1991:248); in research on “theorization,” or “the formulation of patterned relationships such as chains of cause and effect” that enable innovations to diffuse across different adopters and transmitters (Strang and Meyer 1994:104); in “editing rules,” whereby ideas get translated with different content across different contexts while emphasizing similarities (Sahlin-Andersson 1996:82); in the work of “institutional entrepreneurs,” or actors who facilitate cooperation across diverse groups (Fligstein 1997:398); and in science studies on “boundary objects” that operate as unified sites where heterogeneous social actors meet (Star 1989; Star and Griesemer 1989:393).

No one in this wide-ranging group of scholars is explicitly engaged in the coherence debate. But this body of research nonetheless hints at an overlooked third position: “thin coherence” (Sewell 1999:49–50) or “limited coherence” (DiMaggio 1997:277). The methodological imperative is “to discern what the shapes . . . of local meanings actually are” (Sewell 1999:58) by specifying

institutional (Becker 1998; Friedland and Alford 1991), historical (Sewell 1996), economic (Hannerz 1992; Spillman 1999), or symbolic constraints (Biernacki 2000; Hunt 2004; Spillman 1995) that anchor a set of core concerns while engendering multiple meanings. This leads to the third and final conceptualization:

Assumptions of Thin Coherence: Cultural elements will be heterogeneous yet sortable into distinct subunits, each of which will exhibit its own internal logic. Within a respective unit, some elements may change over time, whereas others may tend toward consistency.

IS DISSENT DIVISIVE?

The coherence debate extends beyond cultural sociology. Social movement scholars wrestle with similar concerns as they seek answers to subfield-specific questions of how activists build solidarity across lines of internal diversity. Does dissent among activists unite or divide their mobilization efforts? This question is especially salient for scholars who study cultural dimensions of collective action. Echoing arguments from within the coherence camp, collective identity theorists assert that identity construction entails the strategic aggregation of differences into a unified whole. Taylor (1989:771), for example, defines collective identity as “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity” (see also Cohen 1985; Friedman and McAdam 1992; Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1988; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Taylor and Whittier 1992). New social movement approaches (Larana, Johnston, and Gusfield 1994), along with scholars who study frame alignment (Snow et al. 1986), narratives (Franzosi 1997; Polletta 2006; Tilly 2002), and music (Eyerman 2002; Kaminski and Taylor 2008; Roscigno and Danaher 2001) similarly emphasize political cohesion.

Redolent of the trend toward emphasizing incoherence in the culture world, some movement scholars argued that the empirical

unity of social movements is an outcome that requires explanation rather than a starting point to be taken for granted (Melucci 1988). This insight unleashed a stream of research on political infighting (Carson 1981; Meier and Rudwick 1973; Robinson 2005; Waite 2001), the jousting of contending insiders who were previously presumed to be integrated (Cohen 1999; Gamson 1995, 1997), and alliance building across multicultural lines (Lichterman 1995). Some scholars concluded that political differences were the death knell of mobilization efforts (Mushaben 1989). According to Gamson (1975:100–102), for example, infighting warrants a “sorry reputation” because this “malady . . . may hasten [movement] collapse.” In accounting for the decline of the U.S. civil rights movement, McAdam (1982:189–90) asserts that “once effective insurgent organizations were rendered impotent by factional disputes that drained them of their unity.” Mirroring the trend in cultural sociology, movement scholars shifted from studying coherence (e.g., collective identity construction is a unifying process) to incoherence (e.g., infighting persists and is pernicious).¹

Finally, similar to the thin coherence position, movement scholars have recently advocated integrative possibilities, outlining conditions under which variable outcomes may transpire. Benford (1993:694) diplomatically offers that “infighting is detrimental and facilitative of movements” because it can stunt the mobilization of some while inspiring others (see also Balser 1997; Ghaziani 2008). In the social movement version, thin coherence is akin to niches, in which distinct organizations fit together as part of an omnibus political enterprise (Levitsky 2007), or to a generational model of continuity and change (Whittier 1997). Our research is most similar to a small handful of studies that show the effects of social networks in the patchwork construction of collective self-definitions from an array of protest materials (Baldassarri and Diani 2007;

Bearman 1991; Calhoun 1991; Castells 1997; Gould 1995).

In summary, the question of unity versus division in social movements yields three positions that parallel the coherence versus incoherence debate in the sociology of culture. Activists can unite and create consensual collective identities (i.e., there is a united movement culture); differences can divide and destroy activists' mobilization efforts (i.e., infighting across multiple movement subcultures undermines coherent organizing); or the effects of infighting are conditional on internal and external factors (i.e., infighting has the potential to be destructive, but there may also be dividends of dissent). It is not uncommon for sociologists today to reject polar positions; therefore, this third, integrative perspective seems convenient. Its intuitive appeal, however, is insufficient to establish its empirical validity. The thin coherence position remains mostly theoretical, especially in cultural sociology where Sewell's analogy of the Christian Trinity is the best exemplar to date. Situated at the nexus of culture, social movements, sexualities, and networks, our research advances this dialogue by offering an explanatory mechanism of a cultural anchor that enables thin coherence. We show how activists manufacture unity despite exceeding internal diversity and the continual advent of unexpected historical events. Cultural anchoring allows for continuity in the face of change.

METHODS

This research investigates four lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Washington marches staged in 1979, 1987, 1993, and 2000. These and other national social movement protest events provide a compelling case for the study of cultural coherence. Institutional politics in general are plagued by a "tricky infighting" (Polletta 2002:1), and it has been particularly pronounced within an "increasingly fragmented" (Kirsch

2000:115) LGBT movement that has wrestled with dilemmas of identity and strategy "from its modest and clandestine early forms in the 1950s" (Epstein 1999:30). A central concern of this movement has been how to construct a "fundamental commonality" (Armstrong 2002:110) across lines of exceeding internal diversity (Bernstein 1997; Gamson 1995, 1997; Robinson 2005; Warner 1993), especially during marches on Washington when "politics and culture collide" (Ghaziani 2008:5). The many "boundary disputes" (Stone 2010:465) that stem from this challenge correspond to our theoretical concerns with cultural coherence—incoherence and political unity—division.

Washington marches leave behind paper trails, facilitating the collection of primary source materials. Our data consist of 424 randomly sampled newspaper articles (36 percent from a population of 1,191 total articles that include news stories, letters to the editor, and opinion pieces) and more than 200 archival documents, all of which the first author gathered from seven institutional archives and the personal papers of 14 activists.² Newspaper data span 11 local and national, mainstream and gay presses as follows: *Advocate* (national gay news magazine); *Bay Area Reporter*, *Bay Windows*, and *The Sentinel* (San Francisco gay press); *Gay Community News* (Boston gay press); *Washington Blade* (DC gay press); *Windy City Times* and *Gay Life* (Chicago gay press); and *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Washington Post*. The population of newspaper articles includes every published article for one full year before and after each march.

There is persisting debate in the social movement literature on the use of newspaper data (Earl et al. 2004). Scholars discourage using indices such as the *New York Times* to create a list of time-varying protest events. The most troublesome studies are those that use newspaper data "to construct protest event counts as outcome variables" (Ortiz et al. 2005:412) or to impute social psychological motivation for the actors reported in the story

(McAdam 1982). We do not use our data in either of these ways. Instead, we use coverage to connect public interests with collective self-definitions, given that the media can substantiate a movement's political claims while the coverage itself signals the movement's cultural effects (Amenta et al. 2009).

We acknowledge that public statements can be a small part of what is shared and that not all of the discussion involved in producing a movement culture transpires at the public level. Yet it is virtually impossible to reconstruct LGBT history without consulting the gay press. The mainstream media has a long history of neglecting to cover gay issues or distorting its coverage of them. As the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* observed as late as 1993, "there is probably no mainstream media outlet that does a good job of covering gay news on a regular basis." Or consider the following letter one movement member submitted to the editor of the *Gay Community News*: "The service that's being provided by your organization to us in the gay community is one sorely needed: . . . something as fundamental as an open forum for us all across the country to articulate our thoughts, feelings, and goals. . . . The gay media is practically fundamental to realization of our needs and goals."³ The line between autonomous actors and strategic editors is not as clear in the gay press as in the mainstream press. Streitmatter (1995:117) confirms this, arguing that a rapidly growing gay press "created an arena in which lesbian and gay leaders waged their battles over what their social movement would be and where it was headed. . . . Writers stood at the front lines of the ideological warfare, defining the themes debated across the country." The dearth of historical records on LGBT issues, along with the interdependent relationship between editors and the rank-and-file in the gay press, justifies the use of this particular dataset, not because it is free from limitations, but because it is optimal in light of these expressed constraints.

The first author used content analysis to detect "cultural building blocks" and "packages of meaning" in each march (Creed, Scully, and Austin 2002:479, 481; see also Ghaziani and Ventresca 2005). Codes were generated using a retroductive scheme that alternated between a priori (or theoretically established) and inductive codes (Ragin 1994) to balance concerns of reliability and validity (Stemler 2001). Specific principles of cultural analysis further directed the first author to ground inductive codes in the actual language used in the newspaper articles, rather than codes "superimposed by the analyst" (Griswold 1987a:1096). Codes answer the question, "Why should we march on Washington?" Responses cluster into 12 themes (with yes-or-no replies): to fight HIV/AIDS; to build coalitions with other groups; to build our own community; to display our unity; to display our diversity; to display the size and strength of our movement; to educate American society; to obtain equal rights; to resist anti-gay federal activity; to resist anti-gay state-level activity; to obtain social and cultural acceptance; and other.⁴ Articles could contain multiple codes, although they did not always. By opening up this possibility, we correct a common criticism that content analysis ignores the potential for multiple meanings (Gottdiener 1995; Steinberg 1999). The first author also hired a graduate student assistant to compute a Cohen's Kappa statistic for each theme to ensure inter-rater reliability.⁵ Table 1 details the coding scheme we use for our analysis.

We use paragraphs as the textual unit of analysis within which each coder searched for the presence or absence of the above themes. Although every paragraph had the potential to receive a code, not every paragraph did. Coders detected codes in two ways: keywords (e.g., names of the codes in Table 1) and inference. When we required inference, coders followed work in social movement, organization, and communications theory (Creed, Langstraat, and Scully 2002; Creed, Scully, and Austin 2002;

Table 1. Coding Scheme and Inter-rater Reliability Tests

| Code | Code Definition: Why Should We March? | Kappa |
|----------------------|--|----------------------|
| Coalitions | to build coalitions with other groups | K = .712, $p < .001$ |
| Community Building | to create, build, and celebrate our own community | K = .738, $p < .001$ |
| Cultural Acceptance | to become more socially and culturally accepted into mainstream society | K = .302, $p < .061$ |
| Diversity | to display our internal diversity | K = .667, $p < .001$ |
| Education | to educate mainstream society about who gay people are and what they want | K = .793, $p < .001$ |
| Equal Rights | to obtain equal legal and political rights | K = .700, $p < .001$ |
| Federal Activity | to resist federal oppression or discrimination | K = .651, $p < .001$ |
| HIV/AIDS | for reasons that have anything to do with HIV/AIDS | K = .737, $p < .001$ |
| Size/Strength | to display our strength, size, or force | K = .870, $p < .001$ |
| State-Level Activity | to resist anti-gay activity in individual states | K = .783, $p < .001$ |
| Unity | to build or display our unity, pride, solidarity, or work through our internal differences | K = .815, $p < .001$ |
| Other | for other reasons | K = 1.0, $p < .001$ |

Entman 1991, 1993) and asked: what core concepts unify the central ideas in this paragraph? There were two options for proceeding if doubt persisted. First, the coder checked to see if the next paragraph built on the paragraph prior. Because every paragraph did not necessarily receive a code, reading paragraphs in clusters sometimes helped to assign a code. Second, coders defaulted to the lead and concluding sentences within the paragraph for the presence of a code.

Our study makes use of different kinds of data, and our themes (i.e., reasons for marching) may vary across outlets (e.g., mainstream press, gay press, and archival data). To manage this, we segmented and controlled our use of data. Given our interest in the culture of U.S. lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people, we use the gay press as the exclusive site for our network analysis (which we describe in detail in the next section). This is also the basis for the coding and content analysis we described earlier, and it is the analysis we use the most. We make selective and separate use of our archival data to add texture to our network findings, and we make sparing and also separate use of the mainstream press to show the generality of the major ideas. We did not

formally content analyze these latter two types of data, but because they are primary data sources, we cite them in footnotes. We do this to contrast our primary source data with our secondary sources, which we cite parenthetically within the text.

Network analysis of political discourse.

We conceptualize culture as collective self-definitions, and we narrow our focus to concerns of identity and strategy, both of which are central to an analysis of the LGBT movement (Armstrong 2002; Bernstein 1997; Epstein 1999; Gamson 1995; Ghaziani 2008). Strategies delineate a course of action as desirable by identifying objectives and goals. Operational indicators answer questions such as what do movement members want, and how should they go about securing it (Gamson 1975; McAdam 1982). Identities denote boundaries of group membership (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Operational indicators answer questions such as how movement members define the category “gay” at different historical junctures and how contenders who claim membership in the group defend why they belong (e.g., are bisexuals and transgender persons part of the lesbian and gay movement?) (Melucci 1995). This

approach facilitates measurement of the culture concept, especially in the context of social movement organizing (Ghaziani 2009).

Our objective is to appraise theories of coherence in the context of LGBT political organizing. These have not yet been empirically compared in a single study, likely due to the incommensurability of units of analysis associated with the vying positions, ranging from holistic units like ways of life, signs, and symbols, which often support cultural coherence, to micro- and meso-units such as individuals and organizations, which are more likely to reveal cultural incoherence. Network analysis overcomes this problem by integrating micro and macro units. Starting from diverse expressions of identity and strategy at the individual level, network techniques allow us to induce collective self-definitions (Baldassarri and Goldberg 2010; DiMaggio 1997; Goldberg forthcoming; Goldberg, DiMaggio, and Shepherd 2008; Mohr 1998; Mohr and Lee 2000; Sewell 1992). That is, network techniques elicit a group-level understanding of shared meanings that arises from patterns at the individual level. Network analysis detects co-occurrence, demonstrates how central individual themes are, and enables the disaggregation of themes into their constituent components.

While network techniques have been mainly deployed to map the web of social relationships in which individuals and groups are embedded (e.g., familial, friendship, or patron–client relationships), some scholars have innovatively used them to map the structure of discourse (Bearman, Faris, and Moody 1999; Bearman and Stovel 2000; Carley 1986, 1993; Franzosi 2004; Mohr 1998; Smith 2007a; Tilly 1997). We follow this approach and use the themes that individuals express in the gay press (the micro-level) to model collective self-definitions (the macro-level). We then assess the extent to which these definitions are shared across the population. We assume that any given individual who offers a reason for why the

time is ripe to march on Washington at a particular historical moment participates in the production of that which we might heuristically call “the U.S. LGBT movement” at that time.

Empirical social research requires comparisons, and studies of culture, social movements, and sexuality are not exceptions. To determine the relative coherence of collective self-definitions, we need to compare expressions of identity and strategy to a hypothetical benchmark. At any one moment in time, scholars may be able to extract ad hoc explanations for the organization of ideas within a network and therefore identify some degree of coherence. The challenge is to push beyond these synchronic efforts and to account for variability or consistency over time. We focus on coherence in a diachronic perspective, although other scholars can adapt our analytic approach to perform between-group comparisons at one moment in time, as well.

We operationalize coherence in three ways that allow culture to be stable or sundry, durable or diverse. First, the degree of coherence is a function of the structural position of ideas over time. We capture the extent to which expressions of identity and strategy remain stably positioned in the network across the four marches by measuring centrality, and we also capture the capacity of one or more ideas to connect disconnected others by measuring brokerage. Second, the degree of coherence is a function of the overall network, or the extent to which the network structure at one time and in one march can predict future events in later periods. A coherent network will have the capacity to incorporate new expressions of identity and strategy without changing the general architecture established in the period prior. In other words, coherence requires a network that is generative, to accommodate heterogeneity as incited by unpredictable historical events, yet still general, to enable a predictive capacity. Third, the degree of coherence is a function of the substantive organization of

a network's internal elements. We use historical evidence to interpret the otherwise formal representation of the network.

Building the network. Our units of analysis are newspaper articles. Our original data structure is a two-mode, article-by-theme matrix. We perform one part of our analysis on this two-mode matrix (Borgatti and Everett 1997, 1999), and we perform another part on a one-mode matrix (theme-by-theme) that reports the frequency with which two ideas co-occur in the same article. We cannot take mere frequency of co-occurrence as a pure measure of connectivity between pairs of themes because it is partly a function of popularity: if two themes are popular in the public forum, then they are also likely to co-occur in the same article.⁶ To control for this and other issues (see Bonacich 1972a, 1972b, 1992), we rely on eigendecomposition methods (Richards and Seary 2000), especially the Bonacich eigenvector centrality measure and the matrix correspondence normalization procedure (Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 2002).⁷ For each demonstration, we build a normalized network of themes based on whether the co-occurrence of codes exceeds that which we would expect by chance, and we draw a link between any two such themes.⁸ We now turn to our results, which we organize according to each of our three measures of coherence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our first operation of coherence focuses on the structural position of individual themes, which we assess using the network measures of centrality and brokerage. *Centrality* captures the overall importance of a theme; it is a function of the total number of connections to other themes.⁹ *Brokerage* is the extent to which a theme links otherwise disconnected or loosely connected parts of the network; it is a function of the number of exclusive, non-redundant ties a respective theme has to others.¹⁰ As a reminder, each

theme represents an articulation of identity or strategy (see Table 1). These themes aggregate into collective self-definitions, our conceptualization of the culture concept.

The graphs in Figure 1 report centrality measures for each of the 11 themes across all four marches. To help visualize these trends, we plot the same graph twice. We first highlight stable themes, both central and marginal (see panel A, upper and lower portions, respectively). We then focus on themes that show variation in centrality over time (see panel B). Starting with panel A, we observe that community building is the most central theme in the 1979 march, and it remains most central in the other three marches. The second most central theme is equality, and it shows a similarly stable trend over time. Other themes, such as size, diversity, and coalitions, remain mostly marginal (with some non-significant fluctuations) across all four protest events. In contrast to these stably central and stably marginal themes, panel B shows that a few themes change over time. Unity, for example, is very central at the outset but then declines consistently across the next three marches. AIDS first appears in the public forum during the second march in 1987—and it is even more central than equality—but it declines in centrality during the third march in 1993 and becomes among the least central themes by the fourth march in 2000. Finally, state-level activity first appears in 1993 as a fairly marginal theme, but it spikes to the third most central theme in 2000.

A historical analysis can complement network findings for the centrality of community building. Activists perceived Washington march organizing as a movement building exercise for the first march and a movement revival exercise for subsequent marches, one that could serve as “an activist defibrillator” (Ghaziani 2008:162). Consider the following effects of marching that activists identified across each of the four demonstrations. From the first march in 1979: “What happened in Washington over this

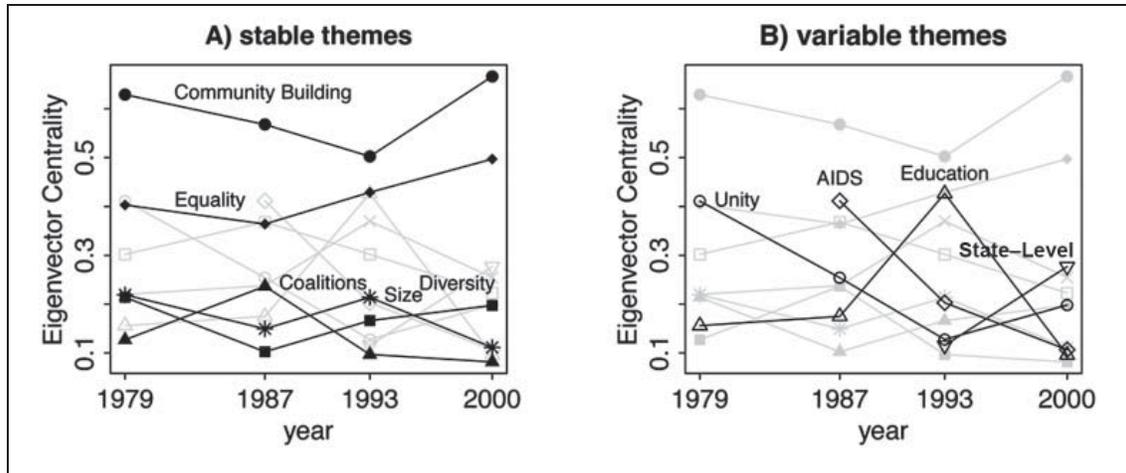


Figure 1. Centrality Time Trends
Note: The graph plots eigenvector centrality measures for each theme over time. Panel A highlights stable themes; panel B highlights variable themes.

past weekend was the culmination of one phase of our liberation process and the instantaneous beginning of another. We are now out of the era of Stonewall and into the era of Washington. We are no longer a movement of isolated individuals or small groups of individuals dealing solely with local problems. We are a national movement.” From the second march in 1987: “If the lesbian/gay movement, or any of the peace and social justice movements are to succeed, we must gain strength from a unified effort. We will return to our communities [after the march] renewed with empowerment, strength, and mutual support. The excitement it generates will strengthen and vitalize local organizations.” From the 1993 march: “The coming together and concentration of gay rights supporters in a single national march will powerfully demonstrate the full strength and solidarity of our unified, mobilized, and visible numbers to the government, the public, and the participants ourselves.” And from the 2000 march: “We’re hoping the march continues the legacy of past marches to inspire a new generation of leaders to form a new generation of organizations.”¹¹

A march on Washington is a potent event where politics and culture collide, where in addition to “personal affirmation and

movement building” (or what we call community building), activists also leverage “the power of collective displays of citizenship” to affect social change (Barber 2002:3; see also Klinkner and Smith 1999; Smith 2000). Equality is therefore a central concept to this particular demonstration. As panel A in Figure 1 shows, equality rises to prominence during the third march in 1993. At this time, the Religious Right launched its special rights program to persuade the public to repeal existing pro-gay legislation and block any new legislation. Special rights translated to the accusation that gays sought preferential treatment and that discrimination against lesbians and gay men was not the same as against other minorities. Activists responded by demanding equal rights. This term, along with equality, buzzed in the public forum. As one activist asserted: “The March on Washington could illustrate our resolve to achieve basic civil rights at a time when the Religious Right has made us their top enemy. The message that gays and lesbians are only asking for the same rights that others have—and not special rights—will be loud and clear.”¹²

LGBT collective organizing is teeming with individual and group differences. Thus, it is not surprising to see the themes

of size, diversity, and coalitions in the public forum. That they remain mostly marginal may be a function of this particular type of event. These ideas may be more prominent in annual gay pride parades, which exemplify the ideal of “unity through diversity” (Armstrong 2002:107), and dyke marches, which are often plagued by political infighting (Brown-Saracino and Ghaziani 2009; Ghaziani and Fine 2008).

Not all themes in the public forum were either stably central or stably marginal; some fluctuated across the marches (see Figure 1, panel B). Unity is one such theme. Prior to the first march in 1979, the movement had not yet established a sense of itself as existing on a national scale. Although U.S. gays had a long history of political organizing and community development (Berube 1990; Chauncey 1994; D’Emilio 1983; Duberman, Vicinus, and Chauncey 1989; Loughery 1998), most of their energies were concentrated at the local and state levels. Political activity during the 1970s existed in “a loose confederation of local organizations that rarely interact with one another,” explained the co-chair of the 1979 march.¹³ During the latter part of the decade, one activist agreed that “up until now, our struggle has been centered around local and state issues. We are realizing that these local issues are part of a national pattern.” The 1979 march on Washington was the “originating spark,” “triggering event,” or “precipitating factor” (Fine 1979:742; Lang and Lang 1961:495; Smelser 1963:16–17) that activists used to develop a national consciousness: “[The] Lesbian and Gay movement is about to take a giant leap forward, to go national, and the March on Washington is the focus that will make it possible.” Activists realized that “we need to unite nationally to ultimately win these local battles” and to congeal a national consciousness.¹⁴ This explains why the unity theme is central at the outset but then declines considerably across the next three marches, once this consciousness was established.

AIDS is another variable theme. It appears during the second march and then declines in centrality over the next two demonstrations. On July 3, 1981, the *New York Times* ran an ominous headline: “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals.” This was the first mainstream mention of HIV. Thus, it is not surprising that HIV/AIDS was not a part of the public forum during the 1979 march. Its centrality in 1987 makes intuitive sense, given that “the AIDS epidemic challenged every aspect of the gay identity movement: the lives and bodies of gay men, beliefs about the healthfulness of gay sex, hard-won pride in gay identity, and the movement’s political and cultural organizations” (Armstrong 2002:155). In 1987, however, the FDA approved the first Western blot blood test to detect HIV antibodies, and Congress approved \$30 million in emergency funding for AZT. Through the 1980s and 1990s, ACT UP succeeded in getting “drugs into bodies” (Gould 2009:339; see also Crimp 1996; Gamson 1989). Infection rates decreased for the first time, which allowed activists to shift their attention to other concerns. One activist noted: “All of us are feeling angry and threatened by the GOP’s embrace of the antigay far right and by the antigay ballot measures that bigots have tried to pass. We were feeling angry and threatened in a similar way in 1987—by AIDS and the Supreme Court’s 1986 decision on sodomy laws. Out of the 1987 event, ACT UP went national. The march showed us how to use our terror and rage to build a national movement. The 1993 march may have a similar effect.”¹⁵

The state-level activity theme first appears during the third march in 1993, and it rises in prominence during the fourth march in 2000. The political center of gravity was actively shifting during the 1990s. As D’Emilio (2002:88) notes, “by the mid-1990s, state capitols had become the site of ongoing legislative debate on gay issues.” The trend intensified in the latter part of the decade, accounting for its centrality in the 2000

march. Pro-gay bills in state houses increased by over 350 percent from 1996 to 2000, while anti-gay bills in state houses increased 110 percent (although not all bills passed into law).

Education is the final variable theme in Figure 1, panel B. Recall our discussion about the Religious Right's special rights campaign. In Colorado, as a result of this program, voters approved Amendment 2, a constitutional provision that nullified all existing protections and banned any new anti-discrimination measures from ever being passed in the future in an effort to "Stop Special Class Status for Homosexuality" (Keen and Goldberg 2000:133). The special rights debate overlaid onto a larger societal dialogue over the origins of sexuality: was homosexuality born or bred? In light of these two debates (special versus equal rights and born versus bred), gay activists accelerated educational efforts during the third march. One activist observed: "Straight America saw that most gay and lesbian people look a lot like themselves." Said another: "One vision for the March is to put a face on gay America, a face that may be your brother, sister, friend, uncle, clergyman, doctor, soldier, co-worker, carpenter, senator, or teacher. By identifying ourselves, we hopefully become less of a fear and more of a friend."¹⁶ Activists applied brakes to this approach during the fourth march, after the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Romer v. Evans* (1996), which declared Colorado's Amendment 2 unconstitutional. This accounts for why the education theme rises in 1993 and falls by 2000.

We now turn to the network measure of brokerage, the second way to assess the structural position of ideas over time (recall that this is our first measure of coherence). Table 2 reports this measure for each theme across all four demonstrations. While the level of brokerage might change over the years, the relative position of the themes is stable over time. In contrast to what we observe with centrality measures, there is

little differentiation between most themes with respect to their brokerage role. Community building is an exception, as it has a substantially greater score on this measure than do the other themes in any given year (see Figure 2). As we suggest later, community building anchors different network components (see Figure 3).

The structural position of individual themes suggests caution in claiming that culture, which we conceptualize as collective self-definitions, can be only coherent or incoherent. While some themes are stable, others show consistent variation. To better understand this, we turn to a second operational measure of coherence that examines the overall network configuration. We first focus on the extent to which network structures resemble one another, or what we term a network's predictive capacity. We then ask if the introduction of new themes induces substantial change in the network or if, instead, they can be incorporated with minimal disruption.

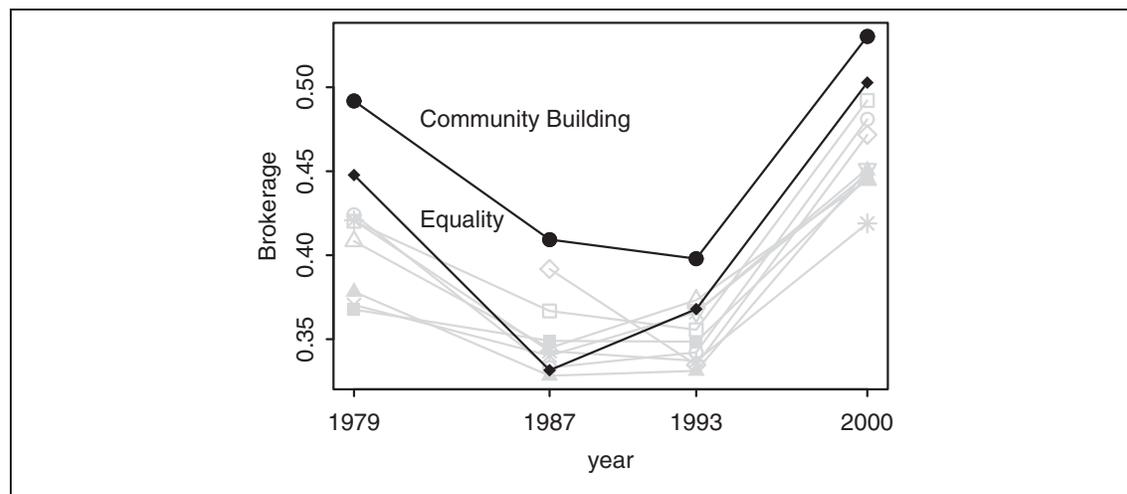
To assess predictive capacity, we look at correlations between network structures. Table 3 reports results from quadratic assignment procedure (QAP) regressions between networks for each pair of years. We run regressions using original, non-weighted matrices (see Table 3, panel A) and normalized matrices (see Table 3, panel B). All coefficients are significant at $p < .01$ level or lower, all are positive, and all range from .48 to .77. These results provide strong evidence of stability: between half and three-quarters of the network is preserved over time. Contrary to expectations, the intensity of the correlation does not linearly decline over time; it remains robust across demonstrations.

For one network to predict another, it must embody a logic of generality. Generality, in turn, assumes some degree of internal organization, which lends evidence for coherence. One way to assess whether this coherence is total or partial (or thin and limited, to allude to the more conventional theoretical parlance) is to see how a network

Table 2. Brokerage Time Trends

| | 1979 | 1987 | 1993 | 2000 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Community Building | .49 | .41 | .40 | .53 |
| Unity | .42 | .33 | .34 | .48 |
| Equality | .45 | .33 | .37 | .50 |
| Federal Discrimination | .42 | .37 | .36 | .49 |
| Cultural Acceptance | .37 | .34 | .37 | .45 |
| Size | .42 | .34 | .34 | .42 |
| Diversity | .38 | .33 | .33 | .45 |
| Education | .41 | .34 | .37 | .44 |
| Coalitions | .37 | .35 | .35 | .45 |
| AIDS | | .39 | .33 | .47 |
| State-Level Activity | | | .37 | .45 |

Note: The table reports the efficiency measure of structural holes (brokerage) for each theme across all four marches.

**Figure 2.** Brokerage Time Trends

Note: The graph plots the efficiency measure of structural holes (brokerage) for each theme over time and highlights trends for the community building and equality themes.

responds to the introduction of new themes. Does it remain impervious, signaling coherence? Does it accommodate new themes while maintaining the integrity of its overall structure, implying thin coherence? Or does it fall apart, evincing incoherence? We use core/periphery analysis of the network structure to answer these questions.¹⁷ Evidence of coherence would stem from core themes in the network remaining the same across marches. By contrast, fluctuating core themes would provide evidence of

incoherence. Finally, thin coherence would manifest as an empirically intermediate position, in which some themes would persist in a way that is historically meaningful. In 1979, the core themes were community building, equality, and unity. In the following marches, community building and equality remained part of the core, while unity was replaced by AIDS and federal discrimination in 1987, education in 1993, and state-level activity in 2000. The core themes of community building and equality guaranteed stability

Table 3. Correlation Coefficients between Network Structures

| A. Raw Data | | | |
|--------------------|------|------|------|
| | 1979 | 1987 | 1993 |
| 1987 | .766 | | |
| 1993 | .485 | .517 | |
| 2000 | .769 | .752 | .590 |
| B. Normalized Data | | | |
| | 1979 | 1987 | 1993 |
| 1987 | .639 | | |
| 1993 | .470 | .472 | |
| 2000 | .671 | .653 | .519 |

Note: The table represents QAP regressions between networks for each pair of years. Panel A reports coefficients for the original, non-weighted matrices. Panel B reports results for the normalized matrices. All coefficients are significant at the $p < .01$ level or lower.

over time. They anchored previously marginal themes and enabled the introduction of new ideas into the conversation.

We now turn to our third operational measure of coherence, for which we assess the substantive organization of the network, both synchronically and diachronically. Figure 3 depicts the network structure and its components. Gray lines between two themes (the nodes) indicate that their normalized value of co-occurrence exceeds what we would expect by chance by one standard deviation. Black lines represent relationships that are greater than two standard deviations. Thicker black lines represent relationships that are greater than three or four standard deviations. To make comparisons over time, we fixed the position of the nodes in the graph. Figure 3 shows the subdivision of the network into three major components—which we call organizational, political, and cultural components—that capture an array of reasons for marching on Washington. We drew ellipses to identify the set of themes that belong to each component: solid lines represent active components, and dotted lines indicate that the respective components are not especially salient in that particular march.

Figure 3 makes vivid a level of consistency across the four marches. Activists

relied on the notion of community building as an anchor around which they coordinated multiple mobilization logics. In 1979, the public forum had two main thematic components: an organizational triad, which included the community building – unity – diversity (C_BUD) themes, and a political triad supported by the community building – equality – federal discrimination (C_BE_qF) themes. On the organizational front, the major task for activists in the 1970s was to establish that their movement existed on a national scale and to refute “one of society’s favorite myths about gay people,” namely, “that we are all alike” (Armstrong 2002:105). Activists decided the best way to build a national movement would be to present themselves as united—because unity bolsters the belief that gays exist nationally in scale and expedites legislative accomplishments—yet still diverse, to resist assumptions that all gay people are alike. Consider the following commentaries from activists, each of which weaves together themes of community building, unity, and diversity: “The march was conceived with the intention of not only demonstrating to the nation that gay rights is part of the larger issue of human rights, but also of unifying the presently scattered lesbian and gay organizations around a focus that would capture the interest of all.” Three organizers remarked explicitly on the interplay between unity and diversity. Said one, “I am committed to the march as a means to publicly exhibit our diversity as well as to demonstrate our unity on specific issues.” According to a second organizer, “We are a people, if not totally united, at least united in our fight for justice and in our hard-won self-respect. We have finally fused all the disparate elements of ourselves. We are whole and healed.” A third activist observed, “We found that on some issues, the broader and more generalized ones, agreement was reached with more ease. A tenuous unity was achieved because a substantial number of us came to create visibility, unity, and perspective—and to celebrate

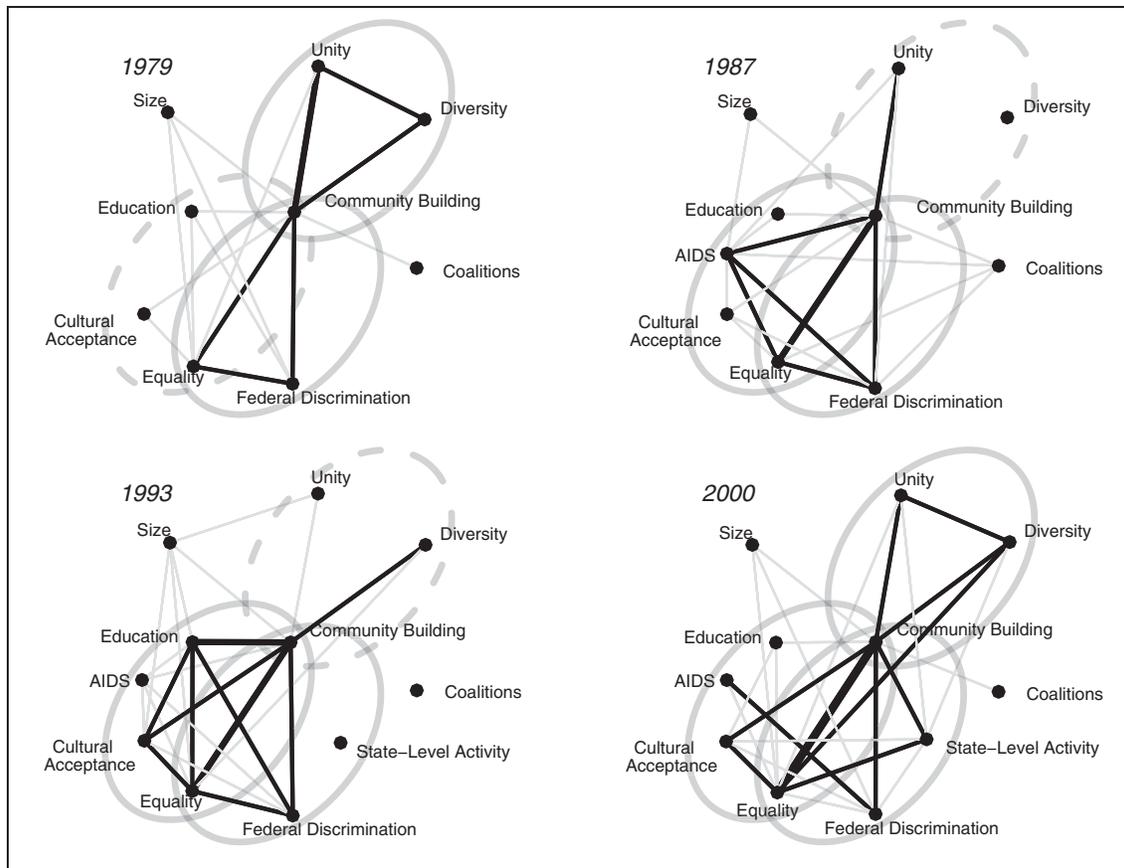


Figure 3. Network of Themes across Four LGBT Marches on Washington

Note: Gray lines between two themes (nodes) indicate that their normalized value exceeds what we would expect by chance by one standard deviation. Black lines represent relationships that are greater than two standard deviations. Thicker black lines represent relationships that are greater than three or four standard deviations. Node position in each graph is fixed. Ellipses identify the subset of themes that belong to the organizational, political, and cultural components. Solid ellipses represent active components, and dotted ellipses indicate components that are not salient within a respective march.

our queerness.”¹⁸ Each of these remarks identifies the contingent or partial nature of unity, a sentiment that parallels the theoretical notion of thin coherence.

On the political front ($C_B E_Q F$), the late 1970s was filled with local conflicts that acquired national resonance, from Anita Bryant’s Save Our Children campaign in Florida, to California Republican Senator John Brigg’s Proposition 6, and the assassination of openly gay San Francisco city supervisor Harvey Milk. These and other local events emitted a national echo (captured in the federal discrimination theme), and they conjoined the impulse to build a national

movement (captured in the community building theme) with the need to remedy rampant injustice (captured in the equality theme). A 1979 editorial in the *Gay Community News* observed: “In the past ten years, gay people have begun fighting back: in cities and in small towns, in the courts and legislatures, and in the streets. The fights have been local, the leaders unconnected, the movements disparate. Slowly, we have begun to develop a national consciousness, a sense of our own common identity.” Another activist responded to events in the sociopolitical arena: “There is a battle going on for the minds of the American public. On the one

side, the gay liberation movement and its friends. On the other, the enemies of gay people—the Anita Bryants who oppose basic democratic justice. The March on Washington can help turn the tide of the debate away from the Bryant view towards the view of the gay rights supporters.”¹⁹

In 1987, due to the success of the first march, the organizational component became less prominent in the public forum. The deep skepticism and fear of a poor turnout that plagued the first march was wiped away on October 14, 1979 when an estimated 75,000 to 125,000 lesbians and gay men from across the country bravely marched on Washington. This triumphant “birth of a national gay movement,” in the words of activist Lucia Valeska, was widely celebrated in the gay media: “This was our Declaration of Independence.” The success of the 1979 march eased concerns of organizational development in subsequent marches. “This march enjoys a lot more support than the ’79 March,” observed national co-chair Steve Ault. “The real difference here is that we do not have to convince people that they have to go to the demonstration. We just have to tell them it’s happening. We can move and coalesce without having to start from scratch.”²⁰

Given that anti-gay activity did not abate, the political component ($C_B E_q F$) remained active in 1987, and it banded with an emerging cultural component that the AIDS epidemic and the Supreme Court’s *Bowers* decision incited. This cultural component is visible in the community building – equality – AIDS ($C_B E_q A$) triad, although the education and cultural acceptance themes are also constitutive nodes. For example, the circulated call to action for the 1987 march opened with a boxed excerpt from Justice Harry Blackmun’s dissenting opinion in *Bowers*: “Depriving individuals of the right to choose for themselves how to conduct their intimate relationships poses a far greater threat to the values most deeply rooted in our nation’s history than tolerance of non-conformity could ever do.” It urged a direct

action response to this “agenda of hatred, of fear, and of bigotry—against us, against freedom, and against love.” The call did not stop at *Bowers*; AIDS was also central to the fiery text: “The AIDS crisis is manipulated to advance this agenda. The federal government plunders already-underfinanced social programs, pitting victim against victim, as it offers too little too late to combat AIDS.”²¹ The cultural component demonstrates activists’ emerging sensitivities toward public opinion in addition to, rather than in place of, their political and organizational concerns.

The 1993 march witnessed a similar strengthening of the cultural component, evidenced in the community building – equality – education – cultural acceptance quad ($C_B E_q E_d C_A$, but note that AIDS persists). Here, we see a more complete merger between political and cultural impulses. As we discussed earlier, Americans were engaged in a boisterous national dialogue over whether gays were asking for special or equal rights and whether they were born or bred as gay. To disabuse dubious notions that gays wanted special rights, activists sought cultural acceptance through a strategy of educating the American population. As Clinton’s campaign manager James Carville noted, “the message [of the LGBT movement] has to be defined along the lines of, ‘Let us realize our full potential as human beings.’” The executive director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund added: “We must show the American people the faces of people who are victims of discrimination. When we tell people the actual stories of discrimination and tell them that such acts are not illegal, they’re astounded.”²² This battle advanced side-by-side with Clinton’s signing into law in 1993 the infamous “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. Although the policy was intended to better serve gays than the prior blanket ban, in the years following codification, discharge rates rose every year, from 617 in 1994 to 1,241 in 2000 (Ghaziani 2008). Thus, the imperative for equality remained firmly in place.

The cultural component continued to be meaningful in the 2000 demonstration. We also witness the re-emergence of the organizational piece (C_BUD). Of the four marches, the fourth struggled with the most intense infighting. Under the headline “March Shows Gays Taking Different Roads,” a *Washington Post* reporter observed: “When hundreds of thousands of gay men and lesbians marched on Washington seven years ago [in 1993], they worried that conservative, anti-gay groups would disrupt the gathering. This time around, the bitterest fighting is among gay rights leaders [themselves].” Infighting reincarnated the 1979 desire to unite. “I think the movement in general needs to be about core principles that unite the community and not break us down along narrow interest lines,” said Kevin Ivers, then the spokesperson for the Log Cabin Republicans. “The ‘meaning’ of the Millennium March on Washington,” reflected a march attendee, “was about unity.” Richard Goldstein, executive editor of the *Village Voice*, brought diversity into the mix by observing that “rampant diversity is the key to our considerable success.” An African American field organizer agreed: “We have the opportunity to be present and make sure that all the colors of the rainbow are visible.”²³

Finally, again during the fourth march, the political component incorporated a new theme, state-level activity (now C_{BEq}FS_A). The late 1990s continued to be a battleground on several fronts. Notable situations included gays in the military, gay marriage and adoption, employment non-discrimination, and hate crimes (Mucciaroni 2008). Apart from a handful of national measures, the “center of gravity on gay issues has shifted to state capitals across the country,” observed the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Kate Kendell, then the executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, agreed:

In almost every state, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are facing unprecedented campaigns to restrict our right to

have families. An increasing number of states have passed or face the threat of anti-gay marriage initiatives and legislation. A number of recent state court decisions have rolled back the clock by holding that openly lesbian and gay parents are unfit to have custody of their children. And in unprecedented numbers, anti-gay adoption and foster care bills continue to be introduced in state after state. In response to these new attacks, the Millennium March on Washington has made a commitment to help build state and local organizations.²⁴

In summary, our multi-method analysis of four LGBT marches on Washington lends evidence for thin coherence and partial unity. Most themes occupy stable centrality and stable brokerage positions, while other themes display fluctuations. The network structure remains robust over time, yet this occurs in a way that allows activists to incorporate new themes. A historically grounded interpretation of the network shows the intermittent persistence of three major components, and the positioning of themes in each component remains stable, even if all the themes do not remain consistently active. Thus, while there is evidence of some coherence and some unity, it is not absolute and unwavering. The anchoring function of the community building – equality axis reveals a thinly coherent public forum that is general (diachronically across the four marches) yet still generative (activists can synchronically incorporate new themes).

CONCLUSIONS

We have used content, historical, and network analysis of LGBT marches on Washington to move beyond analytic strategies that document only similarities or those that draw attention to the mere presence of discontinuities. Our results support the assumptions of cultural coherence *and* incoherence. But how can the culture concept

be both at once? The construction of collective self-definitions in a political context has the potential for “semiotic sprawl” (Sewell 1999:56–57). A disorderly order exists within meaning systems that stems from what is now axiomatic in the sociology of culture: meanings are multivocal (Berezin 1994; Sewell 1992; Turner 1967), and differently situated activists may interpret similar cultural objects differently (Beisel 1993; Press 1994; Shively 1992; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). Answering the question of how culture can be at once coherent and incoherent requires us to reconceptualize coherence as stable and susceptible to change, protean and perennial, and perpetual despite the passage of time. This paradox opens up the possibility for a third position, one that Sewell (1999:49–50) calls “thin coherence” and DiMaggio (1997:277) calls “limited coherence.” We have shown that within each march, activists’ conversations cohered around a small cluster of ideas (satisfying the coherence assumption of consistency, integration, and consensus), but in a way that allowed them to respond to historical changes (satisfying the incoherence assumption of susceptibility to change). The result is a meaningful public forum that, in the absence of our network analysis, might otherwise be mistaken as jumbled and thus unintelligible.

Other studies have hinted at the thin coherence position, but they have not explicitly engaged in the coherence debate, they have not cross-fertilized the sociology of culture with social movement theory the way we have, or they have used different, often singular methodologies. Most likely, the three positions on cultural coherence have not been tested in one study due to unit of analysis constraints; we used network analysis precisely because it can overcome this problem. It does this by way of statistical properties associated with “cultural structuration,” a process that aggregates micro individual attitudes into macro collective self-definitions (DiMaggio 1997:278; Giddens

1984; Goldberg forthcoming; Mohr 1998; Mohr and Lee 2000; Sewell 1992).

But what did network analysis allow us to see that historical data or simple content frequencies of themes could not? We used network analysis to identify the configuration of organizational, political, and cultural components that emerge, persist, or fluctuate across the marches. These three components allowed us to detect whether certain themes co-occurred with others in ways greater than what we would expect by chance. We cannot use frequencies to test this hypothesis of independence. For example, federal discrimination and unity are both frequently occurring and therefore popular themes, but their individual popularity does not translate to their co-presence. Network analysis reveals the ways in which themes are internally assembled, linked, and configured. It also expresses congeniality with the study of language, culture, politics, sexuality, history, and computational social science.

Movements, like the culture concept, are multiplex and multivocal, and they depend on thin coherence and partial unity for their sustainability. Activists who are involved with movements that endure over time do not dismiss internal differences; instead, they find ways to use infighting to motivate subsequent demonstrations. Our results encourage scholars who study the cultural dynamics of social movements to re-orient the key analytic challenge around explaining the organization of inevitable and persisting differences. In the case of LGBT Washington march organizing, some elements moor others, implying a degree of coherence and unity, but in a way that allows activists to respond to changing historical events, implying a coinciding degree of incoherence and infighting. Although the public forum is always heterogeneous, certain reasons for marching co-occur with others in ways greater than what we would expect to happen by chance alone. These recurring and networked ideas operate as a cultural anchor, and activists exploit them to engage in

a thinly coherent conversation. We define this as a type of public debate that is manifold yet clustered into distinct thematic components, each of which embodies an internal logic that has stable and shifting elements.

Recall that activists used the idea of community building to anchor their mobilization efforts around a political logic (e.g., we march to fight against discrimination and to demand equality), a cultural logic (e.g., we march to influence public opinion, to educate society about gay people, and to demand acceptance), and an organizational logic (e.g., we march to build a national movement and to present ourselves as united). Why did we identify community building as the cultural anchor? And how can we determine the presence of an anchor in other contexts? We offer three determinative factors. First, an anchor is case-specific. Community building is the anchor for our study on Washington marches because these demonstrations are national movement building exercises (Barber 2002) that “put a face on gay America” (Ghaziani 2008:195). The study of local protest events like annual gay pride parades, nonrecurring events like flash mobs, or boycotts and labor strikes may produce different results. Second, an anchor reflects conceptual choices and operational measures. Our definition of culture as collective self-definitions and our use of media and archival documents affected our results. If we had defined culture as symbols (e.g., the pictorial iconography of the rainbow flag or the pink triangle) and studied march posters, or if we had defined culture as performance (e.g., the interactive staging of a queer kiss-in) and used ethnographic or quasi-experimental procedures, we may have detected a different anchor. Thus, the validity of an anchor should be assessed within the parameters of specific methodological choices, as different definitions and measurements of the culture concept may produce substantively different anchors. Third, an anchor must have “cultural power”

(Griswold 1987a:1105) and “potency” (Schudson 1989:160). Anchors are aspects of social life that elicit broad consensus among involved actors, yet they must be general enough to accommodate debate and dissent without paralyzing action. Anchors are “multivocal, perhaps ambiguous, but not incoherent” (Griswold 1987a:1106). They are, in other words, thinly coherent.

The penumbra of a cultural anchor may shift for two reasons: new actors with different interests may enter the arena (or old actors who have suppressed their core issues may be emboldened to voice their issues or else exit); or the environment may change to make some issues more resonant. For example, expanding the focus to transgender issues may have been a strategic choice associated with ushering transgender people into the movement (new actors enter), whereas expanding the focus to deal with HIV was thrust upon the movement and could hardly have been avoided (environmental changes). Presumably, different factors would predict the first kind of issue-expansion than would predict the second. We have emphasized the latter. Mische and Pattison (2000) and others provide evidence for the former and, like us, in a way that provides a dialogue between sociology of culture and social movement theory. They used the algebraic technique of concept lattices to study the different stages of coalition building that led to the 1992 Brazilian impeachment movement. This approach allowed them to document the process of consensus formation and to demonstrate that “relationships within political fields are structured by discursive as well as organizational ties” (Mische and Pattison 2000:163). Bearman and Stovel (2000) also used network techniques to analyze “the autobiographical accounts of becoming, and being, a Nazi” (Bearman and Stovel 2000:69). They show that the “Nazi self emerges from the elision of social relations through contact with other Nazis” (ibid:89; see also Bearman, Faris, and Moody 1999).

Using a similar method, Smith (2007b) compares identity networks that emerge from competing accounts of Italians and Slavs. Her approach reveals how “boundary elements act as bridges to otherwise unconnected narratives” (Smith 2007b:22). While we cannot be sanguine that our findings will hold across political cases or under different conceptualizations of the culture concept, such affinities do enable us to affirm the generalizability of our findings.

Authors' Note

The first author was responsible for developing all the conceptual and theoretical arguments, the conclusions, all of the data collection, the content and historical analysis, and most of the writing. The second author conducted the network analysis and contributed to the corresponding discussion in the methods and results sections. Coding syntax, statistical commands, and selected narrative materials are available upon request.

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Notes

1. Much of the social movements literature conflates infighting with organizational defection, which is a distinct phenomenon in which a group fails at conflict resolution—that is, in the language of early social theorists, there is a “proper break-up of the group” (Simmel 1955:48–49). This makes factionalism analytically distinct from infighting, which is why we do not treat it in our discussion in this section (see Balser 1997; Ghaziani 2008, 2009).
2. Archives the first author visited include Gerber/Hart Library (Chicago, IL), the LGBT Community Center of New York (New York, NY), the GLBT Historical Society of Northern California (San

Francisco, CA), collections from the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (Washington, DC), the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives (Los Angeles, CA), Pacifica Radio Archives (North Hollywood, CA), and the Rainbow History Project (Washington, DC). Activist papers include Michael Armentrout (Washington, DC), Steve Ault (Brooklyn, NY), David Aiken (Washington, DC), Paul Boneberg (San Francisco, CA), Ann DeGroot (Minneapolis, MN), Bill Dobbs (New York, NY), Jeff Graubart (Chicago, IL), Billy Hileman (Pittsburgh, PA), Joyce Hunter (Queens, NY), David Lamble (San Francisco, CA), Eric Rofes (San Francisco, CA), Nicole Murray-Ramirez (San Diego, CA), Reverend Troy Perry (West Hollywood, CA), and Robin Tyler (North Hills, CA).

3. “Editors Respond at Mainstream Media Newspaper Forum,” *Windy City Times*, September 9, 1993, p. 7. “Talking to Each Other,” by Erick K. Browning, *Gay Community News*, July 28, 1979, p. 4.
4. We coded very few themes in this residual category and have therefore excluded it from the analysis.
5. The Kappa statistic assesses inter-rater reliability in the content analysis of categorical, often dichotomous variables. It is a more robust measure than calculation of percent agreement because Kappa incorporates chance (Cohen 1960; Neuendorf 2002). It is considered “the standard measure of research quality” for content analysis (Kolbe and Burnett 1991:248). Kappa values range from 0 to 1.0. High Kappa values redress the common criticism of subjectivity and suggest strong, objective coding categories (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Campenella Bracken 2005). An independent rater coded a 10 percent random sample of articles across each of the four marches.
6. This problem is similar to overlapping memberships (Bonacich 1992; Cornwell and Harrison 2004; Diani 2009), in which group size affects the likelihood of sharing members. We follow this scholarship and compute a measure of overlap (or co-occurrence) that is independent of group size.
7. This procedure is standard for the normalization of co-occurrence data, and we implement it using Ucinet 6. Other solutions are available for matrix normalization. Our choice is a pragmatic one, given the constraints imposed by our data. As a robustness check, we conducted similar analyses using different solutions and found comparable results. For each year, the QAP correlation between the matrix obtained with this normalization procedure and the original matrix, as well as the QAP correlations with other normalization options (e.g., Euclidean, z-score, or Marginal), are all .9 or higher.
8. We compare the frequency with which two themes actually co-occur with the frequency with which we would expect them to co-occur if the themes were

- paired at random. This technically means we compare the actual network matrix with a matrix that has the same marginal values and cell values calculated under the hypothesis of independence between themes. We connect two themes when their observed co-occurrence is at least one standard deviation greater than what we would expect if their pairing had been a result of chance. To represent this graphically (e.g., Figure 3), we draw a thin line if the difference between observed and expected exceeds one standard deviation, and we draw a thick line when this difference is greater than two standard deviations.
9. We use Bonacich eigenvector centrality, which is based on calculation of the largest positive eigenvalue (Bonacich 1972a, 1972b).
 10. We use the efficiency measure of structural holes (Burt 1992, 2005). For each node, we compute this measure as the number of alters minus the average degree of alters within the ego network (without counting ties to the ego), which we then divide by the number of alters in the ego's network. Our ego and alters are ideas, not actors.
 11. 1979 quote from "Stonewall to Washington," by Nancy Walker, *Gay Community News*, October 27, 1979, p. 16. 1987 quote from "The March: Room for Local, 'Non-Gay' Issues?" by Bob Lederer, *Gay Community News*, January 4–10, 1987, p. 3. 1993 quote from "The Strengths of the March," by Gordon Schulz, *Windy City Times*, September 17, 1992, p. 17. 2000 quote from "Putting It Together," by John Gallagher, *Advocate*, February 29, 2000, p. 30.
 12. "Support the March," by the editorial staff of the *Windy City Times*, March 25, 1993, p. 13.
 13. "An Idea Whose Time Has Come: A March on the Nation's Capital." Personal papers of Steve Ault. See also "Lesbian Feminist Liberation Opposes the Inclusion of the Equal Rights Amendment as a Major Demand in a National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights." Box: Paula Lichtenberg Papers, GLBT Historical Society of Northern California.
 14. "Why the March?" *Modern Times*, dated "Today, 1979." Folder: Modern Times 14: March on Washington—1979. Box: Ephemera Collection, Recurring Events, Parades and Marches on Washington. GLBT Historical Society of Northern California.
 15. "Forward, March!" by Donna Minkowitz, *Advocate*, December 1, 1992, p. 17.
 16. Straight America quote from "Analysis," by David Olson, *Windy City Times*, May 6, 1993, p. 6. Vision quote from "Lessons from the March," by Barbara A. Warner, *Windy City Times*, May 27, 1993, p. 12. This is a letter to the editor that includes a transcript of a speech Martina Navratilova delivered at the march.
 17. We used a genetic algorithm to classify themes into those that belong to a dense interconnected core, and those that belong to a sparsely connected periphery (Borgatti and Everett 1999).
 18. Gay rights as human rights quote from "Planned March on Washington is in Trouble," by John Graczak, *Gay Community News*, November 25, 1978, p. 1. Marching to exhibit diversity quote from "Diversity Must Be March Priority," by Eric Rofes, *Gay Community News*, March 17, 1979, p. 12. We are a people quote from "Stonewall to Washington," by Nancy Walker, *Gay Community News*, October 27, 1979, p. 16. Tenuous unity quote from "Further Reflections on Houston," by Lee Stone, *Gay Community News*, July 28, 1979, p. 12.
 19. Past 10 years quote from "A Stonewall Nation" (unauthored editorial), *Gay Community News*, June 23, 1979, p. 4. Minds of the American public quote from "A Message for NGTF: March on Washington!" by Steve Beren, *Gay Community News*, May 26, 1979, p. 5.
 20. Valeska quote from "Stonewall to Washington," by Nancy Walker, *Gay Community News*, October 27, 1979, p. 16. First Ault quote from "March has \$70,000 Surplus," by Lisa M. Keen, *Washington Blade*, November 20, 1987, p. 13. Second Ault quote from "March on Washington," by Dave Walter, *Advocate*, August 18, 1987, p. 11.
 21. "Call to Action for a New March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights." The ONE Institute. Box: March on Washington 1987 (#103-151). Folder: National March on Washington 1985–1987, Book 1.
 22. "Analysis," by David Olson, *Windy City Times*, May 6, 1993, p. 6.
 23. Mainstream press quote from "March Shows Gays Taking Different Roads," by Phuong Ly, *Washington Post*, March 29, 2000, p. B01. Ivers quote from "NOW Backs 2000 March," by Lisa Neff, *Windy City Times*, February 18, 1999, p. 4. Meaning of march quote from "Millennium March was necessity for some of us," letter to the editor written by Mark A. Pence, *Windy City Times*, June 15, 2000, pp. 10–11. Goldstein quote from "Cease Fire!" by Richard Goldstein, *Advocate*, February 15, 2000, p. 36. Field organizer quote from "Young, Black, Gay and Marching," by Michael Crawford, *Windy City Times*, December 30, 1999, p. 9.
 24. NGLTF quote from "Capital Gains and Losses: A State by State Review of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and HIV/AIDS-related Legislation, 1996," National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. NCLR quote from "March Makes Family Commitment," by Kate Kendell, *Windy City Times*, February 3, 2000, p. 13.

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